Dr Michael Spence  
Vice-Chancellor and Principal  

13 June 2014  

Professor Greg Craven  
Chair, Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group  
By email: TEMAGenquiries@education.gov.au  

Dear Professor Craven,  

Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group Issues Paper  

I am pleased to provide the TEMAG with the University’s attached full submission to the Issues Paper released on 17 April 2014. An edited version of this submission has been provided to the TEMAG Secretariat in the required template. In providing this submission I would like to make a few key points.  

The University of Sydney strongly supports the Review’s objectives of ensuring the quality of Australia’s system of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is world class, and that graduate teachers have the preparation and support they need to succeed. We are keen to engage with the Advisory Group to help determine the policy and practical actions that should be taken to achieve these goals.  

The University takes seriously its responsibility for ensuring the graduates of its ITE programs meet high academic standards and that they have the right mix of knowledge and skills to take their place in the profession as beginning teachers. By so doing, this University, along with many others, plays an important role in supporting the intellectual development of the next generation of citizens.  

We believe it is in the national interest for teaching to be valued highly by the community and to be a high status profession. Teaching is an intellectually and often emotionally demanding profession. Entrants to ITE courses need to show strong academic potential. They also need to possess, or show the potential to obtain during their studies, the personal qualities that will give them strong prospects for success as teachers. Graduate teachers must have demonstrated their capacity to engage with a rigorous academic and practical program. Government and other employers of teachers also have a responsibility to set high standards for entry to the profession, and to support teachers to develop their knowledge and skills throughout their careers.  

On behalf of the community, governments have legitimate interests in the school curriculum, and in the way that teachers are prepared to deliver that curriculum. It should be acknowledged, however, that maintaining stability in the requirements for schools, teachers and ITE providers is important. A serious commitment by universities to the transparent examination of the outcomes of their ITE programs should be matched by a commitment to regulatory restraint, and to allowing sufficient time for major reforms to be implemented. Respect for institutional autonomy and recognition of the importance of diversity to the process of constant improvement through innovation is also vital.
ITE is necessarily a shared responsibility of governments, universities and employing authorities, individual schools and practising teachers, and professional associations. Like the clinical disciplines, student teachers can only meet the requirements for registration by completing compulsory professional placements. Recent growth in ITE enrolments in some jurisdictions has placed pressure on employing authorities, school administrators and supervising teachers. It has brought a focus on the costs and burdens of hosting students and precipitated calls from teacher unions for increased supervision payments for their members.

Notwithstanding recent and proposed deregulatory reforms, the Commonwealth, in cooperation with state governments, the independent school sector and universities, should adopt the principle that there is a need to strike a reasonable balance between teacher demand and supply, the numbers of students admitted to ITE programs and the availability of quality practicum places. This can be achieved through improved dialogue, better placement data and systems, and through enhanced analysis of demographic and workforce trends at the national and state levels.

Successive reviews of our system of ITE have found a lack of investment in the practicum component to be a key weakness. Funding challenges continue to threaten the quality and sustainability of the system. They also put at risk the good will of the practising teachers on which the system depends. All stakeholders need to work together to find ways of ensuring that professional placements are properly resourced, recognising the mutual responsibility they have for renewing the teaching profession, and the mutual benefits that flow from a strong system of ITE.

Finally, we believe there is a strong case for greater investment in, and coordination of, research to improve the knowledge-base that supports teacher education policy and practice. This includes research into the pedagogies that best support young learners to acquire the understanding and skills of particular disciplines within the school curriculum.

We look forward to engaging with TEMAG as it progresses its work for the Minister of Education.

Yours sincerely

Michael Spence

Appendix  University of Sydney submission to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group Issues Paper, June 2014
University of Sydney submission to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group Issues Paper, June 2014

Question. 1 What characteristics should be fostered and developed in graduate teachers through their initial teacher education?

1.1 How can those best suited to the teaching profession be identified?

While there is merit in using a range of selection criteria to determine the suitability of candidates for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, the underlying principle guiding admission practices should be that teaching is an intellectually and sometimes emotionally demanding profession. Entrants to teacher education courses need to be strong academic performers, have excellent literacy and numeracy skills. They also need personal qualities that give them a strong aptitude for success in the profession.

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)/Grade Point Average (GPA)/Weighted Average Mark (WAM) are useful indicators of an applicant’s likely capacity for success in this intellectually challenging profession. Additional measures, which take into account personal circumstances and traits such as commitment, communication, integrity and resilience, are also helpful. For example, where resources are available:

- targeted interviews are valuable for identifying those best suited to the profession
- consideration of referee reports and CVs from candidates listing co-curricular activities such as community services, volunteering and leadership activities.

It is important also that the teaching profession reflects generally the social and cultural diversity of Australia’s population.

For a useful recent review of these issues see Bowles, T., Hattie, J., Dinham, S., Scull, J., & Clinton, J. (2014). Proposing a comprehensive model for identifying teaching candidates. The Australian Educational Researcher, 1-16.)

1.2 What are the skills and personal characteristics of an effective beginning teacher? How can teacher education courses best develop these?

Skills and personal attributes

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers comprise standards that document a range of skills and knowledge that early career teachers need if they are to provide a quality learning environment for their students. In addition to these standards, early career and experienced teachers alike need a range of personal attributes and attitudes. These include:

- a respectful and caring attitude to all learners, their learning styles and background, cultural experiences and understandings
- the ability to create an inclusive learning community
- confidence in and high expectations that learners have the ability to learn
- an enthusiasm about learning and teaching
- a personal commitment to lifelong learning
- excellent communication, interpersonal and organisational skills to enable the development of trusting relationships and collaboration with their students as well as colleagues, parents and community members
- an understanding of the importance of providing clear and explicit feedback to learners
- high ethical standards
- a willingness and commitment to question, reflect and change their own practices to seek solutions to problems or dilemmas.
Developing these skills and characteristics

ITE is necessarily a shared responsibility of governments, universities and employing authorities, individual schools, practising teachers and professional associations. This ensures that new graduates are ready to take up their work as beginning teachers in schools, and that schools are ready to provide the conditions necessary for a sound start to a successful teaching career.

There is a need for stronger policies to attract, prepare and retain effective teachers. Initial teacher education does not finish at graduation from a university course, but continues through induction into the profession as a beginning teacher through to the established, advanced and leadership stages.

The availability of adequate resources is also critical. Successive reviews of teacher education in Australia have identified a lack of investment, particularly for the practicum component, and for supporting graduate teachers in the early years of their careers, as key areas where improvements could be made.

Pre-service teacher education programs need to offer integrated courses that enable students to understand the relationship between theory, professional practice and relevant research. This is essential for the development of confidence based on knowledge and skill. It is therefore vital for organisations offering ITE courses to establish active, reciprocal relationships with school authorities and partnership schools, to ensure that curriculum and pedagogy of ITE courses reflect and are responsive to the evolving school curriculum.

Curriculum content and pedagogy of ITE courses should be based on evidence drawn from the knowledge, expertise and experience of the teaching profession, as well as being based on the best-validated research. This also requires the establishment of authentic partnerships between universities, school authorities (including in their role as employers), school curriculum authorities and the agencies that set teacher accreditation standards.

ITE courses must be shaped by what their graduates will need to be able to meet employer requirements and expectations in order to be employed as beginning teachers. As a result employers will contribute to shaping the approach and content of ITE courses, while graduates will contribute to the curriculum content and pedagogy of schools.

All assessment of university teacher education students needs to reflect these principles and attributes.

Question 2. What teaching practices should be developed in graduate teachers through their initial teacher education?

2.1 How can the teaching practices that produce the best student outcomes be identified?

These teaching practices are best identified through:

- the Graduate Teaching Standards;
- peer-reviewed research;
- observations of highly accomplished teachers in classrooms and discussions afterwards;
- opportunities for students to experience and implement different learning approaches and reflect on their effectiveness (e.g. through working side-by-side with specially accredited experienced teachers so early career teachers can learn what works best in different learning contexts and schools.)
2.2 How can teacher education programmes encourage teachers to reflect on evidence to support their choice of teaching practice?

Useful reflection can be encouraged through the use of a professional experience curriculum throughout ITE courses. Pre-service teachers can be encouraged to incorporate reflection on evidence and observations they generate during professional experience opportunities.

This evidence would include examples from pre-lesson (feedback on planning), during lessons (coaching during lessons, lesson observation forms) and post-lesson (student assessment data, mentoring conversations, peer-reviewed teaching strategies).

In addition to workshop-based units of study, the best research evidence can be integrated with teaching expertise and learner values using longitudinal studies aimed at specific learners in particular contexts. This is vital for early career teachers.

Reflection itself is a key skill and each student needs to be assessed to measure his or her proficiency in this important area. This includes the capacity to diagnose and articulate tacit understandings, knowledge and values, so that a deeper understanding is gained.

By itself, however, reflection does not lead to better teaching unless the teacher has the required knowledge of the field, understands the key strategies of different approaches to teaching, and has the skills to implement these approaches. Here we note that the Graduate Teaching Standards properly emphasise the distinction between reflection as a professional methodology and the knowledge and skills teachers need to respond effectively.

Even experienced teachers often do not know how to reflect critically (or translate this into a skills based process). This requires the execution of action to diagnose, understand and cope from one situation to another. Curriculum needs to be designed around this ‘problem based approach’, with an emphasis on developing good diagnostic skills.

For student and early career teacher reflection to be successful, sufficient time and resources need to be dedicated to the exercise. It also needs to be undertaken with an experienced teacher, mentor or teacher coach who has been specifically ‘accredited’ for this purpose. This ensures that students and early career teachers can employ active interpretation and evaluation from observing experienced teachers in action.

2.3 How does reflection on evidence translate into student outcomes?

Once equipped with a personal understanding and repertoire of teaching and learning practices and strategies, teachers are able to meet the changing needs, interests and abilities of individual students.

Teachers need to be accredited in the use of evidence-based learning (including critical reflection) by demonstrating that they are keeping up-to-date with the latest: research journals in their field; guidelines and protocols based on research for teachers to deploy in the learning context; and the development of tools to assist teachers to work effectively with different types of learners.

The teaching-learning cycle needs to begin with assessment for student learning so teachers are able to understand where students are at a particular point in time. A teaching and learning cycle should finish with assessment of student learning to determine the next steps.
Question 3. What level of integration should there be between initial teacher education providers and schools?

3.1 What evidence is there that effective integration achieves good teaching practice? What are the most effective types of integrated experiences in preparing new teachers?

The evidence that effective integration achieves good teaching practice resides in many peer-reviewed and institutional publications, including:


The most effective types of integrated experience involve constructive alignment between schools and universities where both parties understand the course principles, pedagogies and practices, and work collaboratively to realise these.

A final Professional Experience (PE) of internship, in which students teach half to two thirds of a full load but also are also involved in the other roles of a teacher, has been shown to be a very effective way of enabling students to make the transition to full-fledged teachers.

Other successful mechanisms include Knowledge Translation Platforms (KTPs): partnerships between policymakers, stakeholders (universities, schools and professional associations) and researchers to establish purposeful exchange of ideas, knowledge and information through accessible communication channels, informed by evidence briefs which are kept up to date.

3.2 What are the cost implications of more integrated professional experience? Are there more effective ways in which professional experience might be funded?

Professional Experience should be the planned pathway for ITE students to link their content knowledge and pedagogy studies with understanding of the complex realities of schools. PE should provide students with the opportunity to work with accomplished school and university supervisors and mentors, including to examine issues that arise in their school placements; and to demonstrate the attributes needed to work effectively in a range of contexts.

There are cost implications if more staff, such as practicum supervisors and associates, need to be employed. Another approach is to redesign the current workloads of existing staff so that university faculty regard school-based work as an integral aspect of their workload, and so that school staff working at the Highly Accomplished level are entrusted with supervision of pre-service teachers.

There will be risks to the goodwill on which the system of PE relies, if the cost implications of integrated learning are not funded adequately. Overall, integrated PE is worthy of investment because of the social and long-term economic impact of high-performing teachers. The benefits of renewing the teaching workforce flow broadly to the community, while the private financial benefits to ITE graduates do not compare favourably with many other professions. There is therefore a strong case for the Commonwealth and states to governments to contribute directly and indirectly to the cost of preparing the next generations of teaching professionals.

3.3 What other methods, or combination of these methods could achieve better outcomes than the current approach to professional experience?

There is a need for governments (Federal and State), school authorities, the profession and unions, the accrediting bodies, schools and universities to work more effectively together to coordinate PE planning and delivery. The objective should be to ensure that sufficient quality placements are available in schools for the numbers of pre-service students enrolled. If there are too many students enrolled in ITE courses, then this issue needs to be addressed through dialogue between the Commonwealth, education providers and employing authorities.
Improved governance over all stakeholders to discuss policy, strategies and issues is needed. At the macro level this could involve the establishment of professional learning networks to exchange ideas, challenge assumptions, knowledge and perspectives.

TEMAG could recommend that AITSL elaborate/publish and perhaps develop (in consultation with employing authorities, schools, teachers and teacher educators) new integrated models and options that could see the Commonwealth deploy its funds in more constructive ways.

3.4 How can partnerships between teacher education providers and schools be strengthened to make teacher education more effective?

As emphasised above, ITE is necessarily a shared responsibility of governments, universities, employing authorities, current teachers and the profession as a whole. Policy needs to reflect this reality and ensure that it promotes rather than hinders collaboration.

In jurisdictions where concerns are held about a growing mismatch between demand from students for professional placements and their availability, improved dialogue and governance arrangements could be established to bring key stakeholders together to determine how to better match supply and demand.

Initial teacher education needs to be adequately funded, and it is difficult to ignore the potential implications of recent Commonwealth Budget decisions on these and other existing problems, including intergovernmental co-operation in relation to the renewal of the teaching profession.

Universities and schools can work together in mutually beneficial partnerships where academic staff provide their expertise in research and professional learning in return for school staff conducting expert mentoring of pre-service teachers.

The University of Sydney recently released a scoping study to assess key trends and challenges to the future of work-based training in the health disciplines. Many health fields are experiencing similar issues to ITE due to recent strong enrolment growth and policy reforms that have brought a heightened focus on the costs to workplaces of hosting students on placements.


3.5 How can teacher education providers and schools best work together to select and train mentor teachers to effectively support pre-service teachers on professional experience?

Every mentor teacher should be either recognised as Highly Accomplished under the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, or be completing an accredited mentoring course provided on-site by the provider. Both mentors and early career teachers need the time to meet together and observe each other’s teaching and critically reflect on observed methods and situations.

3.6 How can consistency of good practice and continuous improvement across teacher education providers and schools be assured?

See above.
Question 4. What balance is needed between understanding what is taught and how it is taught?

4.1 What is the desirable interaction between content knowledge and teaching practice for developing teachers? What is the difference for primary and secondary teaching? Why is there a difference?

Teachers at all levels need both content knowledge and the ability to transmit it in situations that will present various degrees of challenge. In secondary teaching a need for narrower, deeper content knowledge reflects the burgeoning intellectual capacity of older students and their ability to follow the teacher into more specialised areas of knowledge.

In primary teaching the balance may weigh more heavily on the side of the teacher's skills in engaging and transmitting information to younger learners, with strong fundamentals and broad content base required. All teachers will have their own special interests, usually reflected in their subject specialisation. The flow-on benefits for students at both primary and secondary levels, of teachers who are genuinely enthusiastic about a particular subject area, should not be underestimated.

4.2 Should there be explicit training in how to teach literacy and numeracy in all teaching courses?

Literacy and numeracy are important components of all teacher education courses. The curriculum should be based on research-evidence matched to diverse learner issues and values as well as specific learning contexts.

4.3 How can the balance between the need for subject specialisation and a generalist approach in primary teaching qualifications be addressed?

There is considerable merit in an integrated approach to the education of young children. One of the most important factors for success in primary school classrooms is the relationship that develops over the course of the school year between one teacher and the student as a member of a stable group. In secondary schools students have many teachers and different approaches are needed to build strong relationships with students. Teachers should engage in ongoing professional learning across all key learning areas to ensure they are well qualified and confident in each area.

4.4 What, if any, changes need to be made to the structure of teacher education courses? Should content be studied before pedagogy (i.e. should ‘what’ to teach be studied before the ‘how’ to teach)?

There are many mechanisms in place to ensure the quality and appropriateness of ITE courses. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) sets the knowledge, skills and capacity for application that graduates of courses at each AQF level must meet. Together, the AQF, the Higher Education Support Act, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Act, the Education for Overseas Students Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework, provide an overarching regulatory framework that every registered higher education provider must satisfy. In addition, the national accreditation for ITE courses has three core elements: the Graduate Teacher Standards, the Program Standards, and the accreditation process. Both the AQF and national ITE accreditation standards and processes are meant to be outcomes focused. It is not clear that the new process has gone far enough into the robust review of student learning outcomes.

There is no single model of ITE that should be mandated across the system, and risks to quality and innovation over the long term in mandating one approach. The focus of governments should continue to be on ensuring that the regulatory and accreditation standards and processes are appropriate and applied rigorously. The focus of accreditation needs to be on quality of the implementation of courses and on the graduate outcomes.
As major employers of graduates of ITE programs state and territory governments and the independent school sector can influence the educational approach of providers by maintaining strong linkages with providers, by partnering with providers in the delivery of the professional experience element, and by setting the standards that graduates must meet in order to gain employment.

4.5 What barriers are there to restructuring teacher education courses to ensure they address these concerns, and how may they be overcome?

Once again it is not easy to generalise given the diversity of course offerings and pedagogical approaches teacher education evident in Australia.

It is essential that ITE courses are based on enriched research and evidence-based approaches. They must show the link to the learner and learning contexts required to allow students to meet the full spectrum of responsibilities characteristic of the modern teacher. They need to provide students with the base knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to seize the diverse career opportunities that could come their way.

In terms of areas for improvement, the use of specially accredited teacher mentors and coaches employed in skill-based units of study should be considered. There is value in the work that state bodies such as the Board of Studies, Teaching & Educational Standards (BOSTES) in NSW are undertaking to systematically review the effectiveness of curricula for teacher education courses in a selective sample of universities. AITSL could be asked to build on this work to determine whether teaching methods influence the effectiveness of such curricula and teacher outcomes.

Key stakeholders with responsibility for teacher education in each state and territory (governments, schools, universities) need agreed goals and strategies for teacher education, curriculum, pedagogical approaches, provision of quality professional experiences and expected outcomes. Such a framework is the process of being developed and implemented in NSW through consultation following the release of the NSW Government’s Great Teaching, Inspired Learning blueprint of March 2013.

4.6 Why does Australia face a shortage of maths, science and language teachers?

These shortages are not new and are not unique to Australia. The reasons for the shortages are complex, and there is not likely to be a simple or quick policy solution. Fewer students are choosing to study these disciplines at higher levels. Of those that do complete study in these fields at university, many choose careers that are viewed as more attractive for reasons such as pathways to employment, pay, status and career prospects. Of those that do commence classroom teaching, too many become dissatisfied (again for complex reasons) and are lost to the system.

The persistent shortage of highly skilled teachers in these disciplines compounds the problem by reducing the numbers of role models working in the system to generate the interest of new generations of students. Particular geographic, gender and equity factors are at play, which require integrated as well as targeted strategies.

It is also a workforce pipeline issue, while too-regular changes to relevant Commonwealth and state policies have resulted in a lack of operational certainty for schools and universities. Any positive momentum that may be gained from one government program is lost when that program is discontinued or refocused by the next government in order to deliver budget savings or target resources to address a part of the problem considered more important.

A sustained, long term national strategy is needed. The recent work on these issues led by the Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb AC, points the way, while the $54 million package of measures announced by the former government represents a start on which to build. Governments need to allow time (at least 5-10 years) for initiative such as these to deliver results, while policy decisions need to be based on evidence and evaluation of the types of initiatives that work.
4.7 What can be done to encourage teaching students to develop a specialisation in these areas?

Market-based solutions alone will not be sufficient, and may even exacerbate the situation if they result in dramatic increases in the cost of studying these courses for students. Whatever basic funding arrangements exist for higher education in the future, increasing the science, technology and language capacity of the teaching profession will require key stakeholders working collaboratively to develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated long term strategy.

Options that could be considered as part of such a strategy include:

- providing better opportunities for maths and science teachers to remain linked to universities science and maths faculty to engage in joint research, teaching
- supporting study leave and other forms of support for existing teachers to allow them to refresh their disciplinary knowledge, or build knowledge in new specialists areas
- targeting the recruitment of high quality Year 11 and 12 students who demonstrate proficiency in target disciplines, or are identified as possessing the potential for proficiency in these fields
- permitting students to continue their specialist studies in the primary faculty with other studies done through education faculty
- encouraging pre service teachers to develop specialisations in areas of national significance during their ITE courses
- enabling partnering between universities with strengths in target fields of specialisations and those with less expertise in these areas
- providing funding to support research into the pedagogies that best support young learners to acquire the knowledge base, skills and values of particular disciplines or subject areas within the school curriculum. Such research should draw on experience of practising teachers.
- supporting AITSL to consult with jurisdictions around an agreed set of definitions/specifications of specialist strands in primary courses (how many extra units; nature of extra units; nomenclature of the specialisations) and add these to the work of the accreditation panels to ‘certify’ the optional specialist strands.

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