

**SUBMISSION COVER SHEET**



**INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA  
SUBMISSION TO TEACHER EDUCATION EXPERT PANEL  
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**Organisation: INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA**

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## **Introduction**

The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper.

The IEUA represents 75,000 teachers, principals, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions across Australia, including early childhood centres, kindergartens, schools, and post-secondary colleges.

The IEUA is of the view that a teaching career consists of various, interconnected, and interrelated stages and any review of initial teacher education programs must also consider the support and resources required at the various career stages. This necessarily includes both the support and resources provided to graduate teachers, and the support and resources provided to the more experienced teachers which mentor them.

In recognising the teaching profession as a continuum, we also recognise a need for ongoing support to enable all teachers to transition to higher levels of practices, regardless of their current career progression point.

The Discussion Paper focusses unproductively upon ITE deficiencies rather placing ITE in context as one element of a complex, dynamic education system.

The IEUA believes that in placing insufficient focus on the school/system/ ITE interface, the Discussion Paper fails to recognise the real and significant limitations being experienced in schools and by teachers.

The IEUA calls for reform that addresses the ongoing and significant professional and industrial issues experienced in schools and systems. The following provisions are vital for quality teacher development and must be guaranteed through industrial agreements and appropriate funding.

- The provision of formal, structured, and well-resourced practical experience placements to all preservice teachers.
- The provision of well-structured and well-resourced mentoring and induction programs delivered by qualified and experienced teachers.
- The provision of appropriately trained remunerated school based experienced teacher supervisors and mentors who have been provided with appropriate time -release.
- The provision of appropriate and ongoing support and release time for graduate teachers as they commence their career to enable them to transition to higher levels of practice.
- The provision of resources and strategies which address the excessive workload for teachers in schools.

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

Discussion :There is an opportunity to ensure all teachers learn in ITE the evidence-based practices which improve student learning. In addition, there is an opportunity for graduate teachers to be assessed on these practices as part of their final year assessment (TPA) so that they develop and practice their skills in these areas.

*To what extent would this strengthen ITE to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates*

The IEUA challenges any assertion that teachers do not currently use evidence-based teaching practices. Planning, implementing, and reflecting on success or challenges to modify future implementation are standard practices for teachers and providing opportunities to engage in these practices is an essential element of a quality ITE program.

The focus of this question is limited to the final year assessment of ITE students and as such ignores the issue of the need for ongoing support and better investment to ensure teachers have access to high impact professional development during their career.

Assessing an individual proficiency at these specific evidence-based practices during an artificial and short- term placement isn't an accurate assessment of their capacity to develop the required skills.

There are several limitations on ITE students when attempting to learn and apply these practices.

1 **The importance of high-quality practicum experience.** Many graduates may not have access to sufficient practicum experience or mentoring support. This lack of support may make it challenging to effectively implement evidence-based practices, as they may not have yet have the concepts of adaptive practices to meet the needs of their students.

The IEUA believes that a quality practicum component of ITE is crucial in the development of preservice teachers' professional skills, abilities and therefore confidence in response to different educational contexts.

To ensure quality practicum experiences, professional and industrial issues must be addressed. The workload involved in mentoring a preservice teacher far exceeds the time and resources allocated.

The IEUA calls for greater provision of time release for supervising and mentoring teachers to hold reflective discussions and assist ITE students in the implementation of evidence-based practices.

2 **Pressure to meet performance standards.** While some jurisdictions have taken steps to reduce the variability in practicum assessment requirements across universities, the variation across universities at a national level remains high. Further some assessment practices are time consuming and without value. Graduate teachers may feel the pressure to meet performance standards, which may lead to the prioritising of some aspects of teaching over other evidence-based practices. This pressure may be particularly acute if they are teaching in a school that emphasises high stakes testing.

3 **Limited Resources.** Graduate teachers and schools may not have access to the resources nor sufficient time release that they need to effectively implement evidence-based practices. Again, equally problematic is the lack of access to experienced mentors in schools.

4 **Fast Tracked ITE Programs.** Truncated initial teacher education programs are in danger of not equipping graduate teachers with sufficient support and training. This lack of training may make it challenging for them to effectively implement such practices in the classroom, as they would not have yet developed a sufficient understanding on how to use them effectively.

## 2 **Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE**

**Discussion** The opportunity to strengthen the focus on improving performance in ITE by setting the standardised measures for higher education providers and reporting publicly against them. There is also an opportunity to strengthen the link between performance and funding through the provision of financial incentives to encourage higher education providers to strive for excellence.

*To what extent would these opportunities provide a strengthened focus on improving the performance of ITE programs*

The IEUA raises concerns that the Panel has limited their focus on the performance of the ITE course being the sole indicator which influences a student to make a choice to take up teaching. This is not the case. Invariably, students look towards the profession they intend to enter, the public regard of the profession and the salary and working conditions when making career choices.

The IEUA further raises concerns regarding the use of publicly reporting of data. There is rarely a situation in education where publicly available data has not been misrepresented or misinterpreted.

Currently the approval process for ITE programs resides with teacher registration/accreditation bodies and there exists a framework for ITE program accreditation.

The IEUA cautions movement away from this, though would encourage some flexibility to allow jurisdictions to respond to local contexts as long as such flexibility contains safeguards which protect and enhance the profession and does not encourage fast track remedies.

The IEUA believes that funding allocations must be fair and transparent and focussed on the delivery of quality practicum.

As outlined within the discussion paper, (Hudson and Hudson 2013 and Young 2020) the IEUA supports an increase to funding made towards strengthening the mentoring structures in schools.

The IEUA is cautious about a system of ‘reward funding’ to ‘high performing ITE programs’ Such a system would create ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ within a system and would fail to take into account the needs of remote and regional placements.

Funding would be better allocated to schools for the continued development of graduate teachers and meaningful high impact professional development of existing teachers.

### **3 Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching**

Discussion: There is an opportunity to improve the quality of practical experience in teaching through:

- Developing a more comprehensive system level agreements between school systems and higher education providers to improve the coordination and quality of placements
- Developing national guidelines for high-quality practical experience
- Supporting practical schools to specialise in delivering high quality placements who can share their expertise and
- Providing targeted support for ITE students with competing commitments, additional needs or studying in areas of workforce need to complete their placement

*To what extent would these opportunities improve the quality of practical experience?*

The IEUA acknowledges that the requirement for all jurisdictions to develop a PEPA has encourage greater collaboration between schools and universities, based on a recognition of core roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder. The mere existence of a PEPA does not however, provide the resources that each stakeholder requires to meet the expectations and deliver quality practicum experiences. Significant improvement in the coordination and quality of practicum experiences will not be resolved without the provision of time, funding and resources.

At present, while universities receive a nominal amount of federal funding to resource the practicum component of ITE program, schools receive very little meaningful support and the workload impacts, and other needs of the school, and its staff, are not taken into account when teaching practicums are arranged.

The issues can not be resolved without recognising the very real reason why schools are unable to resource high quality practicum experiences. Schools already burdened by workloads and teachers are not remunerated nor supported sufficiently to mentor and supervise ITE students.

The role of school/ sector employers should be to ensure that appropriately trained, remunerated staff are provided the appropriate time release to deliver the necessary support to ITE students.

Further, the IEUA believes that greater engagement with the profession and schools by higher education providers will ensure a more effective placement of the ITE students. Schools are more likely to deliver high quality practical experience and student learning opportunities, if they have enough capacity to manage logistics of placements, teachers who have allotted time to mentor and expertise to develop practice.

The IEUA believes that should national guidelines be developed, they should overview comprehensive school- system /provider agreements and establish clear expectations for the funding expectations for the type of support and supervision that preservice teachers should receive during their placements.

Importantly, the IEUA also believes that such guidelines must stipulate the appropriate funding and time release made available to teaching staff undertaking mentoring and supervisory roles.

Central to all school – system and higher education agreements must be the guarantee that appropriately trained and remunerated teaching staff are provided with the necessary time release and funding to deliver the support ITE students require.

The IEUA raises the following significant matters when considering the creation of a system involving centres of excellence or ‘practical schools’ or ‘hubs’

- **Diversity** Sufficient diversity within and across centres must be in existence to address any potential context dependent practice issues.
- **Access and placement** of such centres must be such as to be offered to a wide range of ITE students, particularly those in rural regions.
- **Staffing ratios** within the centres to ensure that the education of children is not compromised because of the additional work required in mentoring and supervising larger cohorts of ITE students and graduate teachers.

If these matters are not considered feasible or possible, then the creation of centres of excellence may not be an appropriate option.

#### 4 Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

Discussion: There is an opportunity to attracting mid – career entrants into ITE by

- Enabling mid-career entrants to enter the classroom sooner as part of their degree
- Developing evidence and provide guidance on the features of effective programs to attract mid-career entrants, and
- Improving the flexibility of available postgraduate ITE programs to support mid-career entrants in managing competing demands

*To what extent would these opportunities improve postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants?*

Providing safe and inclusive school environment is fundamental to the delivery of effective, high-quality education and the regulation of the teaching profession is an essential element of the education system. We challenge the notion that regulatory requirements represent a “barrier” that prevents individuals with the required qualities, attributes, and qualifications from joining the profession.

The IEUA recognises that there are a range of pathways emerging for ITE students and mid-career entrants to join the teaching profession. The IEUA supports the need for diversity in the teaching workforce and supports pathways that provide alternative routes into teaching, where the pathways are addressing a specific need, are transparent and underpinned by funding and resources where they intersect with experienced practitioners in schools.

In determining alternative pathways to the profession, the IEUA asserts the following three key points:

1. **There is a body of knowledge** (and associated skills) which is central to the practice of teaching and study of these at a tertiary level is fundamental to all teacher preparation. The IEUA emphasises that there is a significant need to recognise the balance of content knowledge and skill and work/life experiences with the quality of pedagogical theories and

practices. While a midlife career student may have experience in a particular subject area, this will not necessarily transfer to quality educational practices without the necessary preservice support, education and practicum opportunities.

2 **A practical understanding** of the variety and complexity of teachers' work can only be developed through time spent in schools and, the supervised practicum component of teaching tertiary qualification is therefore crucial and should be appropriately resourced not be diminished. A quality practicum component of ITE is crucial in the development of ITE graduates professional skills, abilities, and confidence in responding to different educational contexts.

3 **Unsustainable workloads in schools** must be recognised as a significant problem in schools and detrimentally impacts the access of quality practicum and support for the ITE student. The IEUA believes that to ensure a quality practicum component for any ITE student, including a mid-career entrant, professional and industrial issues in schools must be addressed. The workload involved in taking on a preservice teacher far exceeds the time and resources currently allocated. It is essential that there is greater provision of time release for supervising teacher to hold reflective discussions.

The IEUA has serious concerns regarding the fast tracking of unqualified students into the teaching. Any program that results in large numbers of ITE students taking up unsupervised teaching loads within schools creates industrial, professional, and educational issues and will only result in diminishing the quality of education offered to students.

The IEU raises concerns on the over reliance of unregistered, under qualified individuals delivering learning programs in schools. Such fast tracked pathways are not 'better' pathways for mid-career entrants as they are left unsupported, under skilled and not mentored in schools.