Teacher Education Expert Panel – Response to discussion paper

21 April 2023
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Charles Sturt University

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Professor Mark Scott
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Dear Professor Scott

Teacher Education Expert Panel discussion paper

Charles Sturt University welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on the discussion paper from the Teacher Education Expert Panel. We are contributing to this consultation as Australia's largest regional university and an essential provider of skilled graduates for all stages of the education system. The University has also contributed to related consultations on the Teacher Workforce Action Plan, early childhood education, and the development of an Early Years Strategy.

Charles Sturt University offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Birth to Five, K-12, Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education, and every year around 1,000 students complete undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Education at the University. During their studies more than 80 per cent of our Education students undertake placements in rural, regional and remote schools and childcare centres. Our close relationship with regional schools has been the impetus for the innovative initiatives in teacher training outlined in the attached response.

Our role in training teachers for schools in regional NSW is particularly critical. After graduation around 70 per cent of these students go on to careers in education and training, with about half taking up positions in regional and remote areas – though for students who come from regional and remote backgrounds themselves, this proportion increases to more than 85 per cent.

The University's response to the discussion paper has been prepared by a team of staff from Charles Sturt University's Faculty of Arts and Education. It reflects the University's extensive experience in teacher education and in working with rural, regional and remote schools, and their individual and collective practical experience as teachers and academic expertise as teacher educators. The University would be happy to provide the Expert Panel with more information on the ideas presented in our response.

Yours sincerely

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Response to Teacher Education Expert Panel discussion paper

About Charles Sturt

Charles Sturt is Australia's largest regional university, with more than 36,000 students and approximately 2,000 full time equivalent staff, and campuses based in some of New South Wales' most vibrant regional communities: Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Dubbo, Goulburn, Orange, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga. The University supports and hosts a range of social, cultural and sporting activities, including school events and exams, and like our colleagues in other regional universities we played a critical role in helping local communities deal with the challenges of bushfires, floods and the pandemic.

Established in 1989 following the Dawkins reforms but tracing its roots back over more than a century, Charles Sturt has a long and proud history in providing access to higher education to students who might otherwise miss out on the opportunities it provides. The University Strategy 2030 continues this tradition with clear goals for students, research, and the wider community.

We are particularly proud of our track record in boosting higher education participation and attainment for those living in rural, regional and remote areas, for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and for First Nations peoples. Every year at least 45 per cent of Charles Sturt's students are the first in their family to go to university. Among our domestic enrolments, around 16 per cent come from low SES backgrounds, and almost four per cent are from First Nations backgrounds.

Charles Sturt consistently ranks as Australia's top university for full-time graduate employment according to the Graduate Outcomes Survey, with 84.7 per cent of 2020 graduates in full-time employment four months after graduation – well above the sector average of 68.9 per cent. The University also ranks in the top three for medium-term graduate employment.

More than 75 per cent of Charles Sturt's graduates go on to work in regional areas, placing the University at the centre of efforts to address regional workforce shortages in a wide range of industries, including health and allied health, aged care, engineering, and education. Charles Sturt offers a full range of education courses for pre-school, K-12 and specialist teachers, and we have developed an innovative pilot program to help teachers' aides upskill to become fully qualified teachers, offering a quicker way to meet education workforce shortages.

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 detail associated with this reform aims to prescribe specific practices and knowledges such as mastery learning, cognitivist learning understandings and explicit teaching. A potential limitation is that ITE programs will focus predominantly on what is prescribed. Teachers need knowledge of a range of teaching strategies and techniques as per *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* APST 3.3 (AITSL, 2018).

For example, in Technological and Applied Studies (TAS), project-based learning is a core strategy, and within it a range of teaching techniques are required. Another example is drama where experiential learning is a core strategy.

While most of these teaching practices are relevant across years, there is no acknowledgment of evidence-informed early childhood pedagogies (including play-based learning) and the need for continuity to support transition from preschool to the initial years in the classroom. The document appears to focus on specific concepts in educational psychology and explicit instruction yet doesn't draw much on research related to other areas. As a team we noted gaps in research related to neurodiversity, digital literacies, differentiation between social contexts, assessment practices, social contexts of learning and teaching for diversity and belonging.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is used as a primary source of information to support the use of particular practices. However, it is an external research organisation with a narrow instrumentalist focus that is just one potential source of evidence-based practices. For example, the *AERO introduction to the science of reading* (AERO, 2023) relies heavily on psychology and speech research, ignoring decades of essential educational theory.

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?*

What is needed are standards for program design that reflect the hard questions about what it takes to produce graduate teachers who have a workable skill set with specific teaching approaches:

- the skill sequence required to learn collaborative process,

- quality standards for the design of the learning experiences in ITE programs,

- standards for the type and way assessment connects and builds over a program, and

- how the program design builds realistically toward and connects with the practical experience placements.

Charles Sturt works closely with our state accrediting body, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to ensure that we meet the national standards and procedures required by AITSL as well as NSW-specific requirements. We have always found this to be a rigorous process with in-depth assessment of the design, content, assessment, and professional experience components that we offer in our various ITE programs. Needing to demonstrate the places within our programs where the requirements of the standards are taught, practiced, and assessed means that we ensure that knowledge, understanding, skills and values required by graduate teachers are embedded throughout our programs. Any specific practices added to the standards

would fit comfortably within the professional knowledge domain and Standards 2 and 3 that focus on content, teaching, planning and implementation.

We do not believe that the Accreditation Standards and Procedures should be amended to require the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) to assess practices introduced. The TPA was established to determine "classroom readiness" not to assess specific content. Providers in New South Wales are able to demonstrate meeting content requirements through the accreditation standards.

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

Any curriculum specific content needs to be balanced with an element of flexibility to allow providers to focus on aspects that are important to their unique contexts and student cohorts.

For example, Charles Sturt prides itself on preparing students for the professions with a strong commitment to the regions, reflecting our regional footprint. Students also need the opportunity to engage with specialist content with an expert to gain deep knowledge and understanding of the area.

Further, if a discrete subject on inclusion or literacy or numeracy was not required and this was embedded in all other subjects, students would not receive the depth of knowledge required. This content needs to be taught across the curriculum with the space for students to develop deep understandings in a specific subject/s. We cover numeracy in the math subjects we teach but that does not support the secondary history teacher in considering how to incorporate numeracy in their subject. Mathematics and numeracy are related but they are different to each other, and numeracy needs to be promoted just as much as literacy.

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?*

As noted earlier, we feel that the accreditation jurisdiction that we happen to be accountable to (NESA) has a robust accreditation process through the coverage of all AITSL standards as well as state identified priority areas (ATSI education, classroom management, ICT, literacy and numeracy, students with disability and teaching students with EAL/D). These align strongly with the expectations of the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) where students are expected to demonstrate their ability to plan, teach, assess, reflect and appraise.

If the intent is to move towards a national accreditation body as suggested in both the final report of the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022) and the teacher education ministerial advisory group report *Action now: Classroom ready teachers* (Australian Government, 2015), the significant variability between requirements of various jurisdictions needs to be acknowledged. Considering this we suggest any national oversight should take a 'light touch' approach and be strongly informed by effective practices already used by providers.

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?

Enrolment indicators: The introduction of enrolment selection indicators that focus on increasing the participation of diverse cohorts such as First Nations students, regional and remote students, low socio-economic status students and secondary STEM students is supported. The only exception we have to the enrolment indicators suggested is the "participation of high achieving students: proportion of school leavers with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) above 80" for a few reasons:

- The suggestion that an ATAR above 80 is somehow an indicator of a 'high-quality candidate' or teacher quality is not supported by research (Auhl & Bain, 2021). The evidence tells us that ATAR is not a great predictor of success at university. It is a single score that provides no indication of a student's potential.

- University Admissions Centre data from 2019 indicated that 57% of students who achieved ATARs of 90 and over were from the highest socio-economic quartile. Students from the lowest SES quartile accounted for 7.6% of students achieving an ATAR of 90 or above (Firth, 2022). This enrolment indicator is counter intuitive to the others that are focused on supporting potential students from disadvantaged groups.

- In 2015, Wright noted that "less than one third of students nationally enter ITE on the basis of their ATAR" (p. 1) and recognising the continuing growth of students entering initial teacher education on a basis other than ATAR in the past decade (Wilson, 2020) it is likely that this figure is currently even less.

Retention indicators: We have concerns about how the national attrition data is collected and using attrition rates as a measure of quality. One of the indicators noted is "the proportion of commencing students leaving the ITE program within six years … while also accounting for part-time students who may still be enrolled in their program after six years" (p. 31). This suggests that students that have not completed their course after six years are counted in attrition numbers. Students completing their course part time take 8 years (for a 4-year full time program).

We have also found through our attrition tracking that the most common reasons for leaving a course are family circumstances, financial issues and changed work responsibilities, noting that the largest proportion of students studying ITE at Charles Sturt are enrolled part-time. The number of students that cite issues with the course or it not being what they expected as the reason for leaving is extremely low. It has also long been established that online students have a much greater rate of attrition than on-campus – this does not necessarily correlate with the quality of the program. Again, it tends to have more to do with the nature of the students – mature age, multiple responsibilities and pressures including family and financial.

Classroom readiness indicators: Review measures of readiness are weakened as they focus on student satisfaction and self-reporting. In very few cases would a new graduate report that they are entirely ready for the profession. The feeling of a lack of readiness would be experienced by most people new to a profession.

Additionally, the term 'classroom readiness' remains problematic – as important as the classroom is, a teacher's role is far more complex and broader than the classroom. Providers could always do better in responding to the gaps that graduating students have seen in their degrees and the areas that could be improved to better prepare them, so any feedback is helpful to inform this.

Transition indicators: The use of successful transition as an "indicator of program quality" may be problematic depending on the measures selected. Working collaboratively with schools, school leaders/principals and employing authorities on ensuring a successful transition and solid workforce would be welcomed – an example is the approach used in Western Australia, which includes a robust survey of school principals to determine their perception of graduate readiness.

We have concerns about ITE providers being responsible for measuring sustainable employment outcomes of graduates as institutions are not funded beyond graduation and have no control or oversight of the variables. Are there examples of other professions that track graduates as a performance indicator? Additional funding would need to be provided to institutions to support this. What issue is trying to be addressed through this indicator? Is it possible to deal with that issue rather than impose an imperative measure? Any measures used need to focus on improvement.

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

There is a serious risk in conflating improvement in these measures with quality. For example, Charles Sturt has a large number of part-time enrolments in our ITE courses. Students typically work full-time and can find it too difficult to undertake study – this impacts our attrition numbers yet has absolutely nothing to do with the quality of our courses.

Notably, the discussion paper does take up the need for more rigorous performance evaluation related to accreditation. However, there is a long history in education of driving reform and improved productivity by trying to sharpen inputs (e.g., entry requirements) and then tighten outcome measurement (performativity standards) as described in the document. A long history of reports on teacher education tells us that this approach usually fails (ACDE, 1998; ACE, 2003; Hartsuyker, 2007; Australian Government Department of Education, 2022; Ramsey, 2000; Australian Government, 2014). This is because the hard work of defining the standards for the process of program design and implementation that deploy the inputs and produce the outcomes is rarely articulated in ways that are workable and evaluable.

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 to support ITE providers in the cycle of continuous improvement and quality assurance would be welcomed. This funding could be used in a variety of ways:

- to build on existing, and the establishment of new, collaborative partnerships with other ITE providers and continue to share best practice,

- the development of evidence-based content resources,

- enabling and supporting school-university partnerships,

- the formalisation of mentorship models used to support students during professional placements,

- student support to reduce attrition while enrolled in ITE programs, and

- work with schools and educational authorities to tackle retention once graduates are working in the profession.

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?

The notion of system level agreements and the need for a consolidated approach towards the delivery of professional experience is supported however this would require a whole of profession approach. Currently placement practices are inconsistent and payment approaches mixed so we are sceptical about the ability of education systems to effectively manage such a process in their current formats. Our concerns include the ability to work to university timeframes, ability to match students, and the fact that if a placement is not provided it will not be the school or system that is left stranded but the ITE provider.

We are aware of a previous pilot attempt made by the Queensland Department of Education to move to a centralised model facilitated through the adaptation of InPlace. It was found to be too onerous and not an efficient model given the nuances of individual placement requirements. For this to work it would require significant investment from providers and school sectors as it is working in some areas but remains inconsistent.

Charles Sturt University works closely with Wagga Wagga Catholic Education Office and have streamlined conduits and contacts, but it is still not a one stop option as is evident in professions such as health. However, the health model is not without issues and can be overly prescriptive – providers have no oversight, students can be sent to distant locations without support or the ability to negotiate, numerous examples of negative experiences and student complaints. ITE is far more nuanced and requires careful alignment for almost every student in relation to location, discipline, stage. For a provider such as CSU our professional experience placement spread is wide. A single campus provider will be easier to source, whereas providers with multiple campus locations and large online cohorts will be more complex.

Presently there is an inconsistent approach to the securing of placements, with some ITE providers relying on a large random generic distribution of emails to schools working on a percentage return to elicit interest whilst others adopt a more targeted relation focused approach to individual schools. In some geographic locations that form a nexus for multiple ITE providers the situation can arise that schools receive a high volume of university requests for placements, each with differing tactics, onboarding and reporting paperwork, terminologies and support mechanisms. There is an opportunity for ITE providers to work with schools and systems to develop similar onboarding procedures, recruitment and sourcing of placements and a shared approach to how and when the approach to schools impacts on their ability to partner with universities to deliver quality professional experience placements.

During the height of the COVID pandemic, there was a shift in the dynamics of placement facilitation. Even as many campuses went into lockdown, programs continued to operate with a need for placements. This had an ongoing impact on metropolitan campus locations who experienced a prolonged period of lockdown while regional locations were able to continue. Students who had migrated to metropolitan locations for study returned to the regions to undertake placements. In addition, previously existing conflict of interest rules regarding placement footprints for ITE providers established by the DOE were relaxed to further facilitate increased placement access. This meant a shift away from previously established footprints that gave priority to ITE providers based on their campus locations. This has meant that many RUN universities have had an increased number of online students needing professional placements to be sourced in metropolitan areas whilst at the same time many metropolitan providers have increased their presence in regional locations. To navigate these changes ITE providers have had to become more aware of each other's activity, particularly in places where programs have increased overlap. We suggest that there is an opportunity to develop a more formalised networking approach across the ITE community to assist in the management of partnerships and the sourcing of placements. The NSW DoE has commissioned a project to gather data on where and how placements are currently being sourced to allow for an evidenced approach to be developed. This project, led by CSU and Macquarie University under the guidance of the NSW Council of Deans includes all NSW ITE providers and will commence in late 2023.

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

More clarity is needed regarding what this would entail as there are multiple notions including Ambassador Schools (with a pre-election announcement of an additional 40 schools to be named) and Hub schools (20+) that are funded and resourced by the NSW Department of Education (DoE). What would this mean for other systems such as the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) and interstate bodies? It should also be noted that the current pressure on schools places an increased burden on 'best practice' for professional experience. The benefits of being considered centres of excellence would also need to be clear for schools.

In our experience, an extension of Hub schools would be very beneficial across Australia with links to notions of reciprocity, to build increased working relationships with schools and an ITE provider and links effectively to the Australian Government National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) framework. Possible impediments include providers being restricted regarding research and the potential suppression of findings. This is entirely possible where a specific body is providing the funding and is an on-going issue for university researchers.

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?*

A national framework would be beneficial. The national body, Network of Academic Directors of Professional Experience (NADPE) established by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, could be more impactful if given greater structure and authority to work with regulators and system authorities. There is constant discussion between the states supported through professional bodies such as the *Australian Association for Research in Education* (AARE), the *Australian Collaborative Education Network* (ACEN) and the *National Association of Field Experience Administrators* (NAFEA). Specific guidelines or mandates could include percentages of employment and clear responsibility lines for conditionally approved and waiver students. Currently NAFEA is undertaking a project examining the cost of delivering placements for all providers in education and nursing.

It is noted that the language used within practical experience in teaching pertains to schools only and does not engage in discussion around Early Childhood Education and Care. There is variance due to double degrees and the need to be accredited with multiple education authorities, in our case NESA and the *Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority* (ACECQA).

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

Students are often required to undertake professional experience at locations beyond their immediate footprint. This is a significant undertaking and impacts students in multiple ways, including personally and financially. Support for students to undertake placement through the allocation of housing, rent and meal coverage, a stipend to cover expenses would all be beneficial. Many of our students are mature age who have additional competing responsibilities and expenses that need to be covered such as childcare, salary coverage and mortgage payments. There is also the opportunity to address the issue of payment for students to undertake placements. Not paying students is peculiar to Australia and NZ and we need to move to a position where students are paid for placements.

There needs to be significant investment and allocation of funding in teacher education courses to ensure that any WIL / professional experience program has sound support structures. This needs to be inclusive of boundary crossing roles from both sides (providers and schools) and increased recognition of those working

in the third space such as tertiary supervisors, referred to as University Liaison Officers at Charles Sturt. All Charles Sturt students are supervised and supported by a University Liaison Officer and a Supervising Teacher. There needs to be clear alignment of funding back to professional experience as it is the key factor in effectively transitioning from student to professional.

Johnson et al., (2014) suggest a framework for ITE support and resilience development. Resilience is essential for the profession to retain early career teachers, especially given the current context and the number of teaching positions evident online. Considerations include policy, workload, school culture, identity and the ITE provider. Capable teacher mentors are also required. There are issues regarding consistency and ensuring the qualifications and experience is appropriate to the placement opportunity. As part of the PEXHUB there is an ongoing discussion of how to ensure consistency regarding mentor and university liaison support.

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?

We believe that this discussion question shows a lack of understanding of current practice across the sector. Practical experience has significantly developed in New South Wales over the past 5-7 years and has undergone significant change due to COVID. ITE providers share knowledge, course structure and design and have incorporated theory into each subject. This is underpinned by TPA consortia driving this reform and requiring ITE providers to map and align theory into each practical focused subject.

This is an emerging academic field (Winslade, Loughland & Eady, 2023) with several key journals and peak bodies working in this space including ACEN and NAFEA. All Charles Sturt professional experience subjects integrate theory and practice across each of our ITE programs. Many of the opportunities identified in the discussion paper are practices our institution is already involved in however we also suggest an additional consideration of simulated placements which could be used as part of the embedded days and move these days to longer block placements.

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

This is a key issue and one that has changed focus because of the teacher shortage. In recent years, when there was a perceived oversupply of teachers, the power sat with schools to decide if they wanted to host students while ITE providers were responsible for securing placements. Now schools need students to help with workforce shortages. ITE providers require a clear picture of who is taking students and where they are located across the state. Systems could mandate that each school must make a certain number of places available per year.

For example, Glenwood High School in Sydney has created a professional experience Hub hosting up to 12 students at a time. This is a very effective model that has changed school culture and increased professional development across the entire school community.

Schools require agency in this process with clear links to promotion, professional development, career opportunities linked to mentoring and student supervision. We could work towards better strengthening links across the profession through an authentic partnered approach – teachers working with university providers to team teach prior to placement and then work collaboratively during and post placement. While the NSW Department of Education has provided a document with the name of schools linked to universities these schools are not necessarily engaged in formal partnerships with specific providers.

In addition, the use of Waiver B applications (conditionally accredited ITE students employed in a school) to 'fill up' the workforce is not sustainable and could lead to ongoing issues regarding capacity building of the profession.

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?*

Ensuring better pathways for mid-career entrants provides a real solution to help resolve the current teacher attrition. Career changers are excellent candidates and increased focus needs to be placed in this area. The ability for those identified to be able to accelerate and gain conditional approval to teach makes this an attractive proposition.

Additionally, if the DoE definition is utilised (degree + 3 years of experience) this would mean these pathways could be offered to entrants likely to be able to undertake full time study so acceleration would be an option. There are multiple alternative pathways and cohorts that could be tapped into – School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs), paraprofessionals, mid-career supported via scholarship and alignment to paid employment, mid-career income upon graduation as well as expanding beyond the public education system.

Charles Sturt is heavily invested and well positioned in this space as part of an existing consortia exploring how to support mid-career entrants. Through the structure of our courses and offering subjects across all three teaching sessions, Charles Sturt is already able to graduate students entering via this pathway within 18 months.

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?*

We strongly support any work that would contribute to an evidence base and sharing of experiences. Charles Sturt is centrally involved in multiple programs including:

- the Mid-career Transition to Teaching Program with University of Sydney, University of Newcastle and Macquarie University offered in conjunction with Teach NSW.

- Collaborative Teacher's Aide Pathway (CTAP), and

- Grow Your Own (GYO) with Western Sydney University.

Working with other university providers has led to a systematic literature review examining alternative pathways which will further evidence the need for these types of programs in the future. In our experience of offering alternative pathways, they are particularly resource heavy in terms of supports required to ensure positive student outcomes. Increased funding to support collaborative research and evaluation in this space is also needed, with the university sector ready to take advantage of that.

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

Increasing flexibility for mid-career entrants would be a positive move. This could be done through further flexibility around recognition of prior learning (RPL) with approval for entry that includes additional recognition of industry experience alongside flexible course delivery and the ability to undertake placements at any time that works (building around annual leave). The university sector could work together more strategically to offer subjects across institutions and if available share placements.

For example, two students could cover one paid position at 0.5 each as a job share and then 0.5 to study. The NESA waiver B option for final placement is also a good example of how paid teaching placements can be counted towards professional experience and fulfil program requirements.

From the student perspective, there is pressure to shorten the completion period to reduce the period students are out of work to study. However, study and university requirements need to be prioritised in any

accelerated program. Students have competing interests and pressures, but this should not lead to lowering expectations with a standard volume of learning required for maturity and the knowledge and skills to teach.

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