The University of Newcastle
Faculty of Education and Arts

Submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training Inquiry into Teacher Education

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Introduction

The Faculty of Education and Arts at the University of Newcastle welcomes initiatives designed to improve teacher education in the name of improving the experiences of all students in schools throughout Australia. However, the timing of the current *Inquiry into Teacher Education* is rather surprising, particularly in the light of other prominent and recent reviews into teaching and teacher education including those led by Ramsey, Vinson, and Dow. We are hopeful that this *Inquiry* will yield important outcomes for teacher education and will not go down the path of so many other reviews which have had little impact on the resourcing or delivery of teacher education programs. Not long ago, Gregor Ramsey bemoaned the frequency of reviews of teacher education and the relative lack of action resulting from those reviews throughout last century. This pattern is not unusual in other contexts as well, where more time and energy is expended on inquiries and planning, than on action. We are hopeful that this century, perhaps beginning with the current *Inquiry,* will see some genuine progress.

Recent reviews of teacher education have tended to yield a remarkably consistent set of recommendations in response to a relatively common set of Terms of Reference. In general, we would like to see a fraction of the money that has gone into reviews instead going into the proper resourcing and conduct of teacher education programs, and/or into research into effective and innovative approaches within teacher education. Such investment in teacher education is likely to yield outcomes that are far more productive in bringing about genuine improvements. These points are not made lightly. Serious investigation and exploration of teacher education approaches, through research, with appropriate resourcing, that can produce solid empirical evidence about effects will be more useful in both the short and long term than yet another set of submissions based largely in anecdote, perception, tradition and the same paradigmatic allegiances that have characterised educational debates for too long already (Gore, 2001). Similarly, treating teacher education with a level of respect and funding approaching that accorded to medical education might enable teacher educators to work with their students and conduct programs in ways that generate better outcomes. The current financial constraints on teacher education that lead to class sizes much larger than those in many other disciplines and to heavy staff workloads with poor funding for a significant presence in clinical or field experiences account for many of the weaknesses that teacher

educators themselves would be quick to acknowledge. Government intervention to strengthen the funding of teacher education and support large scale research into teacher education effects would be warmly embraced. Indeed, we dream of funding that might allow us to conduct and test high quality innovative programs with small cohorts of student teachers.

The Terms of Reference for the current *Inquiry* address a host of familiar issues, many of them structural, for which there is little evidence of a difference produced by their manipulation. Tinkering with "structural" features of teacher education programs such as length of course, or days spent in schools, or even selection criteria for recruits into teacher education, is much less significant than are the nature and quality of what is done within courses or within field experiences (Gore & Griffiths, 2003). We caution against simplistic solutions, or solutions that dilute the intellectual challenges of learning to teach well.

1.   Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses

At the University of Newcastle, there are currently three main criteria for selecting students for teacher education programs: the University Admissions Index (UAI), which is used for double degree programs which take the majority of entrants; Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for students moving into teacher education after pursuing another career; and Grade Point Average (GPA) from previous tertiary studies for graduate entry students coming into the Diploma in Education. RPL criteria apply primarily to students entering the Bachelor of Education undergraduate retraining programs. For example, students with vocational qualifications and extensive experience in the workplace are granted credit of up to 160 credit points in a 320credit point program. These students submit documentation related to qualifications and work history.

The systems in place appear to be functioning well. The UAI and GPA are the simplest and most transparent techniques for selecting students. In terms of selecting students for teacher education, there are no other well-validated techniques that are as objective and easy to implement as the UAI/GPA. For example, individually interviewing students is an alternative that might be considered, but there are difficulties in interviewing large numbers of students in terms of the time cost of staffing the interview panels for the very large numbers of applicants. It would also be logistically very difficult. However, regardless of time and cost, our experience is that interviews do not always provide a reliable guide as to the suitability of the applicant for teaching. There is a lack of research evidence demonstrating a significant relationship between performance in interview or results on psychometric measures and performance as a teacher.

We do not recommend a change from UAI or similar scores for standard entry to teacher education programs.

2.   Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Attracting high quality students
As mentioned above, a common means of reflecting on the quality of beginning teacher trainees is their UAI score. While UAI cut-off scores may fluctuate from year to year in response to demand, it should be recognised that these scores represent the *minimum* entry requirement and not the highest or even average UAI score achieved by students. Indeed, while many teacher education students may be able to enter other programs requiring higher UAI cut-offs, they choose not to do so. UAI cut-offs for teacher education students at this University have increased from 71.8 in 2000 to 79.2 in 2005. The maximum UAIs are in the 90s.

For the reasons presented under TOR 1, the School of Education has not used and does not intend to use interviews or questionnaires in conjunction with UAI scores in the selection of students entering the teacher education program.

Students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.
The University's teacher education programs attract students from a wide variety of backgrounds, such that school leavers would no longer be regarded as typical of students entering our programs. We attract students with recent industry experience or who currently work in school education systems (e.g. BEd and VET retraining programs, and Graduate Certificate and Masters programs), as well as mature age students and students with an existing discipline (e.g., DipEd). Our programs are offered flexibly and in several locations (e.g., Callaghan and Ourimbah campuses, on-site delivery of some programs in Sydney, and through distance delivery).

As might be expected, given the location of the University and the nature of the teacher education program, the School of Education attracts more female students, students of low socio-economic status and rural and isolated students than is represented in the general population. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the teacher education programs is close to the national average. The proportion of students with a disability is less than that found in the community.

We agree that teacher education programs should seek to increase the representation both of disadvantaged students and students from specific equity groups to a level commensurate with their representation in the general community. The situation for some groups of students (e.g., male student teacher trainees) is maintained by social and economic forces that are beyond the control of universities. However, the University of Newcastle provides a range of mechanisms to assist economically disadvantaged students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to enrol. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students whose first language is not English, and students with a disability receive additional assistance throughout their studies.

3.   Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition

Attrition from teacher education programs at the University of Newcastle is low compared to that from other programs. For example, in the Bachelor of

Teaching/Bachelor of Arts, which prepares primary and some secondary teachers, the attrition rate from 1999-2003 averaged 11.1%. Eight per cent of students left the University altogether and 3.1% moved into other programs. As a comparison, the attrition rate for the Bachelor of Arts degree for the same period averaged 29.4%, including 16% who left the University altogether. Comparison with another professional degree also shows teaching to have a relatively low attrition rate. The average attrition rate for the Bachelor of Nursing was 12.1%, with 10.4% of students leaving the University. For clarity these figures are summarized in the following table:

Average 1999-2003	BTeach/BA	BA	BNursing
Attrition from program	11.1	29.4	12.1
Attrition from University	8.0	16.7	10.4

While the annual attrition rate is relatively low compared to other programs, it will still result in a cumulative loss of 30-40% of initial intake over the course of the program. Such attrition is likely to have been for one of three reasons: students finding that they are not suited to teaching; students finding the pressure of university work too difficult to balance with work and family commitments; and attrition caused by changed circumstances such as leaving the region.

4.   Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members

It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit suitable staff to Faculties and Schools of Education. The ideal appointment at beginning level to a Faculty of Education is a person with (a) a good academic record and postgraduate qualifications, preferably at doctoral level, (b) sound experience as a school or service-level practitioner, and (c) a strong interest in research. However, applicants for these positions tend either to be experienced practitioners with limited academic and research qualifications, or recent PhD graduates with limited practical experience.

Current academic salaries do not attract top staff away from the school sector. For example, a beginning appointment is often at Level A, with a starting salary in the range $38,000- $51,000 per annum. This is less than the salary range for most teachers, and will not attract them away from the classroom. In addition, there are many very competent academics in universities who are not promoted beyond level B, with a current maximum salary of around $65,000. Many of these staff would have become senior principals had they remained in the school system, with a salary of up to $120,000 per annum.

If education faculties are to do the best possible job of teacher preparation, they must be staffed by people who are both excellent academics and excellent teachers. In order to attract such people to the profession, it may be necessary to introduce schemes such as clinical loadings for education academics. Promotion of academics should also recognise and value their community activity and involvement with schools and teachers.

5.   Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses (including the teaching methods used, course structure and

materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.

The Faculty agrees strongly with the spirit of this Term of Reference, which acknowledges the importance of a clear, coherent and defensible philosophy to guide teacher education courses. Education at Newcastle has consistently been driven by deep commitments to preparing high quality graduates. Employment patterns and statistics, as well as general talk around NSW education circles, indicate that our graduates are highly valued. An exciting development impacting on the preparation of our graduates is the leadership role played by this University in the development of the NSW pedagogy model, *Quality Teaching,* which emphasizes intellectual quality, a quality learning environment and the significance of what is taught in order to enhance learning outcomes for all students (Ladwig & King, 2003; NSWDET, 2003; see also www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/qualityteaching).

This framework currently underpins teacher education courses at the University of Newcastle, in order to ensure that graduates have the knowledge, skills and commitments to assist them in delivering high quality pedagogy no matter where they work. The framework has been available for less than two years and is still being embedded in courses, but some early research (Gore, Griffiths & Ladwig, 2004; Williams, 2004) suggests that it could have powerful effects in assisting early career teachers to work with confidence and competence.

The *Quality Teaching* framework draws attention to the most fundamental issues in teaching well, namely:
- Knowing deeply the material one is teaching,
- Having a deep understanding of how to structure learning materials, activities and assessments in order to ensure student learning, and
- Understanding and caring about one's students and their communities as manifest in all interactions with students, their parents and caregivers, colleagues and other stakeholders.

The framework's great strengths as a basis for guiding teacher education programs lie in its conceptual clarity, distilling research that demonstrates the clear relationship between what teachers do and what their students learn; the common language it provides for talking clearly about pedagogical practice across subject areas and stages of schooling; its congruence with priorities and practice in NSW schools; and its practical set of tools for developing teachers' understanding of and capacities to implement *Quality Teaching* in their own work. Interest in the framework's potential in teacher education contexts is evident in a question from the NSW Upper House enquiry into teacher training in New South Wales asked just last week: To what extent do undergraduate teacher education programs in NSW incorporate the Quality Teaching model (Day 1, p.64)? This University aims to more fully embed the framework into its programs and in so doing provide a model of how a strong philosophical basis grounded in research can guide teacher education programs elsewhere.

6.   **Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other university faculty disciplines**

Since the existing double degree replaced the previous B.Ed in 1996, the interaction between the School of Education and the other disciplines has significantly increased and improved. All 4-year teacher education students undertake a double degree and are awarded a Bachelor of Teaching and a Bachelors degree in their discipline area (e.g. Music, Science, Visual Arts, Arts).

The relationships with other Schools and Faculties have progressed through three stages during the development of the new teacher education programs in the last nine years. In the first stage, the other faculties did not understand entirely the fundamental requirements of the teacher education program. Double degree students were treated exactly the same as all other students enrolled in their disciplines, without considering the special needs of students in an integrated double degree program. This resulted in difficulties in timetabling various disciplines available to double degree students, and in making suitable times for them to undertake teaching practicum at schools. The overemphasis on disciplinary studies also lessened the students' focus on Education studies and delayed their conceptualisation of themselves as "teachers".

However, this situation gradually changed as the double degree programs were strengthened by adding 20cps (two courses) of professional preparation to the first year of the program. As a result, students now study half of the first year in Education and half outside the School, in their specialist discipline. Some disciplines have developed courses that are tailored to the needs of double degree students; in other areas students are part of the mainstream discipline group. This mutual understanding and joint effort has led to positive collaborations between the School of Education and other Schools and Faculties.

More recently, relationships with other Schools and Faculties have moved into a further level of co-operation through making a full use of the resources of various schools. One outstanding example is the B.Teach/BA (Primary) program within which KLA-related discipline areas offer approved suites of courses for choice by students. In order to meet the needs of the teacher education program, these Faculties and Schools have initiated active and regular communications with the School of Education. Working parties have been established to conduct on-going review in order to improve the teaching quality and the learning outcomes. Similar cooperative relationships have also been established between staff of the Secondary and Early Childhood programs and those of other Schools and Faculties, leading to joint teaching of some cross-disciplinary courses.

There is no doubt that teacher education programs are greatly enhanced by being located in universities where teaching can be provided by both education specialists and discipline specialists.

7. **Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to**
   (i) **teach literacy and numeracy;**
   (ii) **teach vocational education courses;**
   (iii) **effectively manage classrooms;**

(iv) successfully use information technology;

(v)   deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families;

(vi) deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities;

(vii) achieve accreditation; and

(viii) deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments

The areas of focus described in the Terms of Reference are representative rather than inclusive of all curriculum for emerging teachers in the 21st century. In an earlier section of this submission, the Quality Teaching model was discussed in relation to a philosophy and practice of teacher preparation that produces incisive, solution-focused graduates who have the ability to reflect on and deliver best practice in the increasingly complex classrooms and schools of NSW and Australia. Quality practitioners, therefore, emerge from their initial preparation program well able to maximise literacy and numeracy outcomes in their students, provide positive behaviour supports, use information technology effectively, relate with others meaningfully and take a vocational focus as appropriate. Their skills, knowledge and values are centred on an overall understanding of the ecology of schools and classrooms, a vision for their role in this system, and the acumen to address the theory-research-practice connection in the educational world.

To this end, we submit that effective teacher preparation is best characterised as an holistic and integrated process, rather than a compartmentalised one. The challenge then is to connect the various aspects of a program into a coherent whole, ensuring that all relevant areas are addressed and students make appropriate linkages. At the University of Newcastle, we are constantly balancing the provision of research-based information to students in the context of planned challenges to intellectual engagement and heuristic endeavour. Examples of questions that may be posed include:
- What connection exists between the type of curriculum and instruction on offer in classes and schools, and the development of pro-social behavioural repertoires?
- What are the implications of various seating approaches for reading instruction that maximise learning outcomes?
- How can the classroom teacher best support the active cognitive participation of all students in the room, including those with special needs?

We are encouraged by the prospect of better teacher supports in the future in this State through the NSW Institute of Teachers, and we urge the Inquiry to explore the importance of on-site mentoring and systemic and systematic professional development for teachers, within a transparent process of accreditation. In this way the status and retention of quality teachers will be enhanced.

8.   Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers

There are two main ways that schools and their staff have input into teacher education at the University of Newcastle: field experiences (formal and informal) and contribution to the academic programs at the University.

Formal (Assessed and Supervised) Field Experience. Most of the students' field experiences consist of professional experience placements, in which students are placed full time in schools for periods of up to ten weeks. Double degree students spend a total of 18 weeks teaching in schools across the four years of their program, whereas graduate entry Diploma of Education students have 8 weeks within a one-year program. However, research has shown that the quantity of time that students spend in schools is not as important as the quality of the experience (see review by Gore& Griffiths, 2003), and the effectiveness of a practicum experience is mainly determined by the quality of the school's teaching staff and the quality of the school. This is a major issue of concern because in the past universities have been able, to some extent, to select schools and teachers who are best suited to work with their students. However, with very large increases in student numbers (especially in primary teacher education) there is intense pressure to use all available schools and teachers in order to find practicum places for students. We are therefore unable to effectively influence the quality of their experiences.

The problem of finding enough suitable practicum places is a major issue for all NSW universities and represents a major impediment to expanding teacher education programs and improving the quality of graduates. The issue will be resolved only when all school and teachers accept that the preparation of the next generation of teachers is part of their professional responsibility.

Informal Field Experiences. Lecturers also incorporate short, informal experiences in schools as components of specific education courses. For example, as part of a teaching methods course, students might visit a school to observe specific teaching techniques. These arrangements depend on goodwill between the university and the schools, as the teachers are not paid for their services, but they provide very valuable experiences for students. Unfortunately, there is mounting pressure to curtail these experiences because, as student numbers continue to increase, it is difficult to find practicum places for all our students, and as the practica must have priority, there is pressure to drop other types of field experiences so that schools and teachers are not overloaded.

Input of School Sector Staff into the Academic Programs of the University
Schools and their staff contribute to the teaching of academic programs in the following ways:
1. Recruitment. Teachers apply for advertised positions and join the academic staff of the university thus drawing on their recent teaching experience in their university teaching.
2. Secondments. School staff are released from their schools to work at the university for periods ranging from one day per week to full-time for a year.
3. Casual staff. Teachers currently working in schools are employed outside of school hours to teach in university courses on a casual (sessional) basis.
4. Demonstration lessons. Teachers conduct demonstration lessons in their school.

In addition, teachers are involved in university committees (for example, the School of Education Human Research Ethics Committee), Professional Experience Advisory Committee, and other advisory panels.

9.   Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary training.

The dichotomy between primary and secondary training is important because there are fundamental differences in: curriculum focus (i.e. primary cross KLA planning compared to secondary KLA specific focus); daily organisation; established structure of schools across systems; and staffing (whole school based versus faculty based) between primary and secondary schools. The programs at the School of Education address this through specific foundations courses in Key Learning Areas for primary and secondary programs, Teaching and Learning courses in specialisations, and Professional Preparation and Experience including Internship and practica.

At the same time there are important elements of cohesion between primary and secondary schooling that must be also considered: developmental continua in cognitive, social, physical, affective growth; literacy across the curricula and school-community interactions. The School of Education addresses these continuities through foundation courses in Sociology and Educational Psychology, which are undertaken in the first year of all Bachelor of Teaching programs, and in which students from different programs (i.e. Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary) interact to achieve a holistic perspective on development.

Secondary teacher education students are introduced to primary syllabus requirements in each of the Key Learning Areas offered through secondary programs. The intent is to ensure that students are aware of student entering knowledge and abilities in Year 7 so that they are able to plan for, and cater for student needs as they make the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 outcomes within the NSW education syllabus documents in each of the Key Learning Areas.

The generic approach to teaching in NSW primary schools is at times problematic in specific skill development and knowledge in specialist areas eg music, art, dance, gymnastics. There may be a need to allow for some specialist teaching in the creative arts area, and this could be encouraged through greater flexibility in staffing primary schools. Teacher education institutions are in a position to prepare teachers in specialist areas, such as creative arts, to teach across K-12. As a result, specialist teachers of music, art and physical education could contribute to teaching of their specialisation in the primary school.

Students undertaking the double degree in primary teaching are able to undertake a KLA extended study in the BA component of their degree (e.g. in English, languages, music). This program enables graduates to develop specialist knowledge and skills beyond the

core accreditation expectations of the program, and would allow them to do some specialist teaching in a primary or middle school setting.

10. Examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce

The School of Education's Teacher Education Committee and Postgraduate Coursework Committee receive regular and valuable input from a diverse range of teaching professionals. The Faculty of Education and Arts is responsive to the contributions of educators, practising teachers, NSW Department of Education and Training personnel and other school authorities in the development of both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. This has resulted in the development of programs that meet the emerging needs of teachers in their pursuit of further training, including several relatively short study options within a Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (such as specialisations in Pedagogy and Boys' Education).

Flexibility in the delivery of postgraduate programs has been an important focus of the Faculty of Education and Arts. Currently the Faculty offers a range of options for practising teachers including Master of Educational Studies, Master of Early Childhood Education, Master of Leadership and Management in Education, Master of Special Education, Master of Disability Studies, and as well as the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies. These programs are offered in a range of formats, including online and distance as well as on-campus delivery.

The University's *Professional Learning in Education* research group is dedicated to interdisciplinary research and consultancy in the professional learning of educators. The work of the group is centred on projects that examine recent innovations and developments in schools, early childhood centres and educational systems more broadly. The University is addressing professional learning through a diverse range of research and consultancy that is responsive to schools' needs, including a specific ARC Linkage study, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Training, held by members of the PLE research group, that is examining the relationships between teacher professional learning, high quality pedagogy and student outcomes. The PLE also hosts an annual conference (*Pedagogy in Practice*), which has attracted capacity registration in each of the two years it has been held so far (more than 500 educators in 2005). These conferences are held within school holidays in order to ensure that teachers are able to attend and the vast majority of delegates have been schoolteachers and school leaders.

Another manifestation of the University's commitment to supporting the professional learning needs of teachers already in the workforce is the significant number of academic staff who are acting as consultants and/or academic partners to a wide range of schools both within and beyond the local geographic area. This support assists schools to make productive use of funding they receive through such initiatives as the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Program* and the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools* program. Such professional learning focuses on schools' needs, including action learning design and training in the use and application of the *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools* materials. Other activities are directed towards specific skills training such as NSW DET funded internet training for teachers across the region.

Hence, the Faculty of Education and Arts recognises the importance of teacher professional learning not only by providing programs of study, but also by engaging in research and consultancy. In all aspects, the University demonstrates a commitment to responsiveness to the needs of educators and school authorities both in focus and in terms of flexibility. The Faculty also recognises that the contribution it makes through the provision of programs and consultancy, and through its commitment to research in education, is central to the professionalisation of teaching.

However, the Faculty wishes to make some recommendations in this area. It recognises the need to improve opportunities for practising teachers to identify areas of interest among the profession in order tailor courses and programs to their emerging needs. Whilst the Faculty has been committed to ensuring flexibility in the delivery of programs, it believes that the NSW DET and other school education authorities could provide increased opportunities for teacher release to ensure that a greater number of teachers can be provided with professional learning during work hours and term dates. Currently, the majority of teachers undertaking such postgraduate courses pay their own way with little to no financial incentive from the NSW DET, and without remuneration for their time. The Faculty recommends increased funding for teachers to undertake such programs, thereby reducing disincentives to ongoing professional learning, reinforcing the professional nature of teaching, and ensuring the quality of the profession. Teachers are unlikely to take up professional learning opportunities in large numbers unless there is:

- Release from teaching for attendance at short courses
- Financial support for short course fees
- Financial support for postgraduate study.

11. Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administrations

Funding is an issue deserving of considerable attention in the Inquiry. For example, while teacher education programs at this University run very efficiently through use of mass lectures and large numbers of casual staff, the cost of the practicum adds a very significant burden that is not usually accounted for through funding models. The practicum costs are not just for payments to teachers, but also include cost of additional general staff to organise placements, payments to casual supervisors, and travel costs for supervisors. In this University these costs are well in excess of $1m per annum, but are not provided for through the normal funding model.

The excessive casualisation of teaching resulting from funding constraints cannot continue. Over the last three years, around 50% of the teaching in this School has been done by casual staff. The impact of this on the remaining full-time staff, who are left with responsibility of administration and co-ordination, is considerable. Casualisation also impacts on research output, as casual staff are not expected to be research active.

Despite large student numbers, efficient teaching, employer-funded contracts, and heavy casualisation, this School is not in a sound financial position within the University. The funding issue is crucial to the future of teacher education programs, and should be at the heart of the Inquiry.

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