

Northern Territory Department of Education submission to Teacher Education Expert Panel

April 2023

On 23 March 2023 the Teacher Education Expert Panel released a discussion paper inviting submissions on the proposed recommendations to strengthen Initial Teacher Education programs.

The submission provides a direct response to the four focus questions in the Discussion Paper as they relate to the Northern Territory.

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 (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?

- The meaning of classroom readiness is crucial to any discussion about the quality of ITE and in managing expectations of government, employers, ITE providers, and the public.
- It is vital to recognise that ITE is initial education to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the graduate career stage, and like any other profession, graduate teachers require supported induction to the profession and ongoing quality professional development.
- What ITE students should learn is extremely important and the identified key teaching practices are supported.
- However, to become confident, effective and classroom ready, graduates rely on using the academic study and applying it through professional experience in the classroom with quality mentoring and support.
- The importance of the supported practice in the initial stages of entering the profession cannot be underestimated.

2. Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

Discussion

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?

- Standardised performance measures pose an inherent risk of unintended consequences for ITE providers as they do not consider size, location, candidate suitability or school communities they serve.
- Targeted incentives are needed for different cohorts, including school-leavers, mid-career changers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other underrepresented groups.
- A measure which values diversity of candidates must consider that the teaching workforce needs to be reflective of the school communities it serves and for regional areas, such as the Northern Territory, this may skew the diversity of candidates in favour of some cohorts over others. It may also mean that particular cohorts are more highly sought over others in order to meet school community needs.
- Any measures which are linked to financial incentives need to be flexible enough to recognise that excellence is not always directly relative to academic performance. Highly effective teachers have the ability to support students to reach their full potential when they are able to:
 - work with empathy, patience and persistence.
 - be passionate about teaching, to reach beyond the curriculum and inspire students in their learning.
 - be culturally responsive and create an inclusive environment in which children and young people belong, can celebrate their culture and identity, make learning relevant and improve engagement.
 - engage with the community and build positive relationships through strong interpersonal skills.
 - use critical thinking to understand and identify a student’s unique skills, knowledge and abilities, and differentiate pedagogical practices to account for this.

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 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 provide a strengthened focus on improving the performance of ITE programs?

- Any opportunities which support the quality of practical experiences for ITE students throughout the course of their study would strengthen the performance of programs.
- Support which increases capacity of schools to provide quality mentoring for practical experiences recognises the significance of this component of ITE and the time and expertise required to do it well.
- Such support should be broadly available for schools in a variety of settings including regional, remote and very remote schools.
- Where universities and school systems collaborate closely to support students in quality placements, students are better prepared to self-select the contexts in which they choose to teach and therefore better service those communities. This is particularly important in the Northern Territory context with a high percentage of remote and very remotes schools which often have a high turnover because new staff are not prepared for the context prior to commencement.

- Government funding to provide release teachers, enables mentors to support ITE students of practicums.

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.
- Improving the flexibility of available postgraduate ITE programs to support mid-career entrants in managing competing commitments.

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

- The BETA report¹ identified that mid-career entrants value ongoing financial assistance and paid ongoing financial assistance, whether in the form of a scholarship or paid employment while studying and guaranteed ongoing employment in a nearby school upon graduation.
- Improved flexibility of study mode and professional experience structure will make postgraduate ITE programs more attractive to a broader cross-section of mid-career entrants.
- Options to improve attractiveness of programs could include the use of intensives to fast-track program completion and opportunities to utilise Authority to Employ or equivalent and allow preservice teachers to 'earn while they learn'.
- The Northern Territory Department of Education has collaborated with the local ITE provider and the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory to develop and implement an employment-based program, based on an internship model, to fast-track preservice teachers in their final year into the teaching workforce. The program allows preservice teachers, on a case-by-case basis, to be employed under an Authority from the regulatory authority, and paid a salary, whilst they complete their final placement.
- The quality of the practice experience is provided through the additional support from the employer and the school to ensure success, and the authentic teaching experience.
- The Northern Territory has benefitted from engagement with the employment based Teach for Australia (TFA) program to develop and continue to supply to an expert education workforce since 2012.
- The value of the program, apart from providing the NT access to a pool of committed and highly capable individuals, has assisted to build the internal capacity of schools through a comprehensive and purpose-structured mentor training program with additional opportunity for the program to build educational capacity in the NT at the system level.

¹ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 978-1-925364-98-9 *Incentivising excellence. Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates* (online).