

Introduction

- 1.1 Teaching is a highly complex profession. The demands on teachers are diverse and often intense and appear to be continually growing in response to expansions in the knowledge base, technological developments and changes in society. Providing high quality teacher education that equips teachers well to meet these demands is a fundamental step in providing for quality schooling.
- 1.2 Australia's teachers are acknowledged as achieving excellent learning outcomes in schools and Australian students perform well when compared against international benchmarks with students from other, similar economies.¹ Teacher education courses must share some part of the credit for these results. However, it is of concern that a "small but significant number of students, often from remote parts of the country"², still struggle to achieve the desired levels. Australia must continue to do all it can to strengthen all the components that contribute to quality schooling, including teacher education.
- 1.3 In February 2005, the Minister for Education referred to the committee an inquiry into teacher education, with wide-ranging terms of reference.

Aim and scope of the report

- 1.4 Many inquiries in the last 25 years have examined teacher education. To some extent this simply reflects the need for teacher education to keep

1 Teaching Australia, *Submission No. 168*, p. 2.

2 Teaching Australia, *Submission No. 168*, p. 2.

pace with the changes in schooling and in society. However, many of the issues reappear in inquiry after inquiry suggesting that recommendations have not been taken up or have not been implemented or were simply not the right answer to problems identified. This has led to a degree of frustration in the educational community as evident in the following comments, typical of many received.³

...we feel somewhat dismayed that yet another inquiry is being conducted into teacher education when so many important findings and recommendations from the numerous inquiries held over the past two decades are yet to be implemented by Government. We do not expect that findings from this Inquiry will vary significantly from information about teacher education which has already been collected.⁴

- 1.5 In the committee's view the persistence of problems in teacher education can be attributed to the following factors:
- the current distribution of responsibilities in teacher education which results in a fragmented and compartmentalised approach to teacher education;
 - inadequate funding for educational research and for mechanisms to ensure that teacher education and teaching is research evidenced-based;
 - a lack of investment in building the partnerships that would help bridge the gap between theory and practice most noticeable in practicum arrangements;
 - inadequate funding of teacher education, particularly for practicum; and
 - a failure of policies involving teacher education to reflect that teacher education does not finish at graduation from an initial teacher education course but continues through induction into the profession as a beginning teacher through to established, advanced and leadership stages.
- 1.6 The previous reports which examined teacher education contain dozens of recommendations. In this report, the committee has been determined to set concise and clear directions for strengthening teacher education in

3 See, for example: Australian Council of Deans of Education, *Submission No. 31*, pp. 1 & 8; The Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland, *Submission No. 37*, p. 1; Queensland Government, *Submission No. 42*, p. 2; Australian Teacher Education Association, *Submission No. 46*, pp. 4-5; Australian Education Union, *Submission No. 51*, p. 1; School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Submission No. 55*, p. 2.

4 The Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland, *Submission No. 37*, p. 1.

Australia. The breadth of the terms of reference also demanded that the committee concentrate in its report on the main areas of concern rather than attending to every issue raised during the inquiry. The committee has also sought to avoid duplicating the considerable efforts of recent inquiries such as the review undertaken by the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education.⁵

- 1.7 The committee has made a small number of large scale recommendations which will, if implemented, have a substantial impact across all aspects of teacher education. The committee's recommendations, if implemented, would ensure that teacher education has a sound research evidence base; that it meets high standards that are determined by all stakeholders yet retains the vitality, diversity and innovativeness that is necessary if it is to remain relevant; that it is resourced properly; that it is delivered by means of strong and authentic partnerships, and that it is career-long. While the committee's recommendations are all addressed to the Australian Government, effective implementation will require the collaboration of all stakeholders and their acceptance that teacher education is a shared responsibility.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.8 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* on 23 February and 9 March 2005. The committee wrote to the relevant Commonwealth Ministers and to state and territory governments. In addition, the committee wrote to over 320 educational organisations, education research bodies and relevant associations inviting them to make a submission.
- 1.9 The committee received 195 submissions from 170 parties. These submissions are listed in Appendix A. The committee received 122 exhibits to the inquiry, which were provided as attachments to written submissions, offered during public hearings or sent to the committee by other parties. These are listed in Appendix B.
- 1.10 The committee held public hearings across Australia in Canberra, ACT; Sydney and Wollongong, NSW; Batchelor and Darwin, NT; Noosa and Brisbane, Qld; Adelaide, SA; Hobart and Launceston, Tas; Geelong and Melbourne, Vic; and Perth, WA. In total, over 446 witnesses appeared before the committee in the course of the inquiry. Details of the hearings and witnesses who appeared are in Appendix C.

5 Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future, Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics – Main Report*, Canberra, 2003.

- 1.11 At the public hearings and forums combined, 1,533 pages of evidence were recorded by *Hansard*. The transcript of evidence taken at public hearings and forums, and copies of all written submissions, are available for inspection from the Committee Office of the House of Representatives, the National Library of Australia or on the inquiry website:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/evt/index.htm>
- 1.12 The committee is very grateful for the support that it has received during the course of this inquiry. Universities, teacher educators, educational researchers and professional associations have shared their knowledge and insights and given their time and hospitality. The committee appreciates their generosity.