

Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper: Melbourne Graduate School of Education Response



Friday 21 April 2023

The Melbourne Graduate School of Education (“MGSE”) is pleased to contribute to the consultation on the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper (“Discussion Paper”). MGSE acknowledges the efforts of the Panel in developing a response to *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022) and supports the Australian Government’s commitment to ensuring quality initial teacher education (“ITE”).

The following submission is structured to respond to each of the four reform areas of the Discussion Paper, and in the fifth and final section considers the possibility of a more holistic reform to address the teacher workforce shortage, with a commensurate weighting to quality initial teacher education as a response to this issue.

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

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 (known as the Teaching Performance Assessment) 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?

Teacher Education is one of the most heavily reviewed and contested domains of Australian public policy, with a large number of federal and state reviews conducted over the past four decades (Savage & Lingard, 2018, p.64). MGSE has been at the forefront of the response to these reforms, through the development of clinical praxis exams (Kameniar et al, 2017; McLean Davies et al, 2015); and the Assessment for Graduate Teaching (AfGT) (Kriewaldt et al 2021, McGraw et al 2021, Stacey et al 2020). These measures, taken alongside the Teacher Capability Assessment Tool (TCAT) (Clinton, 2016; Clinton & Dawson, 2018) offer assurance of the suitability and preparedness of graduate teachers, directly assessing the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standard for Graduate Teachers in practice.

The proposed core content appears partial and disconnected when compared to these existing approaches to meeting and assessing the Standards, and does not fully reflect evidence regarding the knowledge and pedagogical understandings required by graduate teachers to support inclusive learning for diverse students and in their role as expert professionals situated within diverse communities. We note that the proposed ‘core’ does not acknowledge evidence that teachers must engage with, for example:

- the social context and structural inequalities of schools, teachers, learning and learners (Rudolph & Brown 2017);
- the social and relational contexts of teaching and learning (Kameniar et al, 2017);
- the ways in which to meet the needs of diverse learners and ensure inclusive classrooms (Gerrard & Holloway 2023);
- the rapidly changing role of digital automation, datafication and AI in education (Perrotta et al., 2021); and
- the impact of their own positionality and developing professional identity with regard to student learning (Phillips & Archer-Lean, 2019).

We strongly suggest that First Nations status be acknowledged as core to a student's identity, rather than an 'enabling factor' under the 'core content' in ITE programs. Indeed, we affirm that a learner's context, broadly understood, must be acknowledged as a mediating and central factor for all learners across any 'core' content for ITE programs and that decisions about pedagogy and classroom management must be context sensitive and responsive. Failure to acknowledge learner context and diversity is likely to lead to further inequality. It is also noted that too strong an emphasis on 'evidence-based practices' as the core content in this area may risk narrowing the focus on building teachers' skills of professional judgment informed by research and best available knowledge.

2. Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

There is an opportunity to strengthen the focus on improving performance in ITE by setting standardised performance 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 introduction of performance measures linked to funding as a 'one size fits all' approach will be difficult to administer and may create adverse outcomes. There are significant challenges associated with any attempt at linking funding to education providers for ITE programs, including ensuring that performance-based assessment:

- (i) **Is sensitive to the diversity of Australia's teacher education providers** - for example, rural and remote students are more inclined to attend conveniently located or online providers, and the measures are not relevant for education providers such as MGSE that only offer postgraduate ITE programs.
- (ii) **does not create perverse incentives or generate unintended consequences** - for example: the 'excellence pool' which awards funding to providers who are already doing well creates a situation where 'the rich get richer'; and the use of retention as a measure where we are seeking to enhance quality of graduates.
- (iii) **does not increase the current teacher workforce shortage or reduce diversity of the profession** - simply raising ATAR will not assist quality teaching, this will just increase inequalities and decrease the diversity of entry.

The importance of measuring the dispositions of teacher candidates cannot be understated (Saltis, Giancaterino & Pierce 2021). Multiple pathways for entry, based on pre-service teachers (PSTs) knowledge, skill, attitudes and beliefs and capacity for professional growth are required. The Teacher Capability Assessment Tool (TCAT) is an evidence-based approach to the selection and development of pre-service teachers. TCAT results have demonstrated a significant predictive relationship with completion, course weighted averages and outcomes in the MGSE clinical praxis examinations (Clinton, 2016; Clinton & Dawson, 2018). Dispositional measures combined with a grade point average score is a powerful predictor of success in an ITE program.

3. Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

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

- developing 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 particular 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 placements.

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

The introduction of the Master of Teaching (MTeach) by MGSE at the University of Melbourne in 2008 marked a fundamental change to the way in which teachers have traditionally been prepared in the University of Melbourne and builds a strong link between theory and practice. In the current iteration of the MTeach program, placement and practical experience is situated within ‘Engaging and Assessing Learners’ coursework subjects, which allows the introduction of core concepts canvassing foundational educational ideas? to be implemented in diverse classrooms. While MGSE has long prioritised the nexus between theory and practice, we are supportive of system level drivers to improve the quality of practical experience in initial teacher education courses, noting that this is often left to individual universities to broker. In 2023 MGSE has invested in School Engagement Leads who support school partnerships and contribute to MGSE’s overall engagement strategy through facilitation of events, communications and feedback mechanisms.

While these brokering roles are vital in our current context, where ITE placements are an obligation rather than a choice for many schools, adequate resourcing for teachers and schools regarding placements would support a greater consistency of quality placements for ITE candidates. We acknowledge that States have played a key role in supporting professional placement quality. The Melbourne TAPPs, undertaken with the Vic DET centre around the codesign of high-quality professional development for mentor teachers and using non-judgemental evidence-based feedback to assist PSTs to develop their pedagogical practice (FUSE DET 2022). However, for this to be taken to scale, reform to the ways in which schools are resourced for placements, and clarity regarding the value proposition of mentoring to the professional career of a teacher needs to be articulated and prioritised.

MGSE’s programs are designed to provide the highest quality of education that brings together theory and practice, university-based learning and school-based experience. As reflected in the differential AITSL standards for teachers across their career, professional development and learning does not halt at the end of ITE. Rather, professional learning is embedded in the early years of teachers’ professional work, and in subsequent professional development, as teaching is a relational practice and needs to be responsive to the diverse and changing needs of each particular context.

4. Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

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 commitments.

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

While it is encouraging that the Panel does not see a case for returning to one-year Graduate Diploma’s, the discussion paper has a disproportionate focus on career changers as the demographic for postgraduate ITE courses, implying a normative undergraduate trajectory. Our 2020-2022 annual Commencing Student Surveys indicate that 35% of the MGSE student cohort enrolling in postgraduate education studies can be considered ‘career changers’ returning to study, demonstrating a consistent but not dominant market for this type of student. Therefore, a key focus should be on attracting those yet to commence careers, as well as career changers into the teaching profession. In a tight labour market, this may mean considering how we can offer payment while undertaking ITE study and particularly while undertaking extended placements where participation in other work is limited.

MGSE offers an internship version of its Master of Teaching course – the Master of Teaching Secondary (Internship) course (known as MTSI). This course allows students to complete their Master of Teaching while working 0.8 FTE as a paraprofessional in a school. The newly revised MTSI (2024) will provide increased flexibility for existing Master of Teaching students who wish to transfer to the internship provision for their second year of study (known as “fast track”). However, moving immediately into or transferring into practice will not suit all potential postgraduate ITE Candidates, and so both flexible programs, and incentives are required to ensure teacher workforce requirements are met.

5. Comment on the focus of the discussion paper

Initial Teacher Education is arguably the most regulated and measured part of the profession. Systematic reforms to ITE have been introduced, with some, such as TPA, still gaining traction in some contexts. MGSE, like many other research and scholarly communities, considers the cause of the teacher workforce shortage issue is not the quality of education new teachers experience or their readiness to teach. Indeed, the circumstances that contribute to the teacher shortage are complex and include teacher workloads, the status of teaching and school resourcing. A key imperative to addressing the teacher workforce crisis is therefore to not simply seek answers to the workforce crisis in the initial years of teaching preparation, but to take a whole of career, system level view of why teachers leave the profession or decide not to embark on teaching as a career.

6. References

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