

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

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We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry, which is addressing issues of fundamental importance to the teaching profession, and to the future well-being of all Australians. Our credentials, including the research on which we base our observations and advice, are outlined in an attachment to this submission.

## **1. Teacher education is a cornerstone of quality learning in schools - and of national prosperity: key themes of the submission**

On the available evidence, Australia has a sufficient number of qualified teachers and people preparing to teach, to meet anticipated demand. The emphasis in teacher policy is shifting from demand-supply toward such issues as improved selection and preparation to teach, balance of subject specialisations and teaching out of field, hard to staff schools, career development of teachers and the forging of new partnerships among universities, employers and the schools.

The education, employment, career aspirations and continuing professional learning of teachers are receiving increased attention not only within Australia but internationally. This reflects growing concern over the quality and relevance of teaching. New growth theories recognise that progress and international competitiveness are grounded in the quality of human capital, hence in education and training.

Australia must ensure the best possible teaching in schools, colleges, universities and training centres in order to maintain prosperity and compete effectively in a global market place. This requires not only a high average standard but the identification, support and appropriate recognition of outstanding teachers.

Good teaching focuses on the development in students of knowledge, personal values, practical competence and understanding. Equally, it contributes to

democratic values and social cohesion in order to ensure a stable, harmonious social order. These requirements set goals for teacher selection and education.

A balance is needed in the education of teachers and their continuing professional development among:

- curriculum knowledge;
- pedagogical expertise;
- social awareness; and
- personal growth.

Teachers have a vital role in developing applicable knowledge and skills, strengthening values, deepening mutual understanding and respect in the Australian community and enriching our culture. Yet it is doubtful whether the interrelationships of high quality teaching, student learning, national prosperity, cultural enrichment and international competitiveness are well understood or appreciated in Australia today. This, at least, is what teachers themselves believe, and is a source of professional dissatisfaction.

The Committee can contribute to better understanding and public recognition of the value of teachers to society and the economy through its recommendations on quality in selection, initial education and career development of the Australian teaching force.

There is need for clear, forward-looking and incisive messages to reach the wider public and employers of teachers, as well as the teaching profession. We believe that teachers and teacher educators will accept vigorous and challenging reform measures if they are well argued and supported by evidence, and if their clear intent is to improve quality in positive ways.

Teacher education in Australia has undergone substantial changes and many improvements over several decades. It has become an all graduate profession with a base in university education extending to four years of systematic study and practical experience in schools and classrooms. Recently, the academic standard of trainee teachers as measured in enter scores has improved from a dip in the 1990s. There has been a rapid increase in the number and proportion of career change and mature age entrants to teacher education. These people bring a wealth of professional and life experience which – despite some criticism (e.g. 'inflexible' or 'inappropriate' attitudes and methods) – is of enormous value to young people's learning. These changes and many reforms notwithstanding, there are deficiencies in selection, initial teacher education, continuing professional learning and career trajectories of teaching that require attention.

## **2. The test of initial teacher education is teacher confidence, effectiveness and impact in schools**

Initial teacher education is a beginning which should inspire confidence and equip teachers with basic knowledge and capabilities. However, it is important that an inquiry into initial teacher education be set in the broader framework of the teaching career and in the context of economic and social change. The terms of reference of this Inquiry are rather constrained in this respect and should be interpreted liberally.

The key point about the quality of teachers and teaching is teaching *effectiveness* and *impact* in schools (colleges etc) – for which initial teacher selection and education are a preparation. What happens to teachers when employed and in terms of career planning and development are on the one hand influenced by their experience of initial teacher education but, on the other, a function of a complex interplay: initial teacher education must not be isolated but seen as part of this interplay. The Committee's concern for quality of teacher education is a platform from which to bring these diverse elements together in coherent policy analysis and advice.

## **3. Challenges to beginning teachers**

In our research, the most widely reported challenges facing teachers in their first years in the profession relate to:

- planning learning experiences appropriate to student diversity;
- classroom management, especially behavioural problems;
- relationships with parents and carers;
- lack of feedback on their teaching and recognition for their performance.

In addressing these challenges, teachers speak highly of the value of the classroom and school experience they have gained while preparing to teach. However, they often appear to be unable to integrate into this experience the theoretical subject matter they have been taught at university and feel that in this respect they have been inadequately prepared. While it is sometimes argued that teachers will come to value research-based knowledge and educational theory after a few years of teaching, with some exceptions the evidence does not support this view. There is too wide a gap between research, theory and the craft of teaching.

It is reasonable to expect that from the beginning of their preparatory studies and in the early years of their career, teachers will be progressively building their

professional competence on the pillars of practical experience, research-based knowledge and a rich understanding of educational principles.

#### **4. Teacher selection**

Many teachers believe that initial selection for teacher education programmes (B.Ed, Dip.Ed, etc.) should be more focused on personal qualities and attributes relevant to a teaching career. Likewise, our experience, research and analysis of the literature lead us to believe that the selection process should include more systematic appraisal of suitability to teach than is currently the norm.

Teaching is a highly complex activity bringing into play attitudes, motives, relations to others, empathy, skill, knowledge, experience. Of particular importance is 'other directedness' or recognition of and responsiveness to the distinctive, individual needs and interests of others – mainly young people in their formative years but also parents, fellow teachers and the community. These attributes, while properly given close attention in teacher education programmes, can and should be given more attention in the selection process.

Academic success at school is one criterion, but not the only one. Success in another profession or in rearing children is also relevant. But these are not enough. We firmly believe that well structured interviews, the completion of personality schedules and reports of relevant work experience should be systematically used – with appropriate privacy safeguards – in the selection of prospective teachers.

By these means present attrition rates in initial teacher education and in early years in the profession may be reduced. Attrition requires more research on causes and ways to achieve reduction in present rates. Some is inevitable and even desirable as students find that they are not suited to teaching. Nevertheless, improved retention rates could mean that fewer teachers need be trained and costs could thereby be reduced. Attention is needed to ways of producing a better match - of highly motivated, well educated beginning teachers and the needs of schools. Improved selection with reduced attrition rates is one such means.

Teacher educators will need to be trained in personnel selection procedures and provided with appropriate resources for this time-consuming role. Changes that may be introduced in selection should be monitored and evaluated, perhaps as part of a national project in which a number of universities might be willing to participate.

An issue raised in the course of the Commonwealth's 2003 Review of Teaching and Teacher Education with particular reference to science, mathematics and technology, is the unrepresentative nature of the teaching force vis-à-vis ethnic (and perhaps socio-economic) diversity. Although data on ethnicity are unavailable and research is inhibited by privacy requirements, teaching does not seem to be drawing fully on the multi-ethnic/ multi-cultural diversity of Australia. Or, when it does, some schools are becoming ethnically defined rather than facilitating a strong ethnic mix. This is a key issue, not only in the design and presentation of teacher education courses, but in a conventional image of teaching – as largely a lower middle class, Anglo-Celtic profession, feminine in the primary and lower secondary years and some subject areas (humanities and languages) and masculine in upper secondary years, some subject areas (science, mathematics) and senior leadership positions in schools. Teaching is in danger of being stereotyped through these features of the teaching force. Selection should draw upon the rich cultural diversity of Australian society.

## **5. Education faculty members: toward genuine partnership with schools and employers**

Although in their training teachers spend considerable (although variable) periods in schools, the university is the primary locus of initial teacher education. There is scope for improvement in relations between schools and universities. It is essential that university staff responsible for teacher education should be of the highest calibre and that they be required - and supported - to keep abreast of changes in educational policy and school practice as well as the broader trends of thought about the future of education.

In the past, teacher education was perhaps too narrowly focused on the immediate needs of schooling within single states and territories. Its scope was then extended through the global growth of educational research and scholarship and changes in employment whereby many graduates have not taken up school teaching careers here, or have moved abroad. Education faculty members are now having to meet a wide variety of needs, of which preparing teachers for employment within their individual state or territory is but one.

Education faculty members in universities are a mixture of academic scholars and researchers, and people with extensive school teaching and/or educational administrative experience. Relatively few university teacher educators satisfy the criterion of 'recent and relevant classroom experience' although many – especially those involved in initial teacher education – are in frequent, close contact with school people. Moreover, practising school teachers are commonly seconded to education faculties or teach part-time. The numerous links with

schools and schooling notwithstanding, it is still the university that is the primary provider of initial teacher education.

In most states and territories there is a growing sense of partnership between schools and universities in teacher education, teacher professional development and research. There are exemplary collaborations in all of these spheres and these should be nurtured and more widely emulated. Funding needs are not always recognised, as such partnerships may have no 'natural' funding sources in the existing categories of funding ('research', 'teaching'). Just as the Commonwealth has provided substantial resources for professional development, the funding of programmes focused on partnerships in initial teacher education and the development needs of early career teachers would be of great value.

We see a need for a change in the orientation of teacher education (section 6 below) which would ensure a closer, more equal partnership between teacher educators in universities and schools. By this means teacher educators in universities would develop and maintain a richer experience of current school realities and become more effective communicators to students preparing to teach.

Teacher educators in universities should be rewarded as much for their success in educating students as in their research and scholarship. There are moves in this direction, but they could be carried further through closer working partnerships with schools and employing authorities whose views on 'successful performers in educating teachers' should be given more weight by universities.

We believe that for initial teacher education, 'university as provider' should be replaced by 'university in full partnership with schools and employers of teachers'.

## **6. University courses in teacher education**

A key finding in our research is that while teachers generally value the teaching practice component, there is an almost universal dissatisfaction, among teachers who have been teaching ten years or less, with 'educational theory' courses provided by universities. Not only do these teachers find little if any value in educational theory, as taught, for the craft of teaching, they do not value it as an intellectual discipline. This is extremely disquieting, given the reforms, reviews, and developments of university programmes of teacher education in recent years. Not all criticism should be taken at face value and trainee teachers must take a

considerable measure of responsibility for their own learning. Nevertheless, there is cause for concern.

We think the reasons for the criticism are manifold and may not be readily analysed. There is certain to be controversy and further study is warranted. However, our provisional conclusions are these:

- Courses on the semester unit system have tended to become episodic and disjointed, and are not perceived by students (or teacher educators) as adequately sequential and integrated, contributing to a lack of depth of understanding and capability of application in real life situations in schooling;
- Students may lack adequate experience of the realities of schooling in making their choices among the numerous themes, courses and programmes of study available to them in the university;
- Over several decades, in the English-speaking world, 'educational theory' has become something of an intellectual plaything of academic specialists in different disciplines e.g. sociology, philosophy, psychology, and treated as a form of applicative, academic discipline-based knowledge. Its central reference points (e.g. individual and group learning, social interaction and social development, and personal and interpersonal values, pedagogy) are, it seems, often given a specialist 'angle' rather than firmly integrated into a **robust theory of pedagogical action**. Students and teachers in schools often do not understand how educational research and scholarly analysis might help them become better teachers;
- **Pedagogy, i.e. teaching for effective, high quality learning and drawing together educational knowledge and practical competence, should be the central organising discipline.** Pedagogy is teaching and learning in action and in context. For future school teachers the study of pedagogy must have schooling and school effectiveness as a primary focus. **It is essential that the school should be as much a base of initial teacher education as the university.** This means that some schools – sufficient for all trainee teachers – must become centres of teacher education, in close collaboration with universities. Moreover university academics should have operating bases in schools, just as school teachers who have a substantial role in teacher education need a base in the university.

For a knowledge-intensive profession in a knowledge-dependent society, resistance to, not to say outright rejection of the value of educational theory and research is highly disturbing and calls for action. Knowledge in many different forms (and not simply information and communication technology) has become the most critical staple of the modern economy and is increasingly the basis of personal decision making and social action. In addition to curriculum-focused

knowledge, teachers need to know how and why students learn, to understand characteristic features of children's and young people's behaviour and barriers to effective learning.

If the knowledge-based economy and society are not to become mere slogans bandied about in education policy discussions, their relevance to teachers and schooling have to be carefully examined.

For teachers, one challenge is to integrate different forms and sources of knowledge into action plans relevant to individual learners and capable of being adopted in the diverse settings of school and classroom. While secondary school teachers may specialise, teachers in primary and middle schools/years need breadth, over a wide range of disciplines. In developing the knowledge, competence and skills of their students, teachers are providing a foundation for the future knowledge society and this must be a sound foundation. For this purpose, teachers themselves must become models of knowledge development in their own teaching, learning and continuing professional development. They need to learn how to integrate research and the fruits of educational research and scholarship into their professional practice. This includes critical reflection and inquiry into their own teaching.

Although we believe that there is no single or simple solution, we think the following could be a useful start:

- commissioned studies of courses in and theories of pedagogy, drawing on international experience and seeking to identify best practice in Australian university faculties of education, including existing consortia such as the Sydney-based school-university 'Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools', and the innovatory school-focused/ school-based teacher education programmes in several universities;
- close attention by universities across the country to the teacher education implications and opportunities of major systemic innovations, such as *Productive Pedagogies* in Queensland, *Essential Learnings* in Tasmania and major innovations in curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation across the country. Teaching needs to become a fully national profession and be at the cutting edge of innovation;
- insistence by course approval and registering authorities that client (student- school – employer) evaluations of courses are rigorous, regular and visibly responded to;
- a request to university academic boards (not just education faculty bodies) to review and strengthen the intellectual quality of educational theory courses with particular attention to their



coherence and relationships with other academic courses and programmes;

- question the tendency of all universities to establish and maintain initial teacher education courses. The Committee might address the issue of quality of teacher education by querying the number of separate programmes across the country and the need for practically all universities to sustain high quality programmes. A high quality national approach to initial teacher education would identify successful or promising innovations and seek to mobilise public resources to strengthen them rather than enabling all comers to do something, regardless of its national significance.

Through these measures there can be gains in quality, effectiveness and efficiency. We support a progressive shift in the orientation of educational theory courses from a virtually exclusive university base toward a working partnership with schools and employers – with these courses being taught jointly by senior school personnel and university academics. Although we reject the return to a kind of apprenticeship model (pupil-teacher) of teacher education, there is a clear need for richer, more intense and more equal partnerships involving experienced school personnel. These partnerships should encompass planning, course development, practicum placements, teaching on courses, and assessment of student teacher performance and the further development of a knowledge base of teaching through research. There are various implications – cost, decision-making procedures, school staffing and organisation – but these are capable of being addressed, provided the issue is acknowledged and there is a resolve to address it.

## **7. Continuing professional learning; rewarding high performance**

Initiatives are being taken by several teacher registration bodies to develop a framework of continuing professional learning and competence. These need to be thoroughly developmental in nature and not be seen as a series of hoops teachers must jump through.

Continued registration should no longer be on the basis of an initial qualification but should reflect a model of lifelong learning and demonstrated competence. All teachers, throughout their careers, should be engaged in systematic learning of a more substantial and rigorous kind than present 'in-service' days provide for. Notwithstanding the complexities of fair assessment, we believe teaching performance should be evaluated throughout the teaching career and that graduated steps are needed to make teaching a career based on quality of

performance, with appropriate incentives and rewards, including rewards for completion of advanced university studies. This view was well supported by teachers in their first ten years in the profession.

## **8. The teaching career**

In both initial and continuing education of teachers, it must be recognised that, for many, teaching is not itself a lifelong career, but part of a career which may include lengthy periods of other work, travel, family responsibilities and so on. Career planning has been relatively neglected and should feature in teacher education and in personnel management by employers of teachers. Career change and portfolio careers are strong features of the contemporary labour market. Many teachers will prefer part time posts or accept short term contracts. On the other hand, for long time career teachers there are too few opportunities for advancement and career recognition as school teachers - as distinct from joining the ranks of administration. Teaching, as a profession, has a flat profile whereby effort, achievement and quality of performance are inadequately recognised.

Significant structural changes relating to salaries, career profiles, and rewards for quality performance are difficult to achieve but should become a target of policies to improve the quality and standing of Australia's teachers.

## **Attachment: The authors and their recent studies of the Australian teaching profession**

The authors of this submission have substantial national and international experience in educational research and consultancy for governments and intergovernmental bodies.

**Emeritus Professor Malcolm Skilbeck** has taught at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. He has held professorships in education at the Universities of London and Ulster, was the founding Director of the Australian Curriculum Development Centre, Director of Studies at the Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations (England and Wales), Vice Chancellor of Deakin University and Deputy Director for Education at the OECD. He publishes widely on educational policy, teacher education, curriculum development and higher education. His experience includes national and international reviews of education policies and programmes. A Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia, he has an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the National University of Ireland and is an honorary Lifetime Member of the National Foundation for Educational Research of England and Wales.

**Dr Helen Connell** has higher degrees in geography/ planning and education, and has substantial international experience as an educational researcher and writer. She has completed projects for several national governments and intergovernmental agencies including OECD and UNESCO. Trained as a secondary school teacher and in planning, she has had academic and planning appointments in New Zealand and Canada. In London and Paris, she carried out consultancies in school curriculum and international education, educational reform and higher education. Her most recent research has been in the fields of educational reform strategies (UNESCO), higher education (OECD) and teacher policy (Australian governments).

In the past three years, Professor Skilbeck and Dr Connell interviewed teacher educators, researchers and policy makers in the UK and Ireland, and at the OECD in Paris. They have carried out research and prepared three reports on the Australian teaching profession:

- [Australian Country Background Report for OECD multi-country study on Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers](http://www.qualityteaching.dest.gov.au/Content/Item_869.htm) (commissioned by the Commonwealth of Australia Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003 - [http://www.qualityteaching.dest.gov.au/Content/Item\\_869.htm](http://www.qualityteaching.dest.gov.au/Content/Item_869.htm))
- Draft final report for the Commonwealth Review of Teaching and Teacher Education: [Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future. Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics.](#)

Main Report (commissioned to undertake research, analyse submissions and prepare draft material in association with the Secretariat and the Review Chair), 2003.

- Teachers for the Future: the changing nature of society and related issues for the teaching workforce (commissioned by the Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce (TQELT) of the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment and Training, 2003/4 – MCEETYA in press)

In its most recent research, the Connell Skilbeck Consultancy has examined the views and impact of teachers in their first ten years, including their views on selection and training. Findings are based on questionnaire returns and interviews during 2003/4 with some five hundred teachers (in state, Catholic and independent schools) in their first ten years in the profession in the jurisdictions of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. Teacher educators, school principals, senior teachers and educational administrators in these jurisdictions have been interviewed. In addition, initial professional training in four other professions with relevance to teaching (accountancy, communications, law, nursing) has been explored. This research, with accompanying literature reviews, provides insights into the background, school experience and aspirations of Australia's future teaching force. In this and in previous studies by the Consultants, the development of the teaching profession has been set in a broader social, economic and educational context.