



National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE)

Submission to:

Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

21 April 2023

Introductory Comments

The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) is a coalition of peak arts and arts education associations who represent arts educators across Australia. NAAE members are: Art Education Australia (AEA), Australian Dance Council – Ausdance, Australian Society for Music Education (ASME), Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM), Drama Australia, and National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA).

In relation to the field of ITE, some of the issues we have identified in the sector would not be addressed by the current discussion paper and proposals.

There have been huge cutbacks to arts programs at schools, and at universities, and other training providers. This reduction in programs or offerings within education programs impacts on quality applicants being able to undertake ITE studies in the arts. In particular the impact of COVID 19 on the university sector resulted in a reduction of course offerings in the arts and the closing down of some arts education programs in a range of institutions. The focus of earlier government policies and ITE initiatives on STEM in particular contributed to a devaluing of the arts and humanities sectors. The increase in the cost of initial arts degrees also impacts upon the pool of graduates who can then undertake post-graduate ITE studies.

A greater focus on arts programs and subject offerings, and on creativity and innovation more broadly, may in fact help attract more quality candidates to ITE.

The ongoing quest to ‘improve’ the quality of teacher education continues to focus on Initial Teacher Education and this discussion paper proposes a raft of additional reforms that follow on from the extensive suite of changes that followed on from the TEMAG proposals in 2014. The underlying premise of the current discussion paper is that the ways to ‘improve’ the

quality of graduating teachers is almost exclusively about what happens within universities, and that they aren't already producing confident, effective, classroom ready teachers. The solution appears to be a new suite of regulations, measures and expectations required of ITE providers as if this will improve the quality and quantity of graduates. At the same time the proposals seem to ignore all the systems of program and curriculum accreditation, review, quality assurance, reporting and so forth that are required of universities and ITE providers. The proposed solutions do not address the wider issues in terms of professional standing and reputation of teachers and the profession. Nor do these proposals address the workload issues that are really impacting on attracting quality candidates to ITE training.

The proposals to strengthen ITE programs through determining evidence-based teaching practices to prioritise has merit as a principle. However the proposed list of 'core content' is reductionist and should not be built into any accreditation standards and procedures. The current alignment to the Teacher Professional Standards is appropriate, and if anything the standards could be reviewed.

Reform Area One

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

We have concerns regarding some of the proposed 'core content'.

The 'brain' does not learn in isolation from the people, interacting within environments and social contexts. The focus on the 'brain' and learning devalues the importance of the evidence base regarding social identity, relationships, socio-economic background and more that all impact on learning. It is also important to acknowledge that thinking and cognitive functioning is grounded in, and impacts upon, embodied action and experience (Ionescu & Vasc 2014, Keifer & Trumpp 2012, Lakoff & Johnson 1999).

The notion of 'evidence base' needs to be expanded beyond the typical large scale quantitative studies and meta-analyses that are often highly valued in educational contexts. There is often limited funding for large scale research projects in education and in the full range of curriculum areas. Even so there is a substantial research base internationally and nationally that has demonstrated the diverse ways in which the arts in education can impact on improved student outcomes in a range of academic and non-academic areas (Fleming, Gibson &

Anderson, 2016; Martin et al, 2013; Winner et al., 2013; Catterall et al., 2012; Ewing, 2010; Bamford, 2006; Catterall, 2002; Deasy, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Fiske, 1999).

In regard to evidence based pedagogical practices, as well as ‘generic’ strategies it is important to acknowledge that there are effective and ‘signature’ pedagogies in different curriculum areas (beyond literacy and numeracy as documented in the discussion paper). Shulman defined ‘signature pedagogies’ as “characteristic forms of teaching and learning” in a profession (Shulman, 2005a, p. 52). These pedagogies are distinctive “pervasive, routine, and habitual” (Shulman, 2005b).

In the UK, Pat Thomson, along with colleagues Hall, Jones and Sefton-Green (2012) have elaborated upon this work and noted that in the arts some specific practices include the use of the body, managing behaviour differently, the use of open-ended challenge and permission to play. Evidence-based practice should therefore also align with the eight Learning Areas of the discipline-specific Australian Curriculum including The Arts F-10 (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts) as agreed by the States and Territories. Furthermore, ITE courses need to have sufficient time to teach and for pre-service teachers to learn and practice these pedagogical approaches, especially as opportunities to observe and implement these innovative practices during placements may be limited.

The proposal to address ‘enabling factors for learning’ including First Nations peoples’, cultures and perspectives, culturally responsive teaching, family engagement for learning, diverse learning needs is pertinent. These are areas that ITE students need to develop knowledge and skills in, however there is no need to amend the Accreditation Standards and Practices, as these areas are already covered in ITE programs.

Discussions around amending accreditation standards and procedures and ensuring ‘consistent, robust delivery ...’ are unnecessary – rigorous processes are undertaken by institutions offering ITE with programs reviewed and moderated through the state based authorities.

Reform Area Two

Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

We do not support the proposal to attempt to rank and rate ITE programs and institutions and introduce further systems of performance ‘measures’ and publishing ‘performance’.

There is a range of information collected and reported upon by universities and ITE providers already that is publicly available. The notion of introducing another level of performance measurement would add to the already stretched workloads of teacher educators and ITE providers.

If any link to funding was to be proposed it should perhaps go to those providers servicing regional areas, First Nations students, students from low SES areas, and funding to support ongoing research in ITE and teaching practice in schools.

While a ‘transition fund’ to assist with any costs associated with revising program design and delivery would be of value if changes are required, this should be available to all ITE providers and ongoing if longitudinal research etc is required.

Reform Area Three

Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

The concept of increasing the delivery of practical experience has long been discussed. However, there are ongoing major issues with school capacity and ability to accommodate ITE students for longer practicums, and expectations from schools, teachers and unions regarding payments. The pressure on the teaching workforce and turnover that is likely to occur over the next 10 years means there may be less, not more experienced teachers willing and able to accommodate ITE placements.

Pressure to develop more agreements and a national framework is not likely to improve the placement situation.

Initiatives to support students with competing commitments is of great importance. The financial pressures many students face have been heightened in recent years and the lack of financial support for their block placements presents a huge barrier for some students to complete their studies. Some students must give up their usual employment and pay for extra child-care, costs that currently can't be covered through existing funding programs.

Reform Area Four

Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

Initiatives to improve entry to ITE for mid-career entrants need to focus more on wider professional standing, teacher pay and working conditions, rather than the ITE courses themselves necessarily. Proposals such as recognition of previous experience in pay levels would help attract experienced candidates, but to action such an initiative is outside the scope of ITE providers.

In regard to options to begin paid work in the final phase of study, this already occurs in many jurisdictions with schools applying to the teaching authority for permission to teach. This is being widely used, especially for certain specialist teaching areas and regional locations. While early permission to teach can provide students with ample and valuable practical teaching experience, consideration needs to be given as to how they are supported in schools, and how they can still complete studies in their accredited ITE units and courses.