TEEP Discussion Paper Response from Teacher Education Academics at the *University of Technology Sydney*

Response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

Teacher Education Academics at University of Technology Sydney

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the recommendations of the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper (*The Paper*). We (the undersigned) are Teacher Education academics in the School of International Studies and Education at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). We believe *The Paper's* recommendations present a significant opportunity for Australian teacher education and are of considerable importance in ensuring there are new generations of young people seeking a career in the teaching profession. In general, we support initiatives that seek to ensure ongoing quality in teacher education programs. While we support the recommendations of *The Paper*, we offer insights that could strengthen *The Paper's* 'Reform Areas'.

General Recommendations

1. Undertake a national and systematic review of the large corpus of data on Initial Teacher Education Programs including data reported to the state regulatory bodies as well as the QILT data.
2. Broaden the 'Core Curriculum' to include other disciplinary fields of knowledge, for example, sociology, philosophy and history and socio-cultural learning theories.
3. Review proposed nomenclature, for example, 'Classroom management' and 'Classroom readiness'.
4. Specify and clarify the data that will used to 'measure' Selection, Retention, Classroom Readiness and Transition.

Introduction

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) has a distinguished history in teacher education, boasting internationally renowned academics and alumni. In the 2023 Times Higher Education subject rankings, Education at UTS was ranked 91st in the world and 8th in Australia, which constitutes a remarkable achievement considering the small size of the discipline at UTS compared to many other universities. Our teacher education programs are designed and calibrated to respond quickly to regulator changes in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) requirements and policy. Each program has the benefit of being informed by strong and wide engagement with the scholarly education community through research centres including the UTS Centre for the Advancement of Indigenous Knowledges (CAIK), Centre for Research on

Education in a Digital Society (CREDS) and the Life-wide Learning and Education Research Group (LLE).

All UTS teacher educators are actively engaged in undertaking empirical research that brings contemporary understandings of schooling within the changing socio-cultural and political landscapes in which our teacher education graduates will work. The ITE program at UTS has established and maintained productive industry partnerships with schools, the government and private school sectors and private enterprises. The recent *Innovation and Change School Partnerships Conference* hosted by UTS brought together in-service and pre-service teachers, principals, teacher education academics and senior officials from the NSW Department of Education to workshop and discuss a range of pedagogical, curriculum and career issues. The conference was also a chance for our partner schools[1] to showcase innovative practices and future plans in a series of workshops.

Sustaining a strong connection to schools, the ITE program at UTS:

- is agile and innovative, as evidenced by the unique suite of Master of Teaching (Secondary) degrees.
- has strong relationships with schools, as evidenced by the school/university co-design of teacher education subjects and other ITE initiatives.
- has the capacity to deliver its programs flexibly through hybrid, research-based technologies.
- is continually investigating ways to improve the quality of the student experience, as evidenced by our positive and flexible response to the current teacher shortage and its ramifications for our final year students; we support our students to manage work as conditionally accredited teachers through to completion of their remaining studies.

In this response we offer several over-arching comments on *The Paper* and then comment on each of the reform areas.

Five overarching comments on *The Paper*

1. *The Paper* is not based on a systematic review of current ITE programs nationwide. Many suggested initiatives are already implemented by programs at universities. Without accounting for what is already offered by universities across the country,

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[1] Partner schools include Liverpool BHS, Macquarie Fields HS, Inner Sydney HS. Workshops and presentations were conducted by Prairiewood HS, Plumpton HS, Concord HS, Merrylands East PS.

many of the claims and recommendations in *The Paper* are potentially undermined as they may be based on incorrect assumptions of practice.

2. *The Paper's* recommendations for a generic approach oversimplifies the nature of teacher education. The more programs are regulated, the less opportunity for differentiation between providers to suit the local context of the provider's 'catchment', and the greater the risk that the program is not optimal for any context.

3. *The Paper* references the recent QITE Review and uses it as a basis to adopt a 'deficit' view of current ITE programs; this view is not justified.

4. *The Paper* assumes all ITE graduates can be equipped with the entire range of skills, knowledge and understandings required to teach in schools. This is flawed thinking since teaching is a contextual and relational practice. It is an inherently human profession, the lived experience for which no university course can fully prepare. Moreover, it assumes that the socio-cultural milieu in which teachers work is static.

5. *The Paper* does not attend to the many and varied local contexts, acknowledging the unequal distribution of resources, facilities and specialist teachers across schools and school systems. The school placements of some ITE pre-service teachers may be in poorly resourced schools, thus potentially limiting opportunities to demonstrate their full repertoire of teaching.

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

- While *The Paper* identifies core content, the selection and privileging of this content requires further explanation and elaboration. We acknowledge the insights about learning that developments in brain science affords, however, there is an ongoing need for pre-service teachers to be educated in socio-cultural theories of learning, the sociology, philosophy and history of education and schooling. This breadth of knowledge is needed because schooling is part of the wider political economy and cannot be understood in isolation.

- As suggested in *The Paper*, there is much work needed in ensuring that all schools and classrooms can function as productive, safe and inclusive sites for learning. Improving student learning outcomes requires a 'whole of government' approach. Teachers have no power to intervene in many of the factors that mediate students' investment in learning - e.g. the quality of the physical infrastructures in the school (e.g. air-conditioning), the significant financial pressures that the families of many school children currently face, lack of adequate health care in some regions, and climate change and international conflicts that engender fear, anxiety and/or sense of hopelessness. Mitigating these factors requires

serious investment in upgrading school infrastructures, particularly in the most vulnerable regions, and improvements in wider economic, health and social policies that would give hope and practical survival strategies to families and children who are most at risk of social and economic marginalisation.

- Assuming that some of the key external factors impacting on students' engagement in learning are to be addressed, teachers can create a positive environment for learning. This requires teachers to be willing and able to engage with their learners' life-worlds, and to exercise agency to tailor the curriculum to ensure that visible connections are made between the curriculum and the students' interests and imagined futures. Teacher agency requires understanding of schooling from broad socio-cultural perspectives as indicated above.

- One of the areas in ITE programs that requires urgent attention is the capacity of teachers to address the diverse English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) needs of migrant/ refugee, Indigenous Australian and international students in the Australian school system. The Australian Council of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Association (ACTA) has developed a 12-point plan in their *National Roadmap For English As An Additional Language Or Dialect Education In Schools* (Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf (tesol.org.au)) and highlight the need for urgent action to address the uneven quality and distribution of EAL/D pedagogies in schools. These points include:
  - ACTION 5: Equip all pre-service teachers to cater for EAL/D learners in their classrooms.
  - ACTION 6: Revive specialist EAL/D teacher education programs.
  - ACTION 7: Rebuild EAL/D professional learning, leadership and school development.
  - ACTION 8: Institute systematic, national, evidence-based teacher workforce planning that includes EAL/D specialist teachers.
  - ACTION 9: Fast track post-pandemic EAL/D pedagogies of recovery.

- Just as schools aim to enable all learners to achieve high quality outcomes, teacher education programs should provide pre-service teachers with an abundance of intellectual resources well as practical skills to encourage and enable them to support their own learners to achieve quality outcomes. Since the contexts of schooling are always dynamic and influenced by changes in the wider socio-political environment, pre-service teachers need to be building those resources to be able to respond to the changing contexts and conditions of their work.

The list of core content in *The Paper* is insufficient in educating the future teaching workforce.

- The terms 'classroom readiness' and 'classroom ready' do not capture the multidimensional, varied and complex roles a teacher enacts within and beyond the classroom. 'Professional readiness' is more suitable. Professional readiness entails the knowledge base, skills and dispositions that teachers need in order to act contingently in a dynamic environment and to exercise professional judgement and agency. Classroom readiness diminishes the breadth of responsibility and demands that teachers need to navigate in their day-to-day life at school and throughout their career.

- Additionally, there needs to be recognition that early career teachers are at the beginning stage of their career. All teachers undertake formal and informal learning throughout their career.

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

- The recommendation assumes a weakness that has not been substantiated.

- Tracking, monitoring and evaluating performance is important and supported for all ITE programs, and, there is much reporting and accountability already in place for teacher education programs. All teacher education programs must satisfy the Program Standards set by the AITSL and NESA, and this demands time and resources of the teacher education provider to ensure that any reform in this area is successful. It is imperative that any specific weaknesses in the current system are identified and understood.

- The selection indicators are supported, however, these raise further complex questions and require further explanation. For example, the 'proportion of First Nations students enrolled in ITE': is this in comparison to other providers, or in comparison to the provider's previous 'proportion'? While fully supporting the aim of achieving a higher proportion of First Nations teachers in the Australian teaching workforce, setting this as a performance indicator is problematic. This would set up an unhealthy competition among providers to attract and enrol First Nations students, something that would not serve the interests of the First Nations students. Success in this area must be measured not only in terms of numbers enrolled or indeed, numbers graduated, but also in terms of the support structures the providers have in place to provide a culturally safe and supportive learning environment for First Nations students to succeed. In evaluating the learning environment, a broad range of aspects including the curriculum, housing and financial support, counselling and health services, the institution's commitment, and actions towards redressing the historical

injustices experienced by First Nations peoples. UTS is planning a sector-leading Indigenous Residential College with these factors in mind.

- The indicator 'high achieving students' with ATAR scores of 80 is potentially problematic, given recent debates about the worth, value and accuracy of the ATAR. In addition, although *The Paper* cites research by the DET showing high ATAR enrolments 'are more likely to be employed as a teacher after graduation' (p. 28), a high undergraduate ATAR does not necessarily predict the effectiveness of an in-service teacher. Additionally, many students commence a teacher education course at the postgraduate level or commence an undergraduate teacher education course after completing a VET course; such students do not get accepted based on their ATAR.

- Attrition is characterised in *The Paper* as being negative and yet, pre-service teachers withdraw for many reasons, not all of them related to course quality. This issue is indicative of the absence in *The Paper* of a fine-grained analysis of ITE programs in general and attrition drivers in particular.

- ITE programs are not funded to 'reach' into the post-graduation lives of early career teachers, so transition is a problematic measure. Many factors specific to employment can determine the choice to leave the profession, for example.

- The recommendation to publish the performance of ITE providers may create the negative outcomes similar to a 'Myschool-like' scenario where applicants select a provider based on a limited set of criteria. The absence of a fine-grained analysis leads to unclear understandings of the types of criteria which might be included in such publications of performance.

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

Universities in NSW currently comply with the recommendations of Reform Area 3.
Many ITE providers, including UTS currently:

- Co-designs ITE programs with school-based teacher educators (see p. 35).
- Designs professional experience subjects to enable students to apply theory on their school placements and then analyse and evaluate upon their return to tutorials.
- Utilises strong relationships with NSW government funded hub schools, to both co-design ITE programs and to conduct school placements.
- Uses the selection indicator 'participation of STEM students' (see p. 27); this is a priority in the design of a proposed new UTS Teacher Education degree - a Master of Teaching in Primary Education from 2024.

- Conduct placements across the sector as opportunities arise with school partners implementing a more systematic approach to professional experience. However, for this to become more widespread, adequate funding and a cultural shift is needed in the way NESA, schools and ITE providers collaborate to construct effective placement opportunities.

- Place pre-service teachers in schools early in their degree. All UTS teacher education students undertaking a standard study plan are placed in a school within the first year of their teaching degree.

- Organise opportunities for pre-service teachers to visit schools to increase their understanding of school practice. School partners collaborate closely with UTS to provide such experiences for pre-service teachers, which help to, which helps strengthen the pre-service teachers' professional experience placements.

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

ITE at UTS welcomes the staged entry for teacher education students into the workforce. We are well positioned to structure our coursework to support them while they establish themselves in the profession as a conditionally accredited teachers:

- UTS is currently exploring the structure and delivery of a flexible postgraduate degree that meets external accreditation requirements.

- While the volume of learning will remain the same as that offered in a standard 2-year postgraduate degree, pre-service teachers in NSW are able to gain conditional teaching accreditation in their final year of full-time study. This naturally condenses the coursework-only component of a postgraduate entry teaching degree to a single full-time year, with the remaining portion of learning able to be experienced concurrently with a paid teaching role. In addition, teacher education students with relevant undergraduate qualifications can already gain conditional teaching accreditation upon course entry.

- UTS acknowledges that mid-career entrants to teaching have diverse aims, with some seeking an accelerated pathway and others maintaining existing commitments whilst retraining. We are committed to providing flexible coursework options to suit the needs of career change teachers, noting that there are costs that come with increased flexibility and that these should be addressed in funding models.

- Opportunities exist to create better pathways from VET into ITE programs, for instance, by increasing and improving VET options for school students. However, there are currently some significant barriers such as differences in the curriculum frameworks for VET and schools, and the lack of sufficient recognition of subject content knowledge gained through VET qualifications to be admitted into an ITE course.
- Consideration needs to be given to the structure and delivery of the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) in relation to the concept of flexibility. Currently, the TPA assesses the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) standards towards the end of the pre-service teacher's degree. Condensing the degree or creating part-time alternatives occur in ways that do not impact on pre-service teachers' ability to successfully complete their TPAs.
- Condensing programs will impact on the level of support pre-service teachers will need once they start teaching in schools. The resources needed in schools to support early career teachers will need to be increased to ensure that teachers remain in the profession.

Conclusion

Initial teacher academics at the University of Technology Sydney welcome initiatives that aim to improve education and teacher education. We acknowledge the efforts of the Expert Panel and appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback. The work of the Panel comes at a time of significant challenge for not only schools and education but also for society in general. We endorse endeavours that work toward strengthening teacher skills and knowledge and programs that promote equity in the resourcing of schools and school systems. Our strong belief is that as professionals, in-service and pre-teachers need safe, respectful and well-resourced workplaces with attractive and commensurate salaries. We also support initiatives that strengthen and extend partnerships between schools and school communities, particularly those that embrace parents and caregivers as essential stakeholders in the education of children.

Ubiquitous reviews into all levels of education have been a feature of Australian education for decades. As such, we look forward to the next iteration of the Panel's work that not only highlights the current and challenging social context in which we work but also actively builds on the recommendations in this response.

This response was compiled by UTS teacher education academics:

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