



Australian Government

Teacher Education
Ministerial Advisory Group



Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group Consultation 2014

SUBMISSION

NAME OF ORGANISATION

Australian Education Union

Preamble

The Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission in response to the Issues Paper published by the Teacher Education Advisory Group (TEMAG) established by the Commonwealth Minister for Education in April 2014.

The AEU is an organisation of employees registered under the provisions of the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009. It has approximately 190,000 members employed in government schools and public early childhood work locations, in TAFE and other public institutions of vocational education, in Adult Multicultural or Migrant Education Service centres and in Disability Services centres as teachers, school leaders, and education assistance and support workers.

Through its experience as an organised presence in virtually every government school work location in Australia, the AEU is uniquely placed to comment upon teacher education policy and practice. Its members are the higher education students undertaking initial teacher education (ITE) courses at universities, its members are employed by state and territory governments to teach in schools and its members undertake the supervisory and mentoring roles under which student-teachers gain the required practical professional experience necessary for entry to the teaching profession.

The involvement, co-operation and encouragement of or by the AEU will be required to give effect to any outcomes or recommendations of a review of teacher education in Australia.

Few areas of professional employment or experience have been subject, over the last few decades at least, to as extensive and intensive government or parliamentary scrutiny or review (let alone academic inquiry) as the teaching profession. The current review will need to be cognisant of this and confident its recommendations carry the support of the profession for it to avoid becoming simply another government inquiry.

Within the Australian context, the provision of school education, the employment of teachers, and the regulation of standards of entry to the profession remain the province of state legislative action. Together with the regulation of teacher working conditions in school evidenced through industrial instruments, state legislative action remains the bedrock upon which any change in the areas of teacher quality, school autonomy, the engagement of parents in education and strengthening the school curriculum must proceed.

Within that context the Australian government has a significant role as a funder of higher education and in the regulation of tertiary education generally through the TEQSA Act. Importantly, that Act, (s9(2)(b)), expressly reserves to the states and territories the legislative capacity to regulate who may carry on an occupation. Universities are also acknowledged as self-accrediting institutions with substantial autonomy to develop programs of study, to select entrants into those programs and to certify the qualifications and awards of those who graduate from them.

ITE courses are higher education programs of specialist vocational or occupational preparation enabling graduates to obtain professional recognition and subsequent employment. They are not, and should not become, higher education programs for generalist education purposes. Graduates of these programs, the teachers, are required to utilise detailed, and deep, knowledge and high level skills in pressured environments for the benefit of school age students of all levels of ability and from diverse cultural, linguistic, geographic & socio-economic backgrounds in a world whose knowledge and skill requirements constantly change with an almost breath-taking rapidity.

The Australian government through its Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), and with the collaboration of all state and territory governments and the agreement and endorsement of all governments' ministers of education, oversaw the development of Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Professional Standards) and for the standards and procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education programs in Australia (Accreditation Standards). Such developments have occurred largely through the collaborative arrangements engendered as part of the COAG Reform Agenda and evidenced in National Agreements and National Partnership Agreements.

The AEU suggests TEMAG could usefully recommend the full implementation of these Professional and Accreditation Standards continue to be directed by the Ministerial Standing Council for School Education & Early Childhood Development (SCSEEC) with the necessary developmental or implementation work undertaken through appropriate agreed mechanisms such as currently provided by AITSL.

It is these standards and procedures which have supplied a critical step towards ensuring high quality teacher education programs and assure the quality of graduates who commence their careers as teachers of Australia's school children.

It is these standards and procedures to which the AEU will return below in much of this response to the TEMAG's questions. It is to high quality standards and to the assurance of the public interest in the public accountability for these processes that the AEU remains committed.

We strongly urge the TEMAG to recommend ongoing Government endorsement and support for the continuing implementation of these standards and procedures and to urge that there be no diminution in or move away from the requirements contained therein.

In particular the AEU suggests that TEMAG expressly recommend the Commonwealth Minister endorse & facilitate the continuing transition to and full implementation of the requirement for ITE graduate-entry programs to contain at least two years of full-time equivalent professional studies in education and the minimum current discipline-specific curriculum and pedagogical studies content for undergraduate programs (Standards 3 & 4 of the Accreditation Standards).

AREAS FOR RESPONSE

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

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

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

The AEU notes that this is not new territory. It is well traversed, researched, analysed, published and reported or commented upon. There are countless studies within Australia and internationally, including of developing countries and of highly performing education systems.

Further, the AEU refers to the current initiative of SCSEEC in tasking AITSL to develop national selection guidelines for admission into ITE programs. The report is due to be provided to the Commonwealth Minister this year. AITSL has commissioned reviews of the selection mechanisms used by Australian higher education providers and compiled a selected, annotated bibliography of the current research literature, nationally and internationally, concerning selection into ITE. It has conducted a public consultation around these issues in October 2013.

While this work should not be uncritically accepted, the AEU does suggest that TEMAG need not 're-invent the wheel'. The AEU would oppose the adoption of any single test for or checklist of purportedly desirable personality traits.

The Graduate stage of the Professional Standards identifies the knowledge, skills, attributes and other understandings required to be an effective beginning teacher and the Accreditation Standards require providers of ITE to demonstrate how graduates of their courses meet such standards.

The AEU recommends that the continuous and rigorous assessment of students of ITE programs against the requirements of these standards throughout their program, and in particular during their professional experience components, is essential.

Ensuring standards of entry to ITE courses are suitably high and that the provision of teacher education is appropriately rigorous is a critical first step. Program Standards 3.1 & 3.2 of the Accreditation Standards require entrants to ITE courses to have personal literacy and numeracy levels broadly equivalent to those of the top 30% of the population or to have achieved this level before graduation. There is an AITSL project currently working on what 'tests' to establish these criteria might look like. AITSL has also worked with the curriculum authorities in each jurisdiction and published separate lists of the Yr 12 subjects and indicative 'study score' range which might correspond to the 'top 30% standard'.

The AEU also notes that, eg, in NSW under its *Great Teaching –Inspired Learning* agenda the state government is establishing high academic standards – a HSC Band 5 result in at least 3 subjects, incl. English - for entry into ITE courses.

The AEU supports raising entry standards and has suggested that TEMAG consider recommending minimum ATAR scores (with equivalent measures for those seeking entry from other pathways) in order to select students from the top 30% of the demographic.

The Commonwealth Minister for Education has also said his government would push for higher entry standards (see speech to the Christian Schools Australia National Policy Forum, Canberra, May 2013).

The AEU acknowledges that reliance upon a single measure to select for entry is not enough. Imposition of arbitrary thresholds can have unintended consequences: too low a threshold is self-defeating, too high a threshold impacts upon supply and demand. Further an over-emphasis on a test for entry neglects other 'demand-side' factors that can help control for the standard of entry and quality of teaching practice, eg, competitive salaries, rewarding career structures, good working conditions and closer alignment of course enrolments with job opportunities.

The AEU would support the use of a range of measures being adopted by all ITE providers to ensure candidates for entry, in addition to high academic standards, display motivation, aptitude, capacity and commitment. Such measures would include rigorous interviews, portfolios of experience and evidence of community engagement.

TEMAG might also usefully support the continuing development by AITSL of its selection guidelines so they become an agreed basis for adoption by providers.

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

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

How can teacher education programmes encourage teachers to reflect on evidence to support their choice of teaching practice?

How does reflection on evidence translate into student outcomes?

The research literature on the effectiveness of teaching practices is vast and the data subject to extensive debate. The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation in the NSW Department of Education and Communities has produced a useful summary and critique of much of the current research in this area.

Value-added models (VAMs) of teacher (or school) effectiveness seek to ascertain the particular differences an individual teacher (or school) makes to student outcomes, typically by reference to standardised test results. Such measures of teaching and school effectiveness are notoriously difficult to interpret and appear quite limited mechanisms for use in identifying a particular teaching practice with a particular improvement in student test scores. See for example the American Statistical Association statement on this issue, April 2014.

Rather than attempt to identify a standard set of 'best practice/s' that are then packaged and delivered to ITE students, effort should be spent on exposing student-teachers to, and enabling them to use, a continually developing range of different practices that cater for the continually developing different needs, abilities and contexts of the students they will teach.

Teaching after all is a vastly complex task that requires high level academic capability and the deep pedagogical knowledge. ITE students need to be prepared and equipped for this.

The AEU doubts whether a 'picking the winners' approach to identifying best teaching practice is fruitful. It notes, again, that effective teaching practices are those in which teachers display strong subject knowledge, explicit teaching techniques and where they receive constant feedback and monitoring.

AITSL maintains a register or list of ITE programs which are accredited as meeting the Accreditation Standards although the actual accreditation process itself is managed through each jurisdiction's teacher regulatory authority. NSW has committed to an annual review of ITE programs and publication of resulting data. Victoria is similarly conducting a review of ITE programs.

The AEU supports measures which would see the rigorous assessment of ITE programs against the Accreditation Standards and public availability of reports of this data.

The AEU notes that Standard 5 for the Graduate stage in the Professional Standards details the requirement for assessing student learning, providing feedback to students, making consistent and comparable judgments, interpreting student data and reporting on student achievement.

Consequently ITE programs to be accredited must ensure that these elements are more than simply demonstrable within their programs. The courses must provide ample opportunity for students to learn and to practice these capabilities, to be guided

successfully through their differing applications by skilled and experienced supervising teachers and to ensure that students are assessed as having demonstrated competence in their use.

It is regrettable that reports of the experiences of graduates of ITE, eg, those conducted by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia and the Staff in Australian Schools Survey and reported by AITSL in its Data Report 2013 (the 2014 report is not yet publically available) indicate a significant degree of dissatisfaction by ITE students with these elements of their preparation (as they do also with their preparation for teaching students with disabilities, from different cultural backgrounds and from Indigenous backgrounds.)

Of the 400 odd ITE programs delivered by some 48 providers across Australia, only some 69 programs are currently accredited against the Accreditation Standards. While the AEU does not suggest there be any acceleration of the process of re-accreditation of ITE programs which would diminish the rigor of compliance, no delay in implementing the requirements for accreditation against the agreed standards should occur. With tens of thousands of ITE graduates each year (about 30,000 commencements and 16,000 completions with about 76,000 total enrolments), the problem of inadequate preparation in key areas becomes a significant one.

3. What level of integration should there be between initial teacher education providers and schools?

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

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

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

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

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?

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

No profession, or indeed any licenced occupation, accepts entry to it that does not demonstrate a level of competency in performance acknowledged as appropriate by the relevant professional accrediting authority. For teaching this means the practice of teaching in schools (or similar settings) under the supervision and mentoring of skilled, experienced and highly effective teachers.

For that to occur, schools need to be resourced to provide the adequate numbers of the practical or clinical placements required. There is scant systemic encouragement to schools or to teachers to participate. The costs to ITE providers continue to escalate (as concluded by the Lomax-Smith Review of Higher Education Base Funding in 2011), the costs to the Commonwealth rise but monetary payments to teachers to supervise the work of student-teachers in schools have not risen, except in an ad hoc way at an individual institutional level where fragile industrial agreements might be reached.

It is hoped that the progressive implementation of accreditation at the higher levels of the Professional Standards (Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers career stages) will go some way to provide greater integration of ITE provider & school-based experience for student teachers. However, the AEU notes that there has been little progress to date on the part of states and territories to negotiate adoption of these stages within teacher career structures as regulated by industrial instruments.

Initiatives to research, trial, or pilot greater integration approaches are funded on fixed term bases, either through ARC grants or through types of specific – purpose payment programs that suffer the vagaries of commonwealth-state financial relations – and the budget processes. Some receive extended Commonwealth support, eg, the University of Melbourne’s MTeach program. This ad hoc approach is also typified by the continuing Commonwealth support for fringe programs such as Teach for Australia. Programs such as this latter one are unlikely to present as viable options or serve as models for any systemic improvement in ITE programs. The ACER Phase 2 evaluation of the program in April 2012 shows it is extremely costly (\$216,500 per TFA Associate compared to \$140,200 for a comparable postgraduate pathway), high attrition rates (about 60% were teaching in the year after graduation, ie, a 40% attrition rate), only anecdotal not quantitative evidence of impact on student performance and would only ever deliver small numbers of trained teachers. These figures largely relate to the first cohort of TFA graduates. The attrition rate therefore concerned the 2012 teaching year. For the same cohort, according to figures produced by the Commonwealth Dept of Education for the Senate Estimates hearings and recorded in the Hansard, 26 February 2013, p108, of the 43 graduates (from 2011) only 20 were still teaching (at 2014), ie, an approx 54% attrition rate or 1 in 2 after 2 years of teaching. By way of comparison or contrast, the NSW Department of Education & Communities in its 2013 Teacher Workforce Supply & Demand Report (p13) notes a resignation rate for teachers in their first year of teaching from 2006-2012 of between approx 2-4% with 2.1% for 2012.

There have been initiatives through state departments of education and funded through the Commonwealth which have trialled greater integration between the ITE provider and schools in the delivery of teacher practicum requirements and other professional experience opportunities. The NSW *Centres of Excellence* and the Victorian *Centres of Teaching Excellence* (now transformed into the *Teaching Academies of Professional Experience* program) are examples of current initiatives at the jurisdictional level that do offer a viable option or model for systemic improvement which to date appears supported by the profession. However, it would appear evaluations of such programs are not publically available, although there is a literature review conducted for the Victorian programme. It would seem the continuation and extension of the benefits of these approaches is dependent upon extension of the specific program funding.

There are tens of thousands of commencements into and graduates from ITE programs annually. While many, indeed most graduates find employment within teaching within the first 6-12 mths after graduation, many do not find the type of employment or the programs of induction and mentoring necessary for a successful transition from student to practitioner. Too many new graduates or early career teachers have casual or fixed-term contract/temporary jobs – and often located within ‘hard to staff’ work locations. Too many schools simply are not resourced to the levels required to establish the ‘pool’ of skilled, experienced and committed teachers required to provide the professional experience, induction and mentoring necessary for the task.

The AEU recommends that TEMAG propose there be a consistent coordinated approach adopted by the Commonwealth which seeks to more carefully align ITE program enrolments with the teacher supply and demand requirements of the differing employing jurisdictions and authorities. Such an approach would necessitate the involvement of all stakeholders.

The AEU also recommends that there be support from TEMAG for improvement of the payments for practice teaching supervision and for the development within schools of more teachers whose role is to provide the type of supervised teaching practice required. Such teachers require the time, the training, the resources and the recognition to accomplish the task/s.

Some better integration between university and school teaching roles should be explored as, too, should be some form of recognition or accreditation for the detailed research and training such teachers would undertake. University teaching staff in ITE programs could be registered or registrable for teaching in schools and have recent, high level successful experience; school teaching staff could have a form of secondment to university teaching and their work in relation to student teaching supervision, mentoring and induction structured, recognised and credited towards higher level academic and professional accreditation and/or career progression.

The AEU notes that AITSL currently has underway a project developing an agreed nationally consistent approach to the professional experience component of ITE programs. This project includes the partnerships between ITE providers and schools, the professional experience assessment process and the support for ITE students undertaking their professional experience requirements. TEMAG could usefully recommend continuing support for the project

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

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?

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

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

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)?

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

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

What can be done to encourage teaching students to develop a specialisation in these areas?

Program Standards 4.4 and 4.5 of the Accreditation Standards outline the current required relationship between content or discipline studies and pedagogical studies for both undergraduate and graduate ITE programs for primary and secondary education. These are minimum requirements.

Indeed, given the complex nature of teaching and the 'crammed' nature of the ITE curriculum, it is difficult to see how everything can be adequately covered or rather successfully learned by the student-teacher. While the AEU supports the existing minimum requirements and recommends that there should be a nationally co-ordinated and consistent rigorous assessment of the processes of accreditation undertaken by the ITE providers, there is scope to explore further the relationship between the professional experience component of ITE programs and the first years of employment. The AEU notes that many if not all jurisdictions' teacher regulatory authorities provide for an initial year of provisional registration in which the registrant undertakes detailed research and practical or clinical work. Such an exploration would involve consideration of 'transitioning' to a Master's level, or combined Bachelor and Master's, qualification for full registration. This need not amount to formally mandating, per se, a Master's degree as a pre-requisite for full registration. Rather, the requirements of the work and study done in the first year of employment or year of provisional registration could become formally recognised and accredited by the ITE providers as a Master's level qualification and accepted or endorsed by the teacher regulatory authorities.

It is important to stress in these contexts that any Master's (as indeed should a Bachelor) level qualification be fully compliant with AQF requirements.

The AEU notes the South Australian government announced in November 2013 that from 2020 all new teachers will need to have a master's degree and to have studied for at least five years. It also announced that it would offer \$20,000 scholarships for 240 currently employed teachers to undertake Master's degrees between 2015 and 2020. These initiatives have the support of the SA Branch of the AEU.

In the ACT, too, the University of Canberra has an MTeach ITE secondary teacher program. Some 80 ITE students are allocated to 4 clusters comprised of one senior college and two high schools. ITE students are not assigned to a particular supervising teacher but complete the 60 days of supervised teaching practice across the cluster. The University provides funding (\$45000) to each cluster but the decision to allocate funds is jointly made by the school principals. Each school has 1-2 Professional Associates whose role includes assessing the academic work of the students and coordinating the program at each school level. School teachers in the ACT are reporting issues concerning teacher payments and work load.

TEMAG should consider recommending to the Commonwealth NOT ONLY that the current minimum requirements be rigorously applied but that it, the Commonwealth could also facilitate those ITE providers transitioning to a 2 yrs Master's qualification in teaching through the extension of Commonwealth support for these postgraduate enrolments. Aligning ITE course enrolments more closely with employment opportunities would help in this regard.

Employing authorities incentive schemes to address supply and demand issues either in particular work locations or in particular curriculum areas continue to suffer from the inadequacies of fixed-term or specific purpose payment programs referred to earlier. Given the limited access to, or capability of, revenue raising by the state level of government, the Commonwealth has a significant capacity to play a constructive role here. Increased and continuing Commonwealth support for such programs is necessary, eg, including by a waiver of student contributions and 'HECs debt' or tax concessions/rebates in STEM and foreign language subject/teaching areas. Without such support, programs risk cessation. For example, the Tasmanian 'Partnerships in Teaching Excellence Program' (PiTE) which provided some 15 MTeach students with scholarships, increased mentoring and teacher practicum experience and support and a guarantee of a job to attract the "brightest and best" to teach in difficult to staff areas (schools and learning areas) was cancelled this year in the context of National Partnership funding ending.

It is important that ITE programs, either generally or in respect of incentive schemes, acknowledge the integrity of teaching profession and are not seen to bypass appropriate remuneration for work performed or as work improperly imposed on professionals.

5. Other

Any other comments in response to the Issues Paper may be provided here.

Australia needs a systemic approach to preparing teachers for a successful career in the classroom and a more rigorous threshold to ensure that every teacher is actually ready to teach. If both are done well – and graduates gain secure forms of well-paid employment - a teaching credential becomes more meaningful. The top-performing countries spend substantial time and resources to ensure that standards, programs and entry assessments are aligned and coherent. As noted earlier, the Accreditation Standards are still in their infancy in implementation.

As in medicine, law and other professions, all prospective teachers should meet a universal and rigorous bar that gauges mastery of subject matter knowledge and demonstrates competency in how to teach it. These are now encapsulated within or by the Graduate level of the Professional Standards. Also, the primary responsibility for setting and enforcing the teaching profession's standards and ensuring the cohesion of ITE programs must reside with practising teachers in school and higher education.

All stakeholders need to collaborate to ensure that ITE standards, programs and assessments are aligned with a well-grounded vision of effective teaching.

Teaching, like other respected professions, must have a universal assessment process for entry that includes rigorous preparation centred on academic study and professional experience, an in-depth test of subject and pedagogical knowledge, and a comprehensive teacher-readiness assessment.

It is NOT the time to undermine Professional Standards, or to diminish Accreditation Standards. Without such rigorous standards, other efforts to improve teaching quality and ensure a core of highly competent professionals who are committed to students' ongoing learning are, by definition, piecemeal and inadequate. Australia will instead be perpetually chasing new teacher candidates in the short term by the most expedient or convenient route. Alternatively, employing authorities will more readily embrace development, or extension, of 'para-professional' or instructor/tutor/aide type classifications as cheaper substitutes for the professional teaching role. The profession in the longer term will be weakened and the quality of school education will suffer.

Quality ITE preparation programs must be marked by higher entry standards, continuing performance standards, and exit standards, and must conclude with a strong induction program. Joint responsibility and support ITE providers, the profession, schools and employing authorities is required for this endeavour.