

21 April 2023

Professor Mark Scott AO
Chair, Teacher Education Expert Panel
Department of Education

Dear Professor Scott

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper.

Flinders University has expertise in the development and delivery of curriculum across the whole life cycle of a child's formal education, from early childhood through to secondary school, offering undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in these spaces.

Our approach is learner centred, inquiry driven and uses critical and reflective pedagogies.

Further, Flinders is the sole tertiary institution in South Australia specialising in inclusive education for both initial and continuing professional teacher education.

Our role is to educate future teachers and we would like to continue to be involved in discussion on strategies to address the teacher shortage in Australia and strengthening our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs.

Flinders University has strong research expertise across a range of priority areas including mental health and wellbeing focusing on children and adolescents, inclusive and special education, child development and learning/cognition.

We are well placed to build on this research to support the development of an evidence base for a revised model of ITE as well as training and upskilling for the current teaching workforce in areas of government priority.

For further information, please contact Ms Jayne Flaherty, Chief of Staff on 0478 335 544.

Kind Regards



Professor Deborah West
Vice-President and Executive Dean

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Flinders University is aware that a joint submission has been provided by the Australian Council of Deans of Education to which Flinders University has contributed, however we highlight that this submission contains the sole views of Flinders University.

Flinders University supports two key points from the review, (a) public availability of data and (b) a need to attract high quality students, however we disagree with the position to attract high ATAR as less than half the future teachers enrol in courses via ATAR and this potentially presents a narrow view and what we consider markers of quality in our current and future workforce.

Flinders University challenges several points from the review, specifically we believe that there is a very reductionist view on what quality graduates are being referred to as. We contest the notion of performance-based funding in its current description, and we believe that significant workforce challenges must be addressed to genuinely attract mid-career entrants.

We expand on our support and challenges in more detail below.

1. Strengthening ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates

Flinders University agrees that all the core areas proposed in the discussion paper seem appropriate however we are keen to ensure these concepts are incorporated across topics within courses rather than becoming focus areas in their own right. The role of the university is to prepare students to be effective teachers. This includes the ability to replicate the flexibility required in schools. Therefore, the university needs to be able to equip pre-service teachers with an expansive pedagogical repertoire. Teachers require the time and space to take the learning encounter beyond the superficial to places that are authentic, relevant, and meaningful, enabling students to see themselves as successful learners (Munns & Sawyer, 2013).

We believe it is important to **slow down the learning** to allow for wellbeing and a growth pedagogy to take hold in students across all year levels. This approach would allow students to feel safe and supported, allowing for liminality (Land, Meyer & Flanagan, 2016) and the need to overcome initial failures to be accepted as part of growth, building social connections, and feeling confident as a learner. This will mean we need to make room for this content in the curriculum and will require alteration to existing TPAs, accreditation and registration processes and documentation. As recognised in the discussion document, these changes form part of a substantive ITE reform and will require agreement and coordination at all levels as well as flexibility to adapt relatively rapidly.

Including the demonstration of the knowledge and application of the practices associated with these core areas in the TPAs is a reasonable approach however there needs to be a holistic review of the TPA to ensure it is streamlined and focused and not just adding additional requirements. What must be considered is that it is not the TPA itself that ensures confident, effective classroom teachers, but the opportunity to engage with the tasks that inform the TPA. Being classroom ready needs to take into account the ongoing nature of learning to which teachers bring an element of professionalism. We must not lose the critical nature of relationship building that is difficult to document and measure in the TPA.

Further, we do not believe that the proposed content will result in a strengthened ITE program. It is acknowledged that the points listed are easy to measure however are base level cognition outcomes for ITE graduates. Strengthened ITE programs will come as a result of programs that allow space for discovery and creation in ways to be able to apply these practices and strategies as described in models such as Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

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Flinders University strongly supports evidence-based practice however funding allocated to education research has declined steadily in recent years and where funding is available, it is generally allocated to discrete subject matter areas such as STEM at the expense of humanities (incl. Languages, history, and arts). Pedagogical research that honours the very foundation of educational practice and is grounded in socially just practices has not been strongly supported in recent times as it often challenges the notions of neo-liberalism that is evident in current practices of accountability and reliance on high stakes testing to determine 'quality' (Rankin, Garrett & MacGill, 2021). A greater emphasis would create a bridging curriculum between subject matter areas, allowing for creativity and inquiry to continue to develop and be sustained through the curriculum to enable students to access contextualised learning as they make meaning in their experiences and see themselves as learners who can discover success.

Finland provides the perfect opportunity to look at what successful education could entail. There is an emphasis on foundational capacities, where students are provided with the time and scope to build the basics at their own pace. Students are respected as individuals, emphasis is placed on their own growth, development, health and wellbeing and not just on academic skills that align with qualification (Biesta, 2016). The goal is to develop the whole person which requires being socially, emotionally, and academically capable. See further details at: Sahlberg, P. (2022), The Australian school system has a serious design flaw. Can it change before it's too late?

2. Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

Flinders University supports having Higher Education Provider performance data publicised. Much of this data is already publicly available via various websites, including QILT, ComparEd, DESE, Good Universities Guide. However, as the data is distributed across these sites, we can see the benefit in bringing the datasets together to support easier access and develop robust questions and thorough answers.

Our role is to educate future teachers and we would like to continue to be involved in discussions concerning how to ensure quality assurance of teachers entering the workforce and the different ways the existing workforce can upskill and engage in supporting their wellbeing. We believe that to achieve this, we need to provide future teachers with the skills that foster and enable responsiveness, and a framework that allows flexibility to adapt. Critical to this is the need to ensure the university is connected with public (and other) education systems and our regulatory bodies. This will ensure our placements provide pre-service teachers with the theoretical, practical and pedagogical capacities that are required by the profession.

We are keen to ensure that the measures of performance are not reductive in nature. For example, markers of scores in LANTITE may have no weighting for determining the success and quality of that pre-service teacher in the profession. Yet, we still hold LANTITE as the definite standardized test of a future teachers' ability to perform in the classroom. When discussing 'performance' we dispute the notion of ranking or dependant funding unless the discussion of performance truly takes a wholistic view of the roles and responsibilities of teachers.

Whilst many students entering ITE degrees at the Bachelor level come through the ATAR path, there is a significant proportion that come in via other pathways. Since 2020 less than 50% of students enrolling in an undergraduate ITE degree at Flinders University have come through a recent ATAR pathway. The next highest category are students who already have a higher education qualification. This selection indicator needs to be broadened to more than ATAR only, to capture high quality candidates entering ITE degrees, particularly in the case of qualified experts transitioning to the

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teaching workforce. This approach will strengthen the base of the teacher workforce as there are many additional students with more life and work experience who cannot come into the Master level as they have not completed a prior degree.

All providers have proven histories of delivering a quality experience for students but face many competing demands. A key element is the complexity arising from multiple regulatory systems, priorities and processes. There would be significant benefit in aligning these systems and priorities to streamline the teacher workforce creation and upskilling process. This would support continued improvement (as current requirements are prohibitive to change) and free up considerable senior academic time to focus on high quality teaching and stronger engagement with schools.

Flinders, as with many providers, already take in all students who meet the entry requirements. Further places are already allocated to demand and priority areas including ITE. There needs to be acknowledgement and work to ensure that teaching is a sought-after profession and not exclusive to a select few. We need to ensure diversity in the teaching profession to be representative of the super diversity (Morrison et al. 2019) experienced in our schools and classrooms. If school students do not see education as 'for them' and believe they are not successful learners, we will feed a negative spiral of experiences with education.

Whilst it is acknowledged there is a separate discussion happening regarding higher education funding arrangements through the Australian Universities Accord process, it is important to acknowledge the impact of the Job Ready Graduates (JRG) program on income. Flinders University has seen a decrease in income per student for education degrees since the introduction of the JRG. When considering this reduced funding with the ongoing rising cost for the university in funding placements, supporting students through LANTITE preparation, and increased logistical and moderation activities associated with tasks such as the TPA, there is a significant overall deficit being covered by the university. This has been further impacted by the need to offer incentives to students to undertake rural, regional and remote placements to meet the needs of these schools.

We would of course welcome additional funding to support quality improvement and would see supporting performance improvement and associated costs of program design and delivery through transition funding (option B) as the preferred choice; however would like to make the point that the funding needs to be tied to our improvement as benchmarked against our own institution and consider the ways in which universities work to collaboratively meet the needs of the profession with the variety of stakeholders concerned. It is also observed that the ATWD Data currently available is very out of date and should this be the source of performance assessments and funding allocations, the data needs to be current.

3. Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

It needs to be acknowledged that there is a cost to all parties involved in placements – universities, schools and students.

As mentioned previously, the financial cost of placements for Flinders University has been steadily increasing with the rising cost of wages, combined with additional support provided to students to entice them to undertake placements in regional, rural and remote settings. Specifically, support is needed for both the student, the placement site, and the provider to ensure quality experience is achieved at no additional cost relative to urban areas.

The funding higher education providers receive from the Australian Government to reimburse mentor teachers for their time supervising pre-service teachers does not accurately reflect the

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increased load these teachers undertake during this process. Over time, the expectations of mentor teachers to assess student placement experience has increased, particularly as TPAs are expanded to become more connected to the placement experience.

For the University, this funding does not cover the cost of employing liaison staff, additional support for students (and the liaison staff) undertaking rural, regional or remote placements, nor does it reflect the increased costs of moderation of TPA assessments, whether this is completed within the University or through a consortium.

Students bear the biggest cost of placements, primarily in the form of lost income. This can be particularly felt by mature age students pursuing a career change or moving to teach in their area of expertise. There needs to be a change in the approach to placements to increase the attractiveness of teaching degrees. Flinders University would support more relaxed requirements around the time and intensity of placements to accommodate part-time or longer placements that provide greater ability for pre-service teachers to balance their study and work / family commitments.

Flinders University would support the introduction of paid placements to assist both undergraduate and mid-career cohorts to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession to a broader range of potential students. Should these incentives be focused on specific target cohorts and expertise, the scheme would need to provide flexibility to meet changing demands in the education sector with minimal regulatory implications. Any revised placement model needs to ensure support for all three groups is provided.

Consideration could be given to a funding a quota system based on the size of the school. In this model, a portion of the funding would go to the school as a whole, rather than just the teacher themselves, to enable the school to invest in professional development for staff in pre-service teacher supervision.

Flinders University sees the opportunity to use placements to develop communities of practice that enable students from different stages in their studies to engage whilst on placement to provide on-placement observations and contextual feedback of fellow students. We also see scope to adjust fraction of time pre-service teachers are required to be on placement, and to better allow the integration of curriculum into the learning.

With the above specific comments on placements in mind, Flinders University strongly recommends consideration is given to different models of ITE rather than continual tweaking around the edges. We agree with many of the challenges listed in section 4 of the discussion paper however we encourage consideration of models laid out for Master students which could also be applied to Bachelor level as these students face similar challenges.

We can see the merits of a centrally coordinated approach to the management of placements however any model developed would need to ensure the process is streamlined and efficient and does not introduce middle steps that do not add value to the process and outcomes.

Flinders University have innovation as a key value and actively encourages staff, students and alumni to experiment and experiment bravely. The current regulatory arrangements governing the delivery of ITE curriculum in HEPs significantly restricts innovation and discourages rather than encourages deviating from the norm. We acknowledge there is a combination of perceived and actual restrictions however the time required to interpret and negotiate alterations to current requirements is time and effort intensive and delays responsiveness to current market demands.

With any changed model, there needs to be acknowledgement of the importance of time for the pre-service teachers and their students to learn and make mistakes. The improvement, reflection, adjustment, and overall development would need to be accounted for a revised model of ITE programs.

4. Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

As noted in the discussion paper, many universities already offer accelerated pathways, however this has not dramatically increased the demand. We are keen to see the results from these early programs to better understand how to design our programs to ensure the outcomes are meeting the needs of the profession and education sector.

Flinders University agrees that paid employment options need to be explored as this would reduce one key barrier. However, it is unclear why this would be limited to Master students only. It should be acknowledged that many Bachelor students are also mature age/change of career applicants. Undergraduate pathways would also be the main avenue of study for people without a bachelor's degree (required for a Master of Teaching) such as Student Support Officers. At Flinders, the percentage of students entering an undergraduate ITE degree from a higher education or work/life experience pathway (as opposed to school leaver) has consistently been above 30% (with a peak seen in 2022 of 53%), indicating a large proportion of our bachelor students are not school leavers.

Another barrier that needs to be addressed is how recognition of prior learning (RPL) can be optimised to increase the entrance pathways that have potential to accelerate undergraduate degrees for those without a recognised Bachelor degree to gain access to the Master of Teaching, however may have a wealth of relevant experience in education settings, eg Student Support Officers.

Ultimately, if we do not address the issues that are causing teachers to leave the profession (workload demands, disparity between what pre-service teachers thought the profession was like and the reality, current rates of burnout, messaging in the media) then we are not solving the issue. This again points to the need to ensure we are creating freedom within the Australian Curriculum to work with the child as opposed to simply recording academic progress and executing standardised testing.

References

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