SUBMISSION TO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING (MAXIMISING OUR INVESTMENT IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS) INQUIRY - SENATE EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMITTEES

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee's Inquiry on *Teaching and Learning (maximising our investment in Australian Schools).* ACU's submission is designed to address items (a) and (e) in the terms of reference.

ACU is one of the largest producers of teaching graduates in Australia, and has a particular commitment to facilitating the delivery of the highest quality of teaching and learning in Australian schools. As an established provider of teacher education in Australia, ACU's submission addresses important issues around effective classroom teaching practices, and more broadly on effective teacher education policy in Australia; and thereby, the maximising of our investment in teaching and learning in Australian schools.

ACU identifies that teacher education operates on a continuum. Universities have an important role to play in preparing teachers for the classroom. However, teacher education does not stop when teachers graduate from university. ACU believes in a tripartite approach to the continuum of professional learning with universities, education sectors (i.e. government, Catholic and independent) and schools sharing responsibility and ownership.

Universities are best placed to enable the pre-service teacher to develop the necessary discipline and pedagogical-discipline knowledge, and theoretical framework that will support them in their ongoing professional learning.

Schools are best placed to demonstrate the implementation of ideas and strategies introduced at university, support pre-service teachers in their teaching and provide feedback and mentoring in learning to teach.

Teachers in schools are best placed to assess whether the pre-service teacher has the appropriate personal, interpersonal and communication skills to be an effective teacher. It is at the school, through practicum (professional experience)[1] that the pre-service teacher can learn how different schools operate to address the needs of, and interact with, the local community.

Universities cannot prepare teachers for all contexts. On-the-job training is provided by employers in other professions. Education is no different. Employers should provide a coherent and systemic induction and mentoring process which forms part of the framework for ongoing professional learning.

ACU believes that to attract the very best teachers, we must find ways to make teaching a more rewarding career.

ACU makes the following specific recommendations:

1. Teacher Education policy should focus on the quality of teaching graduates at the point of exit from university (output) rather than on student ATARs at the point of entry into university (input). Policy should recognise that a student's ATAR is not necessarily a determinant of their success at university or as a teacher.

2. Universities should maintain the flexibility to decide which students they enrol in their courses.

[1] 'Practicum' is a term used to represent a range of in-school professional experiences including internships.

3. There should be greater transparency around the university entrance system along the lines of the Victorian model.

4. Government should facilitate system wide support for school-based teacher educators to collaborate with university-based teacher educators to enrich pre-service teachers' experiences in schools while undertaking their practicum. Mentoring and support for pre-service teachers could be recognised as evidence towards achievement of higher levels of accreditation within the National Professional Standards framework.

5. The school/university partnership should be deregulated so that universities and schools can devise new ways for pre-service teachers to undertake practicum so that integrated learning can benefit the profession and students in schools.

6. In the context of current classroom practices and assisting children to realise their potential in our schools, it is evident that a range of innovative classroom practices do exist, however they are impacted by ongoing challenges to teaching effectiveness; particularly with respect to issues around classroom management, limited consultation with students, and the pressures of ongoing external assessment.

7. There should be a continued commitment to National Professional Standards and national accreditation processes in teacher education and an extension of these where relevant, such as the development of a national rubric for professional experience assessment and authentic assessment of Graduate Professional Standards. This will enhance confidence around the quality and rigour of initial teacher education.

8. Different pathways into teacher education courses should be supported including undergraduate and masters courses.

9. There should be large-scale longitudinal studies into the effectiveness of different types of pre-service teacher education programs which would include the assessment of the effectiveness of the different partners (systems, schools and universities) in initial teacher education.

2 ACU AND TEACHER EDUCATION

2.1 Background

Australian Catholic University (ACU) has an extensive history of providing teacher education in Australia. For more than 100 years ACU, and its predecessor colleges, have educated teachers, producing high quality graduates to teach students in Australia and around the world.

ACU draws upon 2000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition, which summons the University as a matter of mission, to seek to produce graduates that are "highly competent in their chosen fields, ethical in their behaviour, with a developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life and a commitment to serving the common good."[2]

ACU was formally constituted as a university in 1991 through the amalgamation of a number of Catholic colleges of advanced education across multiple jurisdictions. ACU predecessor colleges include the Catholic College of Education (NSW), Signadou College of Education (ACT), Institute of Catholic Education (VIC), and McAuley College (QLD). St Mary of the Cross MacKillop and the Sisters of Saint Joseph have a historic connection with ACU's predecessor colleges. Saint Mary MacKillop was a co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph, North Sydney, and ACU shares a special connection to her educational vision and values, which includes respecting the dignity of all people, teaching by example, service to the disadvantaged and capacity building in communities; and these are values we seek to instil in our teaching students.

Today, ACU is the world's largest English speaking Catholic university with more than 24,000 students, including over 8,800 students and staff within its Faculty of Education across Australia. ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional publicly funded Australian university with six campuses across three states and one territory. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Fitzroy (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), and Brisbane (QLD).

2.2 ACU Teacher Education

ACU is one of the largest producers of teaching graduates in Australia.

ACU's education graduates are highly regarded in the sector and achieve a significantly high rate of employment after graduation across the Catholic, public and independent school sectors.

Our students appreciate that the ACU experience is different. ACU's *Commencing Student Survey 2012* found that the top three reasons for education students choosing to come to ACU were:

1. The excellent reputation of its Education courses;
2. ACU offers the Catholic/Independent strands to prepare teachers for Catholic/Independent schools; and
3. ACU has smaller class sizes and a community feel.

ACU graduates are committed to high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning. An Education qualification from ACU gives access to a dynamic profession across the Catholic, government and

[2] *Australian Catholic University Mission.*

independent school sectors, and an opportunity to guide the development of young people – from early childhood through to secondary school and beyond.

At ACU we are committed to building a specialised and well regarded research environment. The Faculty of Education's two dedicated research centres – The Mathematics Teaching and Learning Research Centre (MTLRC) and the Centre for Creative and Authentic Leadership (CCAL) – continue to provide a solid foundation for intellectual debate, dialogue and discovery in discipline-specific research areas. The recently established Senior Proven Research Team (SPRT) consists of a team of researchers who conduct high level theorisation of core contemporary issues in early childhood education and builds on this strength to create additional capacity building and research in the area of early childhood education.

ACU's belief in practice-based research means that we share our research knowledge with students, parents and practitioners in professional learning settings, to impact current educational practices.

ACU staff are well regarded in their field and are passionate about education. They strive to provide better learning and teaching experiences for each student, and to nurture educators who can analyse, critique, question and develop existing educational theories and practices.

All ACU initial teacher education courses are fully accredited and the Faculty of Education is highly regarded. ACU's teaching courses provide unique and challenging opportunities for students to assist and equip them with the skills to be effective teachers in the contemporary classroom and to take on the important role of guiding the development of young people.

ACU prepares teachers to teach in schools catering for students of all ages. In 2012 there were 1,498 undergraduate students studying early childhood courses, 2,381 undergraduate students studying primary education, and 1,134 undergraduate students studying secondary education, at ACU.[3] An additional 335 students were undertaking primary education courses and 528 students were undertaking secondary education courses at the graduate entry/postgraduate pre-service course level.[4]

[3] Figures relate to 2012 ACU enrolment numbers: undergraduate early childhood courses being undertaken are the Associate Degree Early Childhood Education, Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary) and Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood); undergraduate primary education courses are the Bachelor of Education (Primary), Bachelor of Education (Primary) [4th Year Upgrade], Bachelor of Education (Primary – Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies); undergraduate secondary education courses are the Bachelor of Education (Secondary)[4th Year Upgrade], Bachelor of Education (Secondary-Indigenous Studies); Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts (Humanities); Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts (Mathematics); Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts (Technology); Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts).

[4] Figures relate to 2012 ACU enrolment numbers: Postgraduate primary education courses being undertaken are the Bachelor of Education (Primary)[Graduate Entry], Master of Teaching (Primary), Master of Teaching (Primary)/Graduate Certificate Religious Education; and postgraduate secondary education courses are the Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary), Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary)/Graduate Certificate in Religious Education, Master of Teaching (Secondary), and the Master of Teaching (Secondary)/Graduate Certificate in Religious Education.

3 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN ASSISTING CHILDREN TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Within the context of Australian education systems a range of innovative classroom practices exist but are impacted by ongoing challenges to teaching effectiveness: classroom management, limited time for consultation with students, other teachers and para-professionals, and the pressures of ongoing external assessment.

The management of children's behaviour is the area of education identified most as a concern for teachers. Despite this there has been little change in the basic techniques employed by teachers in more than 40 years.[5] In many cases, behavioural assessments are conducted solely by the class teacher utilising only the information accessible from their personal viewpoint.[6] As a result, the methods employed to address these challenges are inconsistent and achieve varying success. There is insufficient professional development of teachers and support for developing pro-social management practices that reflects the contemporary needs of children in a technology rich age where teaching and learning practices are undergoing rapid changes in design.

While teachers remain concerned about issues relating to classroom management, very little research explores these issues from the student perspective. For a range of reasons, children interpret the classroom differently to teachers. Without regular and open consultation with the children affected, these barriers to effective educational design may not be recognised.[7]

For Australian children to better realise their potential, classroom practices must increase the opportunity for children of all ages to freely express their views and have it included in the conversations surrounding matters affecting them.[8]

In seeking to achieve this, further education of parents regarding their rights and their children's rights are essential. The Australian Scholarships Group's (ASG) review of the Gonski Report supports school systems with equitable outcomes that offer every child the opportunity to receive a quality education regardless of wealth, status and capability, and preserve the ability for families to make a choice about their children's education. Parents should be able to feel confident that the school of their choice receives sufficient funding to meet the individual needs of their child and that their teachers are effectively and confidently prepared to meet the challenges of education in the contemporary era to maintain an optimal learning environment.

A willingness to engage with students' views of their schooling is an important first step to a successful outcome,[9] however, without a specific professional development program that equips teachers with the skills to effectively consult with students, the children's perspectives will remain overlooked.[10]

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[5] Emmer, E. T., & Stough, L. M. (2001). Classroom Management: A Critical Part of Educational Psychology, With Implications for Teacher Education. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(2), 103-112; Wubbels, T. (2011). An international perspective on classroom management: what should prospective teachers learn? *Teaching Education, 22*(2), 113-131.

[6] Kern, L., Dunlap, G., Clarke, S., & Childs, K. E. (1994). Student-Assisted Functional Assessment Interview. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 19*(2-3), 29-39; Porter, L. (2007). *Student behaviour: theory and practice for teachers* (3rd ed.). St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin; Wubbels, T. (2011). An international perspective on classroom management: what should prospective teachers learn? *Teaching Education, 22*(2), 113-131.

[7] Lansdown, G. (2005). *The Evolving Capacities of the Child*. Sienna: UNICEF; Riley, K., & Docking, J. (2004). Voices of Disaffected Pupils: Implications for Policy and Practice. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 52*(2), 166-179.

[8] Sargeant, J., 'Prioritising Student Voice: "tween" Children's Perspectives on School Success' *Education* 3-13 (March), doi: 10.1080/03004279.2012.668139 (2012).

Recent evaluations of teachers and professionals' attitudes to NAPLAN have been conducted by the Australian Secondary Principals' Association and the Whitlam Institute.[11] These surveys of teaching professionals assessed the impact of both the publication of the myschool NAPLAN data and the practices of teachers in preparation for the tests.

The surveys found that many principals and teachers were making major changes to accommodate NAPLAN in seeking to improve their school's performance in the tests. Such changes included increasing the classroom time that students devoted specifically to literacy and numeracy and increased time spent on NAPLAN test preparation and practice. As a result many teachers feel that the publication of NAPLAN data reduces the ability of schools to engage students with a broad curriculum. The expectation placed on teachers to achieve successful NAPLAN outcome leads to restrictive teaching practices and a more rigid instructional design in preparing students for the tests.[12]

It is apparent that teachers feel ill equipped in terms of training and resources to meet the range of diversity in their classrooms. While diversity is welcomed and the inclusive approach to educating children is considered the preference, without effective resourcing and professional development, teachers consider their ability to meet the needs of all students as compromised. For example the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2012 report *Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools* notes that "Inclusive schools require a teacher workforce that is properly equipped to meet the learning needs of all students in their classrooms. Over half of the educators surveyed said they did not have the support, training and resources they needed to teach students with disabilities well."[13]

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[9] Coppock, V., Hagglund, S., Harcourt, D., I'Anson, J., Quennerstedt, A., & Sargeant, J. (2011). *Beyond Rhetoric: Making Children's Participation 'Real' in the Theory and Practice of Educational Research*. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research; Jans, M. (2004). Children as citizens: Towards a contemporary notion of child participation. *Childhood, 11*(1), 27-44; Jones, P., & Welch, S. (2010). *Rethinking Children's Rights*. London: Continuum; Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 927-942.

[10] Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) An Australian Children's Commissioner: Discussion paper.

[11] Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) 2009 NAPLAN Survey. http://www.aspa.asn.au/; John Polesel, Ms Nicky Dulfer, Dr Malcolm Turnbull (2012) *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families: Literature Review,* The Whitlam Institute, Sydney.

[12] John Polesel, Ms Nicky Dulfer, Dr Malcolm Turnbull (2012) *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families: Literature Review,* The Whitlam Institute, Sydney.

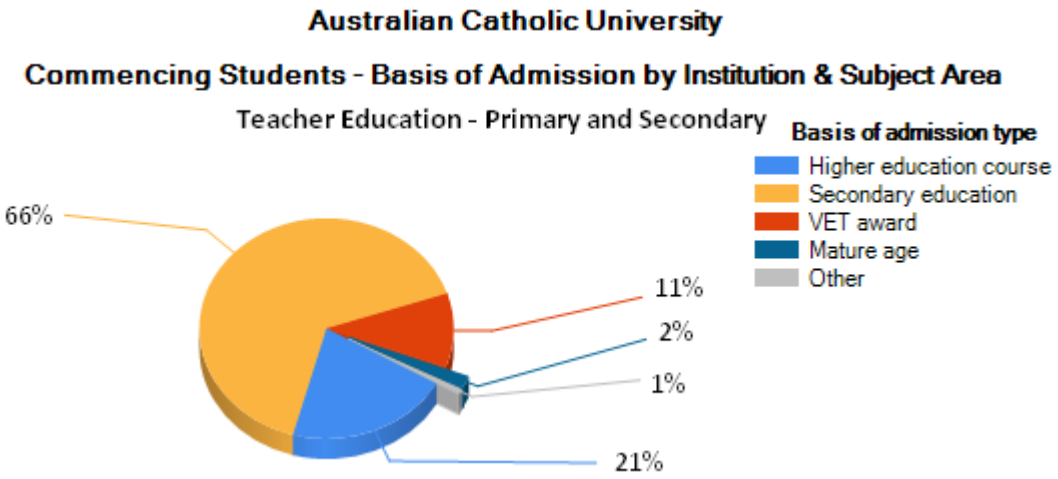
[13] Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012 *Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools*, 11.

4 THE SELECTION AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.1 Entry into Teacher Education Courses

ACU strongly believes that universities are best placed to determine which students are most suited to undertake their programs. It is imperative that universities retain the flexibility to devise and implement their own entry requirements for teacher education courses in order to produce high quality teaching graduates. This flexibility is also imperative as a matter of upholding university independence, the significance of which is discussed further below.

At ACU, we currently administer a range of selection methods to screen and select the best teaching candidates. Students are selected for ACU's undergraduate teaching courses from a number of pathways (about 40 per cent come from non-school pathways which includes mature entry students and students who have studied at university).



The entry requirement for students entering graduate pre-service courses (Master of Teaching) is based on Grade Point Average (GPA) from a successfully completed degree. For secondary teacher education there are also requirements imposed by the discipline which the student wishes to teach.

New national accreditation standards require universities to guarantee minimum standards of literacy and numeracy on graduation.

Undergraduate admission pathways include:

- **TAFE articulated agreements**, whereby students are awarded credit for prior study.
- **Associate degree programs** for Indigenous and Early Childhood students as a pathway for the degree program.
- **Early Achievers Program –** students receive an early offer into university based on the contributions they have made to their community.

At ACU, a significant number of students – more than 50 per cent – gain admission to the undergraduate pre-service initial teacher education programs via an ATAR. While ACU attracts a significant number of high ATAR students to its Faculty of Education, it does not believe that a student's ATAR is necessarily a determinant of their success at university or as a teacher. A focus on minimum ATARs as a measure of quality undervalues the role universities play in adding value to the student's knowledge and performance as a teacher.

4.2 Minimum ATARs

ACU notes the public debate around entry requirements for teacher education courses, and particularly the speculation around the correlation between ATARs and the quality of teaching graduates produced. ACU's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Greg Craven, recently gave a National Press Club Address where he outlined the shortcomings of ATARs and outlined the basis of an alternative selection regime. Professor Craven's speech appears as an Annexure to this submission.

More broadly, a few points need to be made about the role and relevance of ATARs to the debate about teacher education.

An ATAR is not a score. It does not measure knowledge, skills, aptitude or intellect. An ATAR is merely a rank representing the number of students a person performs better than in any given year in their collection of final subject assessments. An ATAR of 66 does not mean a student achieved 66/100 but rather it means that they were ranked in the top 34 per cent of students in Australia who completed their secondary schooling in a given year. But an ATAR does not measure this in any pure way. A scaling system operates so that an ATAR does not purely measure an individual student's performance in subjects they have taken, rather, other factors like the degree of difficulty of the subject chosen and the performance of the student's school overall are taken into account in determining a final ATAR rank. An ATAR also does not necessarily indicate a student's strengths in subjects of relevance to particular areas of teaching; for example, science, history, drama or music.

An ATAR also does not take into account human factors which might affect a person's capacity in high school, university and beyond. It does not measure passion, commitment, communication skills, compassion, enthusiasm, ethics or social disadvantage to name a few attributes which could help or hinder a student or a teacher succeeding in the wider world. Furthermore, our experience is that once in university, high and low ATAR students perform similarly; and in many instances lower ATAR students perform as well, if not better than, students who entered on higher ATARs.[14]

When ATARs are applied to university courses they merely measure supply and demand. If a university wants to increase its ATAR number it simply reduces places. Conversely if a university wants to offer more places to students in a course, its ATAR will probably reduce. However there is a practice in all universities of admitting students below the published ATAR through bonus point schemes. Bonus point schemes can be offered for many reasons. Common reasons might include compassionate grounds, assessment of ability or to address disadvantage. So a published ATAR will never give an accurate presentation of the real minimum rank to satisfy admission requirements.

4.3 Limited University Admission Transparency

One of the myths in the debate about teacher quality is that governments can set and rely on minimum ATARs as a way of preventing some students from undertaking education courses. This idea presupposes that all students enter university via an ATAR. The reality is very different.

At present around half of all university students are admitted to university on a basis other than an ATAR. Most universities, including ACU, have alternative entry schemes some of these schemes are designed to address disadvantage or to select students with a strong relevant subject aptitude (eg language skills for foreign language teachers). There are other alternative pathways for example, through TAFE. All these sorts of schemes are perfectly legitimate.

[14] For example see Willis, S., *Monash University: A High Quality/High Access University that Successfully Marries Excellence and Equity* (2011); James, R., Bexley, E., and Shearer, M., *Improving Selection for Tertiary Education Places in Victoria* (2009).

However, many institutions offer alternative entries that are not based on a bonus point system and whose rationale is opaque. The problem for parents, students and policy makers is that in most States there is very little transparency around university entry scores. Some institutions publish an ATAR for a course which does not actually reflect the real cut off for that course. In Victoria, where there is greater transparency than in other jurisdictions, universities have to publish a score known as a "clearly in" as well as the percentage of school leavers which are taken in below that figure and the percentage of students selected on the basis of something other than an ATAR.

According to data published by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) there are a number of courses offered across a range of institutions in Victoria which have between 30 and 60% of their intake have ATARs below the "clearly in". Institutions therefore publish inflated ATAR scores as their cut off, despite the fact that a large percentage of students got into that course below the cut off.

At least in Victoria there is some transparency. In other states there is no reporting of how many students are being taken in on the basis of an ATAR lower than the published cut off.

All of this makes the idea of relying on minimum ATARs to select teachers pretty silly, as universities can publish a high ATAR but take in a large number of students with an ATAR below the published cut off.

4.4 ATARs and the Teaching Profession

Insofar as teaching is concerned, lower ATARs for teaching than say, law or medicine, primarily reflects the fact that teaching is not a highly paid career and that many teachers will reach their maximum earning capacity after fewer than ten years in the profession. In addition the number of teachers required to serve the needs of the nation is much larger than the number of doctors, hence more places are offered for teaching than medicine at university.

The focus on students at entry level presupposes that there is little 'value add' in completing a teacher education degree. Students who may enter with an ATAR score considered to be lower than that of 'high achievers' may perform extremely well in their tertiary studies and develop into effective, 'high achieving' classroom teachers and leaders. Conversely students who enter with a higher ATAR do not always succeed in a university learning environment which places more emphasis on independent learning.

ACU strongly refutes any blanket assumptions that the admission of students on lower ATARs or via alternative entry pathways results in the production of poorer quality teaching graduates. Such an assumption also effectively overlooks and undermines the core role of universities in 'value-adding' by equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to become effective teachers - which is at the heart of higher education. Universities have a role to play in improving literacy and numeracy where shortfalls may exist. The point that we would make is that it is not how a student enters the university but how he or she leaves the university that is important.

Of course some students with a high ATAR do choose teaching and succeed at university but there are simply not enough students with a high ATAR to fill the demand for teachers. There is an expectation that Australian schools will face a large influx of students over the next eight years. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) forecasts

an additional 670,000 school student enrolments over the next eight years.[15] Therefore, the focus should be on maximising opportunities to support and enrol capable students, and turning them into high quality teachers. The limitations and impact of enforcing minimum ATARs are well recognised by the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE). Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, President, ACDE, notes that ATARs also reflect social advantage and parental education, and that it is very difficult to predict ability to be a teacher based simply on an ATAR result.[16] Professor Sue Willis, former President of the ACDE, flags that teacher shortages in 'hard to staff' areas are likely to ensue from the introduction of minimum entry requirements.[17]

One of the goals of the Australian higher education system is to increase participation and access for students who do not appear in the upper ranges of ranked final year secondary school results. It is therefore important to assess capacity rather than ranking.[18] American studies have shown that when students with a low university entry score are provided with an appropriately supportive transitional program and environment, retention rates and academic performance can be comparable with those of the mainstream student body.[19] In Australia, efforts to ease and support students into the social milieu of academic study and into the discourse of academic writing facilitate student retention and success.[20]

The successes of the Step Up Into Teaching (SUIT) program developed by ACU in collaboration with two Catholic Education Offices in Sydney is a useful example of how reducing rather than increasing ATAR reliance can produce better performing university students. SUIT targets students who might otherwise not consider undertaking higher education, including those from low SES backgrounds. The program follows students in their final year of secondary school into their first year of higher education. SUIT aims to 'increase the university aspirations of students from low socio-economic groups' and specifically encourages them to pursue teacher education degrees.[21] School students undertake two modules, 'Contexts for Learning and Development' and 'Introduction to ICT'. Classes are conducted both at a local school and at the university campus. The modules develop students' skills and knowledge in ICT and broaden their knowledge of developmental psychology in the context of teaching and learning. Students who successfully complete the program may be eligible for bonus points, scholarships and entry via the ACU Early Achievers' program. The success of SUIT students is significant. Data collected to compare the results of SUIT students with the first year university cohort

[15] Ferrari, J, 'Schools to chalk up massive growth,' *The Australian* (23 August 2012).
[16] Trouson, A, 'Uni bid to lift bar for teaching,' *The Australian* (27 October 2012), http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/uni-bid-to-lift-bar-for-teaching/story-e6frgcjx-1226504241172.
[17] 'Raising minimum entry scores could worsen teacher shortages', *Oz Teacher Forum*, Retrieved 22 August, 2012, http://ozteacher.com.au/html/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:raising-minimum-entry-scores-could-worsen-teacher-shortages&catid=1:news&Itemid=69
[18] Palmer, N., Bexley, E., & James, R., 2007, *Selection and Participation in Higher Education: University selection in support of student success and diversity of participation*, Prepared for the Group of 8. Retrieved 22 August 2012. http://www.go8.edu.au/__documents/go8-policy-analysis/2011/selection_and_participation_in_higher_education.pdf
[19] Levy, S. & Murray, J., 'Broadening educational access and participation: The successes of a regional equity and access programs,' 12(7) *The International Journal of Learning* 295 (2006).
[20] Cited in Lynch, B., & Werth, S., 2007, 'Students with low entry scores succeed at university', 3(3) *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 14 (2007), at http://eprints.usq.edu.au/3696/2/Lynch_Werth_IJPL_2007_PV.pdf
[21] Tanti, M, and Labone, E, 'Step Up Into Teaching: Increasing the engagement and academic self-efficacy of school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds' *The Journal of Catholic School Studies* 83 (2011), at 66.

revealed that the proportion of SUIT students who achieved High Distinction, Distinction or Credit results was noticeably higher than the University average.[22]

4.5 Minimum Qualifications: Should a Masters Degree or Higher be a Prerequisite to Teaching?

ACU is aware of recent public debate around measures adopted in high performing education systems which set minimum university entrance levels for education degrees.

It would be simplistic to conclude that the solution to teacher quality is to insist that all teachers attain a higher level of academic qualification; such as, for example, the requirement in Finland that all classroom teachers must have undertaken a masters degree in teaching. Rather, the minimum requirements set in other high performing education systems must be understood within their particular contexts, and their effectiveness is best evaluated having regard to the overarching education system and policies in place in the relevant country. In the case of Finland, the minimum masters degree requirement operates within a matrix of complementary policies relating to lifelong learning and human capital investment. To conclude that the Finnish education system is better just because teachers have a masters degree would be misleading and inaccurate.

As identified, in accurately evaluating the systems adopted by our international counterparts, including minimum requirements for teaching, due consideration must be given to the often significant contextual differences between other high performing systems and Australia. For instance, high performing countries such as Finland, Singapore and Korea are largely, but not wholly, homogenous cultural and linguistic groups. They do not face the challenges of dealing with a federal system where the States and the Commonwealth have joint responsibilities for education. It is also significant that Australia's population is roughly four times the size of Finland and Singapore, and comes with the challenges of supporting the educational growth, and training, of a diverse population with a wide range of needs. Significantly, under these teaching systems teachers spend fewer hours teaching classes and more hours providing one-on-one feedback to students and meeting families to collaboratively diagnose classroom problems and solutions. The main point to be made in comparing teacher education systems (including minimum prerequisites to teaching) and student outcomes in different countries is that any element or feature of a given international system must be understood holistically within the context of the broader education system of that country, and by weighing relevant outcomes. Attributing the success of a country's education system to one or two key isolated features risks the development of misinformed and ineffective policy.

While ACU supports existing teachers undertaking in-service masters, the economic reality is that such a course of action is unlikely unless there is government funding for postgraduate teaching places.

A 2010 survey of primary and secondary teachers in Australian schools revealed that the most common entry-level qualification for teachers in Australia is a bachelor degree in Education. The 2010 survey also identified that 7.1 per cent of teachers in primary schools and 11.1 per cent of teachers in secondary schools held a masters degree in Education; 0.6 per cent of teachers across both primary and secondary schools held a doctoral degree in Education. A further 5.6 per cent of teachers held masters degrees and 1 per cent of teachers held doctoral degrees in fields other than Education.[23]

[22] Tanti, M., and Labone, E., 'Step Up Into Teaching: Increasing the engagement and academic self-efficacy of school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds' *The Journal of Catholic School Studies* 83 (2011), at 71.
[23] McKenzie, P., Rowley, G., et al, *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010: Main Report on the Survey* (2011).

4.6 Practical teaching at ACU

ACU recognises that practical teaching is fundamental to teacher education. Reflective of this imperative, practical experience in schools begins in the first year of primary and early childhood education programs at ACU, and in the second year for BT/BA (Secondary) programs. Undergraduate pre-service teachers undertake 80 days minimum experience in schools. ACU's postgraduate students undertake 60 days for two year programs and 45 days for one-year programs.[24] This level of practicum conforms with requirements for teacher registration for teacher education programs.

In 2012, ACU teaching students secured 7,295 placements around Australia, in a wide range of teaching environments across Catholic, government and independent schools.

ACU's Faculty of Education has established key institutional partnerships with the Catholic Education Offices and other organisations to facilitate practical teaching experiences for ACU Education students. ACU and its partner institutions recognise the significance of the practicum in consolidating and extending novice teachers' pedagogic content knowledge. Practicum placements further students' understanding of the theory-practice nexus as informed by a growing research and evidence base, foster reflective practice, and equip students with the capacity to discern those aspects of teaching that impact most on student learning outcomes.[25]

ACU has developed a number of innovative practical teaching initiatives to ensure that we produce high quality graduates who will become great teachers. These initiatives include:

- **Teaching and Learning Consortium (TLC):** This initiative assists students to link theory learnt in the classroom with practical teaching. ACU second year Bachelor of Education (Primary) students participate in the Teaching and Learning Consortium and Instructional Rounds in their second semester, after completing their first four week block of professional experience. In the Instructional Rounds, students visit three schools in three weeks that have been identified as pedagogically innovative. Students visit the selected school and listen to a presentation by the school principal who explains the school's innovation and the rationale behind it. As part of the initiative, students also gain the opportunity to work across a whole primary school for six weekly visit days assisting teachers, teaching science lessons, and gaining a sense of the whole school.

- **Professional Experience Online Preparation Modules:** ACU's team of Professional Experience Coordinators are preparing a set of three online modules to assist students to prepare for their practicum placements. Students enrolled in all Professional Experience units will be required to view the modules and complete an online quiz. The modules address key areas covering professional standards and expectations, legal responsibilities, and managing relationships.

- In 2012, a formal evaluation of one model of practicum at ACU - the **Learning in the School Community Pilot Project**[26] - found that a partnership established between ACU, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) and 14 Catholic primary schools provided pre-service teachers in the first and second years of their course with a significant apprenticeship into the profession. The Learning in the School Project enables pre-service teachers to combine learning and teaching roles in real school contexts, for extended periods of time during their

[24] One-year programs will be phased out nationally by 2015.
[25] See Darling-Hammond, L., 2006, *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from exemplary programs*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
[26] Hamston, J., & Hassim, E., 2012, *Learning in the School Community: Multiple stakeholder evaluation of the B. Ed (primary) multimodal pilot project*, Commissioned by the ACU and CEOM.

course. A key aspect of the Project is the notion of 'community practice' and integrating on-campus and in-school learning experiences. The evaluation of the Project found that the intensive practicum model (two days per week in schools) with features similar to that of the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP), provided pre-service teachers with an opportunity to develop the range of capacities identified as necessary for pre-service teachers.[27] These included:

- Reflective practice;
- Strategic decision-making;
- An understanding of the processes of learning and development, including language acquisition and development;
- Use of a wide repertoire of teaching strategies to enable diverse learners to master challenging content;
- An orientation towards social justice;
- Content-specific pedagogical knowledge;
- Knowledge of how to cater for students with special needs;
- Knowledge of how to enact curriculum for formative and summative assessments; and
- Skills for constructing and managing a purposeful classroom.

The evaluation also found that, in line with the ACU's Catholic mission, the Learning in the School Community practicum partnership program placed much emphasis on issues of social justice and student wellbeing. It encouraged pre-service teachers to develop strong and caring relationships with their students and members of the school community (a factor identified as having a strong effect on student achievement).[28] ACU's Education Faculty is considering recommendations from this report and implications for expanding this model across its courses. Intensive practical experience in partnership schools is highly valued by ACU but it is dependent on the commitment of the systems and the schools.

ACU is constantly looking at ways to enhance the theory-practice nexus and deepen pre-service teachers' experiences. Aspects for development include: micro-teaching with analysis and reflective teaching, videotaped role play with de-briefing and use of technology to connect pre-service teachers to master teachers classrooms; these are argued to yield larger effects on pre-service teachers' learning.

[27] As identified in research of the Stanford program and other intensive practicum programs by Darling-Hammond, L., Newton, X., & Chung Wei, R., 'Evaluating teacher education outcomes: a study of the Stanford Teacher Education Programme' *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2010), at 369-388.

[28] Hatti, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. London: Routledge.

5 THE TEACHING PROFESSION: TEACHER RETENTION, CAREER PROGRESSION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Teacher Retention and Teaching as a Career Choice

There are a number of factors which are relevant to the retention of high quality teachers in our education system, which are also of broader significance to the choice of teaching as a career in Australia. Additionally, these factors are likely to be impacting on why, today, teaching may often (or comparatively) not be a popular choice for many top achieving students: for instance, in NSW, education was reportedly the least popular course for students with ATAR scores of 90 or above in 2012.

Career Choice: Today career choices, particularly for women, are much wider than in previous generations and consequently other areas are often seen as being more attractive than teaching. The challenges of teaching in the modern school environment, with rising incidents of student violence and serious misbehaviour, may also be serving as a disincentive to choose or maintain a career in teaching.[29]

Salary, Reward and Progression: Teachers generally reach the top of their potential earning scale within ten years of commencing teaching. Consequently, there is little ability to reward high performing teachers and this acts as a disincentive for many to undertake teaching or remain in the profession. If governments want to attract teaching students with the maximum range of options available to them, they must pay their teachers more and reward teaching excellence with financial performance bonuses. Beyond salary, it is often hard to reward good teachers by fast tracking their career progression where teachers can demonstrate achievement against professional standards. Similarly teachers are not rewarded for undertaking further postgraduate study, nor are there sufficient alternative career promotion pathways such as master teacher, school leadership, curriculum leader/expert which can be used as a way of recognising performance.

Professional Development and Status of the Profession: Governments and schools need to consider complementary measures such as ways of promoting the profession as a career choice, addressing teacher workloads, providing better quality mentoring and induction programs for new teachers with the support of master teachers to address the high attrition rate of early career teachers.[30]

Systemic Leakages: With respect to teacher retention specifically, ACU identifies that there are three systemic leakages of teachers: shortly after entry into the profession, when raising a family, and to access superannuation. These major leakages require that there are available additional teachers to fill vacancies.

Overall, in an Australian context, ensuring the retention of high quality teachers in our education system and advancing teaching as a career choice requires:

[29] For example see Domjen, B, 'Schools won't dob in kids,' *Sunday Telegraph* (4 November 2012).

[30] See the following for a discussion of the growing international trend for high attrition rates for early career teachers: *Mass Exodus of Teachers* (NPD); *Teacher Beat: Teacher turnover affects all students' achievement, study indicates; The High Cost of Teacher Turnover (National Commission of Teaching and America's Future, 2007); Eight Questions on Teacher Recruitment and Retention: What does the research say? (Education Commission and States, 2005);* Dr Phillip Riley from Monash University is conducting a five-year study into the attrition rate of early career teachers. His research suggests that 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years.

- Greater focus on pay, conditions, promotion and progression so that 'high achieving' teachers feel valued and liberated to teach rather than overworked, underpaid and overwhelmed by bureaucracy and industrial issues;

- Recognition of the importance of different pathways of entry into teacher education and ensuring that these pathways are maintained and continue to be desirable and effective. This involves recognition that 'high achievers' are not necessarily those who have obtained high ATARs, but are those who possess the capacity and desire to learn and be educated as effective teachers;

- Greater support for a culture of continuing professional learning where credentialed learning has an important place and is financially rewarded;

- More attention needs to be given at the point of graduation, more so than at the point of entry into university. Since professional standards for graduate teachers have been developed in NSW, teacher educators have been able to use the elements and standards to judge teacher quality and determine entry into the profession.

5.2 Professional Development for Teachers in the Australian Education System

Developing professional practice and maintaining quality professional learning are significant factors in facilitating improved teaching practice and improved student outcomes through our education system.

ACU believes that professional development is part of the continuum of teacher education, from pre-service teacher education through induction, to ongoing professional development programs. Universities have an important role to play in preparing teachers for the classroom. However, teacher education does not stop when teachers graduate from university.

Universities cannot prepare teachers for all contexts. On-the-job training is provided by employers in other professions. Education is no different. Additionally, if we are to attract and retain the very best teachers in our schools, we must find ways to make teaching a more rewarding career. ACU also welcomes the opportunity to be more heavily involved in producing a higher quality professional development experience for teachers.

ACU is already involved in initiatives which support strengthening partnerships with schools, and school leadership, as well as the development of ongoing professional practice. We are supportive of further engaging in locally based education development and professional research/development with Australian schools. Some of our current initiatives are listed below.

Strengthening School Leadership:

- ACU and its predecessor colleges have engaged in postgraduate teaching and research in educational leadership for over 30 years.
- *ACU Master of Educational Leadership degree* is currently being offered in every Australian State except WA, as well as New Zealand and Mauritius. The practice has been that Catholic Education Offices sponsor cohorts of students and ACU staff to travel to the diocese to teach the program in intensive mode, making appropriate adjustments for local contexts. Participants also study in on-line and web-enhanced modes. This practice has been highly valued by employers. Participants in the program include both those in senior positions and those aspiring to leadership. Graduates currently hold some of the most senior positions in

leadership in Catholic education across Australia and internationally. ACU delivers this masters degree using a positively evaluated model which shapes cohort programs to employer needs and delivers for individual systems. Such programs are best shaped by drawing on local research, and ACU has been able to integrate the findings of its own research programs and that of its higher degree students in areas such as leading for learning, the ethical bases for leadership and alternative models of leadership.

- *New Master of Educational System Leadership degree* - commenced in 2012 with a cohort of nineteen, from Catholic Education systems from every state in Australia. It focuses on the specific capabilities required by leaders in systems which have been identified, in consultation with systems, and by access to the best current research. It exposes participants to current research and scholarship as well as input from system leaders in education and other fields from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Scotland and England. It builds connections among participants across systems and encourages collaborative and futures oriented approaches to learning.
- *Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners* - the *Centre for Creative and Authentic Leadership* has been involved in this project for the last seven years. This project combines elements of significant research as well as school based improvement processes, school improvement and teacher and leader learning. Firstly, the research dimensions of the project have been developed in collaboration with schools and systems, so that the questions about leading and learning respond to real needs. Secondly, rather than a simplistic recourse to concepts like "improvement" or "excellence," schools are challenged to explore core values and notions of authentic learning and apply these to their practices as a basis for deciding on actions that are called for. Thirdly, the processes in which participants engage are informed by best-practice literature, and based on developing a culture of evidence. This feeds into the knowledge base of the project which has been fed into later iterations. There is also a significant body of publications which has emerged from this work. ACU would encourage further support and expansion of this program, to help encourage other education leaders to be involved in research projects that assist them to focus on teaching and learning priorities, to enhance student learning outcomes.

To strengthen leadership capacity in our schools and school systems, a comprehensive and coherent leadership learning framework is required. The framework should cover aspiring leaders, curriculum leaders, school executive leaders and leaders in systems. Teacher/Leaders need to be introduced to different leadership pathways with support from mentors and coaches being provided to back up the theoretical framework.

Developing and Maintaining Professional Practice and Learning:

ACU recognises that the professional learning teachers undertake should be relevant and high quality.

ACU's national Faculty of Education provides professional development programs in Australian schools. We currently provide the following development opportunities for teachers and their leaders:

- ACU's Schools of Education are endorsed providers for professional learning for Professional Competence.
- ACU has a Master of Educational Leadership focused on producing top class educational leaders and we are renowned internationally for research within educational leadership.
- ACU has a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (with specialisations) delivered by means of blended learning over one semester, including three intensive weekend workshops.

- ACU has a Graduate Certificate in Education Law which equips educators with the knowledge and skills needed to deal effectively with legal issues and to develop educational policy within a legal framework.
- ACU has a *Grammar for 21st Century Literacy* workshop program. These workshops are delivered over six days per year. They provide teachers with the knowledge to improve the quality of their students' writing skills.
- ACU holds an annual Primary Teachers Mathematics Conference and Annual Secondary Teachers Mathematics Conference – Both these conferences attract around 200-250 participants each year.
- ACU in Victoria has six partnership programs with hubs of schools that have been identified as having a Performance & Development Culture. Our pre-service teaching students are placed within these hubs alongside established teachers who want to enhance their own teaching further, while supporting the next generation of new graduates.
- Ongoing Professional Development Workshops, locally, nationally and internationally, at least twice a year in each of the following discipline areas:
    - Literacy
    - Numeracy
    - Science
    - Creative arts
    - History / Humanities

ACU believes that we can improve our professional development programs for teachers by involving ACU Executive Education - a cross-faculty department at ACU - which delivers world-class professional development programs to a range of executives in a number of fields and disciplines. ACU Executive Education can complement existing content-based programs to provide a more holistic development framework that recognises the complex operating environments (legal, budgetary, etc) that school leaders and teachers face.

ACU Executive Education can make a significant impact on improving the quality of school professional development by adapting programs developed elsewhere in the private sector that encourage teachers to consider emerging societal trends that will affect the lives of their students. Leadership development programs can be provided in areas such as motivation, management, leadership, innovation, finance/budget management. Quality professional development can increase teacher retention by providing a framework to objectively identify 'talent' to be supported, create an objective process for teacher evaluation and drive cultural change that will ultimately impact student outcomes.

6 ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A – ADDRESS ON TEACHER QUALITY AND SELECTION TO THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BY PROFESSOR GREG CRAVEN, VICE-CHANCELLOR, AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY, 3 OCTOBER 2012

PICKING WINNERS AND AVOIDING MUG PUNTERS: QUALITY AND SELECTION IN AUSTRALIA'S UNIVERSITIES

ADDRESS BY GREG CRAVEN TO THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

Mug punters and the bad news of education

It has been unkindly suggested that I begin this speech by noting that it is the first time that a Vice-Chancellor has addressed a room in Canberra without asking for money. However, this would not be accurate. As Vice-Chancellor of a Catholic University, there will be a collection after questions. As this is a journalistic occasion, proceeds will comprise a record low.

Speaking of journalists, normally, they can be relied upon to pick serious issues to report: chainsaw massacres; the state of undress of Kate Middleton; and the adolescent psychology of Tony Abbott. Lately, however, there has been a troubling shift in standards of relevance.

Improbably, education has become news, and better still, bad news. One cannot open a paper without trawling up some educational controversy. Whether it is the ramifications of Gonski; enraged cardinals thrashing State education ministers over school-funding cuts; or allegations the average teacher has literacy levels that would shame a Neanderthal, education is out there.

Astonishingly, this national testiness defies compelling evidence to the contrary. Australia's schools are not collapsing, despite minute shifts in NAPLAN scores that no-one understands anyway. Most parents seem to think their children's teachers work reasonably effectively, and at least are more competent pedagogues than they are disciplinarians. We have a world class university system, with the statistical sprinkling of top one-hundred institutions, and graduates highly sought in employment. Satisfyingly, the expansion of universities over the past two years has brought Australia to the verge of reaching OEDC standards for the proportion of citizens holding a university degree. The Prime Minister even seems to have won some sort of UN Gong in world education from Ban Ki-moon which would have left her predecessors H V Evatt and K M Rudd green with envy.

Compared to worries around the resources boom, the rise of China, climate change and the inexplicable failure of Carlton to make the finals, this all seems fairly propitious.

But for some reason, education is in the proverbial gun. Instead of basking in the reality that we finally send students to university in numbers comparable to our competitors, we agonise about whether they are up to it. Rather than being pleased we have enough teachers to reduce class sizes once rivalling football match attendances, we sneer at the supposed Year 12 scores of student teachers. We wonder

aloud how these people get into universities, while hoping the only copy of our own year 12 results was cremated with Mum.

Most strikingly, these attacks on university education and teacher quality are led by the very State governments responsible for the teaching profession. In New South Wales, education minister Adrian Piccoli is the Savonarola of new teachers, castigating them for everything from weak Year 12 results to an inability to spell, and probably bad haircuts. He and like-minded colleagues thunder at universities for admitting these troglodytes and demand "higher standards".[31] Education Quality now rivals Law 'n Order as the most intellectually bankrupt policy debate in Australia: if every problem of crime can be solved by massive prison sentences, so schools will be perfect if only we raise the ATARs of entrant teachers.

The obvious difficulty with this is that it is the States themselves who run the schools; set the standards for teachers; employ them, determine their pay rates, approve work practices and arrange promotions. Laying sole blame upon universities for the quality of teaching involves a sidestep that would do credit to an All Blacks half-back or a used car salesman faced with an uncongenial warranty.

So what is going on? Can it really be the case that our teacher workforce is so bad, and responsibility rests not on those who run the system but those who merely supply it?

Picking winners – selection into universities

Apart from money, four things matter to universities: research; teaching; staff and students. When it comes to students, what matters is having enough and keeping them. Good teaching, beer and sleazy social life help.

You would think that selecting students would be a prime focus for universities. After all, they spend millions on picking the right staff, doing the right research and improving their teaching. Students define the character of a university, and selection defines the character of the student body. Surely, universities must have invested a lot in methods to select their students.

Moreover, student selection into universities ultimately determines the life course of millions of the most talented Australians, ensuring along the way that Howard's Battlers and Gillard's Working Families get a fair crack at advancement. Beyond this, it strongly influences national productivity by setting the operational composition of vital professional groups, ensuring that engineers are raucous, doctors insensitive, lawyers unethical, and so forth.

But selection always has been the shabby back porch of Australian universities in terms of investment and focus, and it is not hard to see why. In the Year 12 school rankings – whether termed ATARs or whatever - both universities and governments have the perfect excuse not to worry. Just read the numbers, and problem solved; an objective, authoritative, numerical solution, and best of all, one for which universities have neither to pay nor take responsibility. In the immortal words of the Emperor Napoleon, nice work if you can get it.

This was reasonable in the 1920s, when the year twelve exams actually were specifically designed for university selection of a tiny minority of people. But today, when they have become a general purpose

[31] The Minister's discussion paper is: New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, *Great Teachers, Inspired Learning – Discussion Paper* (2012).

certification of education, they have the fitness for purpose, as sole determiner of university entry, of an egg beater in a bush fire.

The ATAR itself is a term more used than understood. It sounds like some improbable life form out of science fiction, like an AVATAR, or an intelligent Collingwood supporter. In fact, it not even a school "mark" as aging parents would understand it, let alone a direct reflection of intelligence, like being born Victorian. Rather, the Australian Tertiary Admission *Rank* is just that: your percentile rank achieved at the end of Year 12, actually calculated on the number of students who entered Year 7.

The problems of the ATAR as an omni-competent tool for university selection are so legion that no-one but a politician – and certainly no Vice-Chancellor - could fail to know them. No-one denies a Year 12 score is a useful guide to intelligence and aptitude. But to treat it as the final intellectual judgement of God defies reality.

For a start, the thing that correlates most strongly with an ATAR is not subsequent success at university but socio-economic status. Study after study suggests that if your parents are jobless and you live in Campbelltown, your ATAR statistically declines accordingly.[32] Studies are yet to link low socio-economic status with stupidity.

Similar studies show that while ATARS are reasonably good predictors of success at high levels above eighty, as soon as you move below this into the middle tiers of achievement - from about fifty-five on, where most of the action is in terms of expanding university participation - their reliability declines dramatically.[33] So trying to impose life choices on the difference between sixty-five and seventy-three is a little like selecting students on hair colour or football team allegiance, but less fun.

Worse, the usefulness of the ATAR declines still further once students have been at university for a year. Predictably, a year's equal access to good university teaching is calculated to iron out quite a lot of ATAR difference, together with the disparities in opportunity or maturity that produced it. This hardly is surprising, but it does point to a fundamental truth: what really matters is the quality of a student once they have completed their university degree, not when they enter it.

All this is quite apart from the realities that an ATAR cannot adequately reflect negative influences like disadvantage, disruption or remoteness; nor can it measure (except accidentally) positive qualities like ethics, vocation or dedication. In terms both of self-actualisation and national contribution, the ATAR can harness neither the abilities of a deserving object of disadvantage, nor those of the less appealing, under-achieving seventeen-year-old football menace who nevertheless will be a public asset at twenty-two, given nurture and attention.

These inherent limitations of the ATAR are profoundly reinforced by the utter lack of transparency of published course cut-offs purportedly based on them. Put simply, university cut-offs are as easy to rig as a bush picnic race meeting.

Students and parents, who see cut-offs as a proxy for course quality, would be astonished by this claim. After all, does not a cut-off at an ATAR of 70 guarantee that at least the vast majority of entrants achieved that rank? It does not. While many universities genuinely set cut-offs reflecting the lowest

[32] See e.g. James, R., Bexley, E., and Shearer, M., *Improving Selection for Tertiary Education Places in Victoria* (2009).
[33] See e.g. Willis, S., *Monash University: A High Quality/High Access University that Successfully Marries Excellence and Equity* (2011) - Monash University.

score normally required for entry, others apply wall-paper mathematics that would have impressed Bernie Madoff to give that impression, while employing a variety of stratagems – going well beyond valid bonuses for disadvantage or special characteristics - to ensure that a large majority of students in a course never approach its cut-off. Gullible ministers nod at such courses, while frowning on those with "lower" genuine entry scores. The issue is not whether the students in question are acceptable, but whether their selection was open and transparent.

So welcome to the ATAR as it really is, the alleged decline of which is the source of so much angst in the education "quality" debate. Undoubtedly, it is a seriously useful set of numbers guiding university selection. It also is partial, socially insensitive, inherently weak in the middle and lower ranges, blunt, incapable of assimilating relevant factors that are not purely educational, limited as a means of promoting equity and productivity, a classic input rather than an output measure, a waning asset over a student career and almost infinitely manipulable. Other than that, it is perfect.

So the real issue with the ATAR is not its "decline", but its limitations. It is hard to imagine an overall selection system that did not have something like the ATAR as a vital working part, but the challenge is to devise other elements compensating for its entrenched weaknesses. This is why a majority of entrants to Australian university courses already come in on something more than an ATAR. From the University of Melbourne's bold postgraduate entry model to the equity schemes of the regional universities through the portfolios required of students at other institutions, universities have had to think innovatively about selection and around the ATAR. This is a good, not a bad thing.

Selecting teachers – backing a loser

Anxiety over the quality of students selected into university, particularly aspiring teachers, is nothing new. Over the past decade, various qangos and ministers have vied to rescue the teaching profession from itself.

Recently federal politicians of all stripes have been calling for teachers to be allowed into their degrees only if they come in the top thirty per cent of students for literacy or numeracy. That might be a plausible goal except for the fact that students take their last literacy and numeracy tests in year nine, some three years before they would be undertaking a university degree. Perhaps this could be combined with toddler aptitude assessments.

But for once the uber-regulators are not to be found here in Canberra: rather they dwell in the States. Outbreaks have been sporadically strong in Queensland and Victoria, but the undisputed leader is now New South Wales, with the release of its discussion paper *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning*. Indeed, concern over entrant teacher quality is so prevalent it now is being examined by the multi-ministerial Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC).

The NSW paper, with its neo-Maoist slogan title, is the classic of its genre. It canvasses every conceivable barrier to entering teaching, from stipulating secondary school programmes, to narrowly prescribed university curricula, required skill sets, and separate entry and exit tests for university education degrees. Remarkably, given the challenges discussed here, the paper evinces a touching faith in higher ATAR scores as a panacea for new teacher quality. It gives no specific figure, but the magic number around the traps seems to be seventy.

The paper's argument around a minimum teaching ATAR is made in a very particular context. It maintains the uncapping of university places has produced exploding student numbers, with many entrants going into teaching, with inadequate ATARs. Moreover, the paper asserts that as there already is a gross over-supply of teachers in New South Wales rivalling only the number of politicians in Australia as a whole, ATARs (and other requirements) logically could be increased without any shortfall in supply.

There are more troubling questions here than presented by Tony Abbott appearing publicly in lacy lingerie. Starting with the attraction of high-ATAR students as teachers, the most basic understanding of employment markets includes knowing that the higher the ATAR, the wider the career choice. Inexplicably, many students choose highly paid over low salary jobs. State governments have themselves ensured teaching is poorly paid compared to jobs typically pulling astral ATARs, such as law and medicine. Without better salaries, teacher entrants in the nineties are an endangered species, and governments whose financial policies ensure this should blush before complaining.

Worse, the focus on entry ranks ignores the single most important quality in any teacher. This is not genius, which is nice, but unnecessary. It is not subject mastery, which is what you get at university. It is the personality type that cares about people, likes them, wants to teach them and wants them to learn. The cleverest person with the best ATAR and the deepest subject knowledge will be a rotten teacher without this. The inspiring teachers the State education ministers want us to remember were precisely these "teachers by vocation", and we treasure their character, not their Year 12 results. This is the quality we should try to test, rather than trawling simplistically for higher ATARs. We want Mr Chipps, not the nerds from *The Big Bang Theory*.

This is why so many universities are experimenting with alternative entry schemes for teaching students. From the "Teach for Australia" programme, where recent graduates in other disciplines commence new careers as teachers, to schemes which value prior life experience, to my own university's "Early Achievers' Program" which promotes students with a demonstrable record of community engagement, all focus on bringing dedicated teachers into Australian classrooms, rather than teenagers with a number. Where do these schemes fit in a minimum ATAR regime?

The real question of teacher quality is not how people enter education courses, but how they leave them. The whole point of an education degree is not to *take* but to *make* a teacher. Trying to determine who should be a teacher on the basis of adolescent school marks rather than practical and theoretical training received during their course is like selecting the Australian cricket team on school batting averages while ignoring Sheffield Shield innings.

The flat reality is that a minimum ATAR of around seventy would disproportionately exclude students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who we in turn rely upon to teach back into their own communities. It would decimate the cadre of Indigenous teachers. It would render virtually every education faculty within regional universities economically unviable, critically undermining the supply of teachers into those regions. It would stall education as a traditional entry point for first-in family students.

Of course, if you believe in a glut of teachers, perhaps none of this matters. But taking the New South Wales Discussion Paper as the paradigm, it is - ironically - weak on maths. The only real figure is that

around 5,500 aspiring teachers are produced annually, while only 500 are “permanently” employed in the public system.[34]

Inexplicably, the paper omits some crucial further facts: that its calculations do not include teachers employed in the Catholic and Independent schools systems; that behind the word “permanent” lurks the reality the New South Wales Department itself deliberately has casualised its workforce, so new teachers overwhelmingly go into “casual positions” that actually may be full-time; that the Department consequently has no less than the equivalent of 10,000 full-time teachers employed as casuals, who annually deliver around 2,000,000 days of teaching; that around fifty per cent of the Department’s teachers have been employed in the last five years, odd if no-one is being hired; that there are three major systemic leakages of teachers (shortly after entry, when raising a family and to access superannuation); and that real full-time employment rates as teachers among my own graduates – the largest education faculty in the State – is eighty per cent, with ninety-five per cent of the remainder in other full or part time employment or study. Journalists feel free to weep. In fact, nothing in the paper indicates it is informed by real workforce planning, or even serious astrological insight.

So what is the politics behind this paper-thin façade? It seems to go like this. To genuinely improve the quality of teachers, salaries would need to be increased. But the States generally are cutting education budgets, and have no intention of spending any more of their own money on teachers. Indeed, one obsession in New South Wales seems to be actually reducing investment in teacher training by limiting the availability of practicum places. So the increased investment option is out.

An alternative would be to confront industrial and work practices in schools that do not reward high achievement and protect low performance by teachers. This is the approach that might be expected of a Liberal Government, and is followed in Victoria. There are cautious hints along these lines elsewhere, but not many. School reform would involve confronting the unions and expending political capital. So the reform option is out.

Instead, some States have hit upon an approach that minimises all three of investment, political courage, and outcomes. If the state of the teaching profession can be blamed on universities, problem solved. The States do not fund universities: they are the Commonwealth’s problem. In fact, the States typically take more out in payroll tax than they put into the entire system. By pointing the finger at universities, they transfer political and fiscal responsibility to Commonwealth Education Minister, Chris Evans, while avoiding any nasty fights with the unions. In fact, the States stand to make money if they stall teacher production, both because it will pay for fewer training practicums, and ultimately there will be fewer teachers in the classroom. The fact that class sizes inevitably will rise rapidly seems not to bother anyone.

This is an approach that incidentally buys into a whole range of extraneous problems. Taking the most obvious, the central components of being an independent, self-accrediting university – a status bitterly fought for in the recent debate over the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) – is the right of to choose what is taught and researched, and who is hired and enrolled. No self-respecting institution will accept dictation over who it accepts into one of its courses, particularly on the basis of

[34] New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning – Discussion Paper* (2012), 4.

an obviously flawed policy, which in principle could be extended to any one or all of a university's programmes.

At the same time, the regulatory coherence offered by the TEQSA regime will be fatally undermined if States like New South Wales – self-excluded from a role in tertiary regulation by chronic lack of commitment and funding over decades – now seek to duplicate regulatory regimes in every area of particular interest. This not only would create a degree of administrative chaos unrivalled since John Hewson tried to explain the application of the GST to an iced cake, but involve the Commonwealth paying and accepting political responsibility for higher education, while States mandated course content and workforce development. There incidentally must be grave constitutional doubt over the capacity of the States to do any such thing, given a raft of Commonwealth higher education legislation (including the TEQSA legislation) covers the field of university quality.

What the notably successful Catholic and independent sectors must think of being dictated to by a struggling State education apparatus, while it cheerfully cuts their funding, may only be imagined.

Mind you, every cloud has a silver lining. What other professions are so nationally vital that they should require a minimum ATAR? Surely not Vice-Chancellors, but journalists are vital to democracy, and what about politicians who actually run the country? Perhaps pre-selection should be reserved for those with ATARs over ninety? Or possibly candidates should merely be required by law to declare their school results to an appalled public? Or maybe journalists could escape scrutiny themselves merely by a little investigation of the background educational performance of our politicians, especially those keen on minimum ATARs for others.

Selecting for quality

Neither universities nor governments ever have faced the true complexities of selection, not only for teachers, but generally. On the one hand, the ATAR and its equivalents have provided a convenient bolt hole. On the other, any university adopting more complex criteria would face loss of market share through students preferring a simple ATAR-based application to State admission authorities. Institutionally, more sophisticated processes would be challenging and expensive, rather like marrying Kim Kardashian.

If the current impoverished debate shows anything, it is that the time has come to address the real complexities of selection.

At the macro policy level, we should begin by embracing the complexities involved. Selection ideally should be "trigonometric", assessing quality from converging but different perspectives. It should be diverse: different courses may require different approaches. On overall quality, it is capacity at graduation, not entry, which matters most and there is no reason Australia should have fewer university graduates than comparable countries. Finally, good selection is vital to both personal achievement and national productivity.[35]

Instrumentally, former Macquarie University Vice-Chancellor, Steven Schwartz has set out operating criteria for an effective selection regime. It should be transparent; select students best able to complete their course; based on reliable and valid instruments; minimise barriers to entry; and be

[35] See Craven, G., 'When Elitism Rules the Real Elite is Lost in the Shuffle,' *Australian*, 8 August 2012.

supported by professional structures and practices.[36] At present, we have a system answering these criteria at best variably. This is not the fault of the ATAR as such. It is our fault for having placed disproportionate weight upon a single, specialised measure of selection. The question is, what is the practical alternative?

The start, as stated, is to accept the issue is serious and complex, and design accordingly, eschewing simplistic, populist "solutions". A good beginning would be a nationally coordinated system for University application, allowing students to apply through a single portal, rather than diverse State admission centres. This would encourage consistency, transparency and best practice.

The central challenge, though, is encouraging universities to adopt increasingly sophisticated measures of selection, adapted to the needs of students, courses and – ultimately – the nation. This is difficult, so long as a raw ATAR remains the simple default option for students to obtain university entry. Nor is there the option of imposing some new, universal norm of selection, given the self-accrediting, independent status of universities.

The answer seems to lie in our increasing understanding of higher education standards. As indicated, it is not an impossible task to formulate a broad matrix against which selection processes can be tested. Synthesizing qualities already mentioned, selection processes should, so far as practicable, be multi-stranded; adapted to courses and students; maximise opportunity; be transparent; assess ability to complete; be based on reliable instruments; professionally applied; and operate in the national interest. Were Australia to possess an adequately autonomous statutory body in the nature of a Universities Commission, it would be a manageable task for such a body to assess bands of University course selection processes against such criteria.

The practical effect almost certainly would be the development of diverse selection systems for different courses, with innovation and competition between institutions to devise their own best mechanisms. These might include use of the ATAR, internal school results, weighting of results in particular subject areas, aptitude tests, application of bonuses reflecting disadvantage or other relevant circumstances, past study, interviews, portfolios, personal statements of achievement, special entry tests and a ban on baseball caps worn backwards. Universities would make these arrangements publicly available in a selection policy statement, which incidentally would shine useful light into such sludgy barrels as real ATAR cut-offs, median course ATAR scores, bonuses and so forth. The otherwise inevitable "rush to the bottom" towards a minimalist selection system would be precluded by the process of external assessment against standards, while university independence would be assured by their latitude of those standards.

Realistically, course selection probably would resolve into three broad categories. Areas of purer academic study, such as arts and science, might be adequately assessed by ATAR alone, though subject weighting and bonuses could be applied. Other areas, which involve the development of professional as well as academic capacities inevitably would become "ATAR plus", employing ATARs together with measures like portfolios and possibly interviews. Many professions would fall into this category, including teaching and – as at present – medicine. Finally, there would be genuine "alternative entry"

[36] Schwartz, S. (Chair) – Admissions to Higher Education Review Group (U.K.), *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice* (2004).

courses, in which an ATAR score might or might not figure prominently, with such courses as performing and visual arts being possibilities.

There would be challenges in implementing such a scheme. Critically, comprehensiveness would need to be modified by capacity: personally interviewing 8,000 applicants for a course would defeat most universities, and imaginative proxies would need to be developed. Similarly, the current legislative evolution of TEQSA has not yet arrived at quite the level of autonomy and institutional alignment that would guarantee independence of selection by universities within a broad standards matrix: somewhat different institutional arrangements would be required.

But these difficulties are not insuperable. Moreover, it is imperative that they be resolved if we are to maximise the opportunities of Australians, and avoid the type of sterile debate currently developing around “quality”. After all, it is not as if we presently enjoy a selection system that is the result of careful design for purpose. In the words of Ireland’s greatest philosopher “If I were going to Dublin, I wouldn’t be starting from here”.