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Dear Teacher Education Expert Panel,

RE: Southern Cross University (SCU) Faculty of Education's Response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) discussion paper. In our response we initially discuss Southern Cross University's context, followed by constructive comments and recommendations across the four proposed reform areas.

About Southern Cross University and its Faculty of Education

Southern Cross University is a values-led, young, dynamic and rising institution of excellence committed to [transforming tomorrow](#). Our game changing [new education model](#) brings a deep learning experience, improving individual student outcomes, quality of life and a better way to learn.

Southern Cross University's new 2030 strategy is founded on our people and our purpose to change lives through revolutionary learning and research with real impact. We are leaders in our communities in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, Coffs Harbour and the Gold Coast and pride ourselves on helping shape a better tomorrow.

SCU's Faculty of Education is a diverse and passionate community who seek to disrupt and transform thought in, with and through research, teaching, learning and service for the purpose of leading and empowering profound educational change, now and for a sustainable future. The Faculty offers initial teacher education courses in Early Childhood Education and Care, Primary, Secondary and Higher Education, at undergraduate, postgraduate and graduate-entry levels, and has an active higher degree by research (HDR) program. Opportunities for research in education, are offered through Honours, Masters and PhD programs.

With a global reputation for excellence in collaborative and transdisciplinary educational and social research, the Faculty has a highly engaging research profile with leading researchers responsive to the most pertinent research questions and issues in Australia and worldwide. Faculty of Education research concentrations include the globally recognised Sustainability, Environment and the Arts in the Education (SEAE) Research Cluster, TeachLab, and the Early Years Research Lab (EYRL).

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Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: To lift both government and public perception of evidence-based Australian teacher education, Southern Cross University recommends that HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) be required to publicly publish their Stage 1 and Stage 2 professional accreditation evidence frameworks and accompanying data. SCU's project NEXUS is an example of an evidence-based framework with accompanying rigorous data ensuring high quality initial teacher education at Southern Cross University. It is also incumbent on regulatory authorities and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to effectively communicate the rigorous teacher education accreditation processes in Australia, alongside publishing Australian teacher education provider evidence frameworks and accompanying data, noting that such frameworks and data will be nuanced and contextualised. It is important to note that we reject league tables and standardised evidence frameworks in initial teacher education, rather our recommendation is to ensure that the Australian public and government have increased visibility of and confidence in Australian evidence-based initial teacher education.

Recommendation 2: To deliver on the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration, Australia's Youth Policy Framework and UNESCO's environmental education core curriculum declaration, SCU's Faculty of Education recommend a comprehensive review and revision of the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers in Australia that drive the curriculum of teacher education. This is critical in the context of contemporary research on childhood studies, early childhood education and care, and anthropogenic climate change.

Recommendation 3: The Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) is currently managed by various university consortiums and chiefly administered by one University provider (on behalf of all providers). Going forward, SCU recommends a national independent TPA body be formed. Such a national approach will lift Australian public trust and confidence in the quality and rigour of teacher education and the teaching profession more broadly.

Recommendation 4: The TEEP recommends 'transition funding'. It is recommended that such transition funding be reframed as continuous improvement teacher education funding allocated to teacher education providers to strengthen their programs. Such funding could fund (for example) student scholarships, accelerated initial teacher education programs, increased staffing (including secondments from the school sector), and public-facing teacher education evidence frameworks/data (as referenced in Recommendation 1). These initiatives are likely to strengthen teacher education and assist in addressing the teacher shortage crisis in Australia.

Recommendation 5: To continue to support existing professional experience programs and initiate new programs such as Beyond the Range, additional substantial funding is needed. SCU recommend that professional experience funding be bolstered to support universities and schools in providing high quality work integrated learning

Recommendation 6: Southern Cross University strongly support the development of a teacher education ARC special initiative funding scheme to support longitudinal and collaborative research in teacher education. Aligning with the ARC ensures that such a funding program is rigorous and competitively peer reviewed at the highest standard.

Recommendation 7: SCU recommend that universities in consultation with Teacher Regulatory Authorities (TRAs) co-design and implement evidence-based teacher mentor professional learning programs. It is also important that mentor teachers have the opportunity to participate in ongoing professional development, e.g. micro-credentials.

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Such initiatives could also form part of HALT applications.

Recommendation 8: Collaborative partnership consortiums are highly supported. Such consortiums require a specific focus and partnership of reciprocity across universities and schools with equitable funding directed to both universities and schools with attached agreements, evidence/research framework, and deliverables.

Recommendation 9: Southern Cross University supports the re-introduction of a 12 month graduate initial teacher education program as the sector standard. In addition, the principle of employing pre-service teachers in para-teacher roles is supported, but it is critical that such initiatives are research-evidenced.

Reform Area 1: Strengthen ITE programs to deliver effective, classroom ready graduates

Teacher education in Australia has been the subject of numerous reviews over the past three decades. Each review has taken a position that current teacher education offerings have significant flaws and that major changes are required. In the current review a premium is placed on the application of research evidence to inform programming decisions. Specifically, Reform Area 1 is founded on the proposition that initial teacher education (ITE) is not evidence-based and/or seriously lacking in evidence. This proposition is incorrect. Teacher education has never been more evidence-based and research-led (Biesta, 2017; Helgetun & Menter, 2022). All Australian teacher education providers are required to evidence their programs, and document/evidence this in their 'Stage 1' and 'Stage 2' professional accreditation submissions. All teacher education providers are also required to report annually to their respective regulatory authority (e.g. QCT, NESAs). SCU emphasises this point as the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) review presented a desktop analysis, not drawing upon the extensive body of evidence contained in University accreditation submissions and annual reporting. Had the QITE reviewed accreditation submissions, it would have been clear that not only are Australian teacher education programs evidence and research-based, but also lead continual improvement through measuring program effectiveness and responding accordingly.

Southern Cross University's initial teacher education programs critically align research and teaching. Our programs are informed by our initiative 'Project NEXUS', which is a critical evidence and research platform and is central in our Stage 1 and Stage 2 professional accreditation. Project NEXUS is focused squarely on building the research-teaching nexus. Through annual surveys and a comprehensive student voice project (with pre-service teachers researching their own/other experiences), the Faculty of Education evaluates the impact of SCU's initial teacher education programs on students (pre-service teachers, in-service teachers), graduates, children and young people, academics, and the sector. Our data driven approach affords continuous and robust scrutiny of our initial teacher education courses and implementation of the SCU new academic model. Project NEXUS also necessitates that SCU's Faculty of Education academics are world-leading or emerging world-leading in their respective field/s of research. Our data cycles evidence that SCU's initial teacher education programs are highly effective in bridging the theory-practice gap, and in preparing classroom and profession ready teachers.

As evidenced, SCU's initial teacher education programs are robustly research-based. This ensures that SCU's teacher education programs are research-led, and exceptional in their preparedness of profession ready teachers. To these ends, it is deeply disappointing that the QITE and TEEP groups failed to complete comprehensive reviews and, in that respect, any TEEP recommendations (as it concerns Reform Area 1) are profoundly flawed.

Recommendation 1: To lift both government and public perception of evidence-based Australian teacher education, Southern Cross University recommends that HEIs be required to publicly publish their Stage 1 and

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Stage 2 professional accreditation evidence frameworks and accompanying data. SCU's project NEXUS is an example of an evidence-based framework with accompanying rigorous data ensuring high quality initial teacher education at Southern Cross University. It is also incumbent on regulatory authorities and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to effectively communicate the rigorous teacher education accreditation processes in Australia, alongside publishing Australian teacher education provider evidence frameworks and accompanying data, noting that such frameworks and data will be nuanced and contextualised. It is important to note that we reject league tables and standardised evidence frameworks in initial teacher education, rather our recommendation is to ensure that the Australian public and government have increased visibility of and confidence in Australian evidence-based initial teacher education.

The TEEP further recommended core initial teacher education content. The AITSL (2018) 'Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Graduate)' represent the core content of initial teacher education. We do not recommend a narrowing of this comprehensive content/curriculum. Further, the TEEP proposed core content is overly simplistic with poor alignment with the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers. An example of such poor alignment is in 'classroom management' and its mapping against AITSL standards 1.4 (*Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*) and 2.4 (*Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian*). It is inappropriate that standards 1.4 and 2.4 have been aligned to classroom management implicating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are 'to be managed' (in a classroom sense) and that this is somehow associated with reconciliation. The TEEP misalignment of classroom management and standards 1.4 and 2.4 is prejudiced with overtones of racism and a deficit ideology.

Furthermore, the proposed TEEP core content is highly selective in terms of an evidence-based approach preferring neurological psychology. It fails to consider epistemic cognition (*cognition about the nature of knowledge and knowing*). The problem with such an approach is that the human brain is not homogenous. It is heterogeneous. There are ecological, sociological, cultural, and personal dimensions to learning that the TEEP core content (*the brain and learning*) fail to consider (Colliver & Fleer, 2016; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020; Ritchie & Phillips, 2023; Sahlberg, 2021; Taylor, 2013). Conversely, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Graduate) do make such considerations through standards 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. The latter standards also comprehensively include the 'the brain and learning' from different vantage points and rely on the professional and expert judgements of teachers.

The evidence presented on effective pedagogical tools, classroom management and enabling factors for learning is again narrow, highly selective (in terms of evidence), and quite dated with respect to contemporary evidence-based research in education (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2023; Selwyn, 2016) and teacher education (Allen et al., 2020; Baran et al., 2019; de Groot et al., 2023; Ell et al., 2019; Hauerwas et al., 2023; Howell & Sawers, 2019; Richmond et al., 2019; White, 2019). The TEEP positions teacher education and indeed education as a 'science' or 'absolute' removed from the lives of children and young people. Young people identify "Covid-19, the environment and equity and discrimination" as the most important issues of their lives (Carlisle et al., 2019; Tiller et al., 2021). Yet the TEEP do not consider this or the Australian Youth Policy Framework (Australian Government, 2021) and the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration; specifically, "identifying barriers... and empower[ing] learners to overcome barriers" (Goal 1, p.5) and inspiring all young Australians to become "confident and creative individuals... and active and informed members of the community" (Goal 2) (Education Council, 2019, p. 6). UNESCO (2021) has also called for all education systems (including teacher education) to incorporate environmental education as a core curriculum component by 2025. There is

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also strong evidence to support the benefits of early childhood pedagogical practices to support successful initial teacher education, which the TEEP discussion paper neglects to consider (Dockett & Perry, 2020). That said, contemporary research on childhood studies, early childhood education and care, and environmental education (including climate change) is absent in AITSL's Professional Standards for Teachers and in that regard, it is timely that AITSL's Professional Standards for Teachers is independently reviewed in the context of contemporary research and evidence.

Recommendation 2: To deliver on the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration, Australia's Youth Policy Framework and UNESCO's environmental education core curriculum declaration, SCU's Faculty of Education recommend a comprehensive review and revision of the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers in Australia that drive the curriculum of teacher education. This is critical in the context of contemporary research on childhood studies, early childhood education and care, and anthropogenic climate change.

Reform Area 2: Strengthen the link between performance and funding of initial teacher education

Reform Area 2 is established on the contention that performance-based funding is effective. There is no research evidence to suggest that performance-funding will strengthen initial teacher education (Coaldrake & Stedman, 2016). It is therefore profoundly problematic to 'apply' or 'test out' such an unproven measure on initial teacher education in Australia. The ramifications outweigh any perceived gain as outlined:

- The adverse impact for regional/remote universities in particular is likely to be significant, noting that regional universities supply nearly ¼ (23%) of all graduate teachers to regional/remote Australia (QITE Discussion Paper, p.8). Research evidence suggests that regional/remote students elect to study teacher education at their local regional/remote university and continue to reside in the regions (Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper, 2023). In that regard, SCU is concerned that performance-based funding is likely to deplete regional ITE programs and therefore worsen teacher shortages in regional Australia;
- There is very little movement of Australian on-campus university students across the sector. Specifically, on-campus students tend to study at a local university. It is only online cohorts where there is some mobility. In that regard, any measure of diversity is deeply flawed, and performance-based measures are unlikely to increase diversity of pre-service teacher candidates;
- Completion rates, as currently conceived by the TEEP, are problematic. It appears that the measure of 6 years part-time is the desirable completion time for a part-time student (for a 4 year full-time equivalent degree). However, this does not take account of part-time pre-service teacher education students tending to take 8-9 years to complete. Such students are often parents with young children and school-aged children who are not in a position to study full-time. They also 'chose' not to study full-time, ensuring that their parental responsibilities remain paramount. In this regard, the TEEP must consider measures which accurately represent the breadth of what the community (at large) can reasonably achieve;
- Reform area 2 does not acknowledge alternative pathways into teacher education programs (e.g., vocational pathways). In that regard, how could any performance-based measure account for and support such alternate pathways?
- Using the QILT and GOS data is highly inappropriate. Importantly, student satisfaction data is not a measure of teacher education effectiveness rather it is a measure of 'learner fulfilment'. While learner fulfilment is important, it does not measure teacher education effectiveness; and,
- The Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) "is a tool used to assess the practical skills and knowledge of

pre-service teachers” (AITSL, standard 1.2). It is not designed to measure teacher education program effectiveness, and, in that sense, it is inappropriate to be applied as a performance-based funding metric. If the TPA were to be utilised it would need to be redesigned to ensure that it measures teacher education program effectiveness from a number of different and varied vantage points, managed by an independent national body.

Recommendation 3: The TPA is currently managed by various university consortiums and chiefly administered by one University provider (on behalf of all providers). Going forward, SCU recommends a national independent TPA body be formed. Such a national approach will lift Australian public trust and confidence in the quality and rigour of teacher education and the teaching profession more broadly.

Recommendation 4: The TEEP recommends ‘transition funding’. It is recommended that such transition funding be reframed as continuous improvement teacher education funding allocated to teacher education providers to strengthen their programs. Such funding could fund (for example) student scholarships, accelerated initial teacher education programs, increased staffing (including secondments from the school sector), and public-facing teacher education evidence frameworks/data (as recommended in Recommendation 1). These initiatives are likely to strengthen teacher education and assist in addressing the teacher shortage crisis in Australia.

Reform Area 3: Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

Professional experience lies at the heart of all initial teacher education programs. It is important to clarify here that professional experience does indeed take place in schools as designed placement periods, but it is also incorporated across all teacher education coursework subjects/units. School-based teacher education models are common in Australian universities where core curriculum is taught in schools where teacher educators, teachers, and young people work alongside one another (Cutter-Mackenzie & Fulton, 2014). At SCU we lead a number of school-based teacher education programs across all our campuses in the discipline areas of science, sustainability, and design/technology. These programs are nationally award-winning recognised teacher education programs, where practice or professional experience is at the centre of instruction.

Furthermore, Australian universities readily practice micro and clinical teaching in coursework units where pre-service teachers are engaging in a teacher-feedback process in preparation for their designated placement periods. SCU’s Faculty of Education are presently co-designing high-tech teaching-research labs with partner schools to advance micro and teaching opportunities for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Teacher education courses are costly. This is not addressed in the TEEP discussion paper. Professional experience is already very expensive for teacher education providers and schools, and in fact is the most expensive component of any teacher education program. Importantly, funding has not kept pace with the real cost of providing high quality professional experience or work integrated learning, for HEI and for schools. Specialised programs such as ‘Beyond the Range’ are outstanding examples where pre-service teachers undertake their placements in regional and remote areas. Again, such programs are expensive and require funding support.

Recommendation 5: To continue to support existing professional experience programs and initiate new programs such as Beyond the Range, substantial funding is needed. SCU recommend that professional experience funding be bolstered to support universities and schools in providing high quality work integrated learning



Recommendation 6: Southern Cross University strongly support the development of a teacher education ARC special initiative funding scheme to support longitudinal and collaborative research in teacher education. Aligning with the ARC ensures that such a funding program is rigorous and competitively peer reviewed at the highest standard.

The TEEP call for ‘capable’ mentors. SCU maintain that a mentor teacher needs to be more than merely capable. Rather they must be highly effective and engage in evidence-based teacher mentor professional learning (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). At present the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) mentor training is taken up quite well, but it is critical that all mentors engage in such evidence-based professional learning in mentoring. In addition, mentor teachers should be regularly recognised and awarded. Many Faculties of Education have such mentor awards (nominated by pre-service teachers). Such awards should also be state/territory and nationally focused and therein celebrating and uplifting the profession.

Recommendation 7: SCU recommend that universities in consultation with Teacher Regulatory Authorities (TRAs) co-design and implement evidence-based teacher mentor professional learning programs. It is also important that mentor teachers have the opportunity to participate in ongoing professional development, e.g. micro-credentials. Such initiatives could also form part of HALT applications.

University partnership consortiums are highly encouraged. Southern Cross University is a current collaborator on the NSW Hub school model. From the viewpoint of SCU, the hub school model has aided in building reciprocity, but further research evidence is needed. Reciprocity would be further enhanced through shared funded with an evidence-based focus.

Recommendation 8: Collaborative partnership consortiums are highly supported. Such consortiums require a specific focus and partnership of reciprocity across universities and schools with equitable funding directed to both universities and schools with attached agreements, evidence/research framework, and deliverables.

Reform Area 4: Improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

SCU’s current MTeach can be completed in 15 months (as an accelerated pathway). The latter accelerated pathway is afforded by SCU’s unique Southern Cross model which offers students flexibility without compromising the quality of the program. That said, SCU is of the view that the MTeach (or relevant graduate ITE qualification) can be effectively completed in 12 months delivering a continual pipeline of teachers to the sector. SCU also hold the view that a 12-month initial teacher education program should not be an accelerated pathway (by exception), but rather be the sector benchmark.

While some students elect an accelerated pathway, the majority prefer a balanced or non-accelerated pathway. The underlying issue is the volume of learning or cognitive load, alongside maintaining quality initial teacher education. Thus, SCU Further, programs such as ‘Turn to Teaching’, ‘Trade to Teach’ and ‘Permission to Teach’ (PTT) appear to be having positive uptake, however research is needed to determine their effectiveness in supporting quality teacher education.

Recommendation 9: Southern Cross University supports the re-introduction of a 12 month graduate initial teacher education program as the sector standard. In addition, the principle of employing pre-service teachers in

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para-teacher roles is supported, but it is critical that such initiatives are research-evidenced.

Southern Cross University appreciates the opportunity to offer comment on the TEEP discussion paper. We trust that our comments and recommendations will be considered in any reforms established.

Kind regards,

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