

April 15 2005

Janet Holmes  
The Inquiry Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational training  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT 2600

Dear Janet

Please find attached a brief reaction to the TOR for the current House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education. My response is based on twenty five years as a teacher educator and a professional who is currently active in educational research in primary and secondary school education sectors. I have recently reconceptualised three teacher education programs across two states in both the largest and smallest teacher education faculties in Australia.

I have not called on the empirical data to support my argument but will do so if required. I have simply offered an expert reaction as a knowledge worker in this field and based on my experience in schools, education and teacher education.. I hope you find my narrative engaging and I look forward to your visits to Queensland in the future.

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**TOR1: Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses**

The teaching profession is calling for a much more diversified teaching force. This implies that students entering teacher education should be drawn from a broad range of cultural groups, age/gender groups, and SES groups across the broader Australian society. Thus criteria for entry must become more inclusive than exclusive. If universities are rigorous in their first year studies and the course is one that is intellectually challenging, professionally appropriate and implemented through a quality enhancement framework, students who succeed are clearly the most suitable candidates for teacher education. The implementation of a test similar to ACER's GSA will offer students a profile of their capacities and they can be counselled into further or optional study pathways as required.

*Thus it is argued here that engagement with a rigorous university program is a better indicator for success in teacher education than pre-university based scores.*

**TOR2: Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students including students from diverse backgrounds**

The correlation between school leaving scores and success in teaching has not been confirmed however in countries such as Ireland high leaving scores, mastery in a second language, commitment to a particular ideology are criteria that draw students of high academic achievement to education. However the high status of teachers within Irish society and the high levels of remuneration are also attractive features. (No studies exist that thoroughly interrogate this matter). Comparatively the status of teachers across Australian society is low. The morale of teachers is low. There is a high degree of incongruence between parental expectations of schools and teacher perceptions of what schools should offer. (This is not the case in Eastern or Asian contexts and this is clearly visible at the chalkface).

Why would young people in particular be attracted to teaching when there is a public perception that it is a lousy job with lousy pay!!! Students report regularly that practising teachers discourage them to join the work force. Others preservice teachers report that they love working with students but they find the ongoing attitudes and negativity of many teachers demoralising.

My recent experiences in the professional development of up to 90 teachers from overseas (migrants to Australia) is that, while policy advocates diversification of the workforce, that practising professionals, in the main, were not accepting of newly migrated teachers due to reasons just as "language accents", dress codes (culturally different), and inability to access particular forms of culturally embedded knowledges (WASP). Comments from some practising teachers such as "I can't put my finger on it ...there is just something about her/her that I don't think is suitable for our system" were common. I can produce figures from 1999- 2002 that indicate that only 5% of the 90 graduates were taken up by various education systems despite outstanding academic results.

*My thoughts: while the status of teaching remains low and teacher selection processes that reinstate the status quo continues, recruitment to teacher education will continue as is. Increased remuneration is a partial solution. Mandatory*

*professional learning, increased redundancies and stronger links between families and professional education staff are urgently required.*

### **TOR3: Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition**

The research is clear on this. Graduates in particular withdraw from teaching due to a lack of support in making the transition from student to teacher. Disenchanted teachers in the latter parts of their careers who remain unchallenged state that their primary reasons for staying are linked to their levels of financial commitments to mortgages, family education etc.

*The recommendations for moving forward in this domain are clearly obvious. Universities and employing authorities must partner in supporting graduates through induction and transition for the first two years of a career. There is a vast range of support strategies cited in the literature: contract work, release for PD, teaming arrangements, mentoring etc. Financial commitment to such initiatives should be mandated. In terms of the ageing teaching workforce: once a national standards frame is established, teachers can be rewarded or made redundant based on their performance – just as is the case in most other industries.*

### **TOR4 Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members**

Just as the teaching force is demoralised so too are education academics. In many education faculties there are brilliant teaching and researching academics. However in my recent experience across three universities, some are tired, disengaged and immersed in teaching paradigms of a previous modernist era. They are not familiar with current educational research, nor are they in tune with current educational practices in schools and other learning sites.

*In brief educational standards are required for university teaching. The national commitment to teaching scholarship is a positive initiative although centralised, as opposed to decentralised initiatives will not achieve the desired outcomes. Faculties of Education are taking up these challenges and the recent work that I have completed at QUT, ECU and now USC mandates that quality teaching, based on a set of preferred principles of procedure, mandate the enhancement of university teaching as central to the core business of teacher education program implementation. Of course a series of redundancy packages would assist with the renewal of a “tired” workforce, inviting newly graduate PhD and EdD students into education faculties.*

### **TOR 5 Examine the educational philosophy underpinning teacher education courses**

Teacher education programs are being actively reconceptualised throughout Australia. Many are being reconstituted in ways that reflect an outcomes approach, built on standards and teacher attributes. Multiple national reports have enlightened the profession in how to build more engaging programs that focus on futures, the changing nature of education for youth and children and new pedagogies for higher education. These changes will complement the national agendas for accreditation and the business plan of NIQITSL.

*The catalyst for success however will depend on a professional reinvigoration of education academics and the recruitment of a new type of knowledge worker in teacher education. The generation of a national teacher education curriculum will not be of use, but the ongoing debate and problematisation of the conceptualisation of quality teacher education curriculum and the rationale for such is to be advocated. The recent report from Loudon et al (2004) is instructive here.*

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

Simply stated: *All teacher education programs should take up the debate of subject matter knowledge. It is my view that a good teacher education program is enhanced through Shulman's work that advocates the centrality of deep subject knowledge as one component in teacher education. The interrogation of in-depth subject knowledge is best led through experts in discipline studies who commonly sit outside education.*

### **TOR 7 Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to**

- Teach literacy and numeracy**
- Teach vocational education courses**
- Effectively manage classrooms**
- Successfully use information technology**
- Deal with bullying etc**
- Deal with children with special needs**
- Achieve accreditation**

Deal with senior staff fellow teachers, school boards etc

These are all significant national areas of priority. These will always exist but will take different guises as times change although, literacy and numeracy must remain core. It is my view that listing content areas will lead to the demise of teacher education. The starting point is to articulate the attributes of teaching graduates and then outline learning processes that will ensure the successful development of attributes and the collection of evidence to demonstrate such. This learning should result through the intersection of research, university teaching and workplace learning where issues of priority (such as those listed above) will be identified and interrogated. What is required is a multidisciplinary team of experts from the field and the university to lead these interrogations collaboratively presenting multiple orientations to the subject under interrogation. The content will be more accurately identified through the conceptual constructs of the course in line with the attributes.

### **TOR8 Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers**

As stated above teacher education should be enacted through the intersection of educational research, university teaching and workplace learning. Practising teachers must be central to the learning engagement of all teacher education

students. It is my view that the placement of all teacher education in schools reverts to a craft model of teacher training that was useful in the evolution of teacher education, but is no longer appropriate in ‘new times’. The critical orientation to teacher education that enlightens and transforms teaching practices is best realised through a balance of school based learning and university research based teaching. Many current initiatives are building strong professional learning communities in this way and new partnerships are blooming with commendable outcomes (empirical evidence available). A couple of factors should be noted:

1. Teachers require accreditation as university instructors if this is a serious initiative (the pedagogies cannot be transposed ). At USC we are developing a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education for teachers who want to become teacher educators as central to our programs.
2. University lecturers need to be registered teachers if they are to become involved in the critique of teaching practices or as workers in workplace learning sites.
3. Industrial agreements are hampering new initiatives in workplace learning based on a commitment to an antiquated concept of “prac teaching” (The recent Eyers (2005) paper is a living example of the degree of commitment to narrow views of field experiences)

**TOR9 Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education and training**

*Simply put, if secondary continue to recruit subject specialists and primary recruit pedagogical specialists, programs must by necessity remain separate. If we reconstitute the profession differently so all teachers (despite their sector of employment) become specialist with indepth content knowledge and pedagogical (and curriculum) knowledge, we can develop more cohesive and integrated teacher education programs.*

**TOR10 Examining the construction delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the work force**

There is a vast literature in this field. What is missing is the pool of funding resources that will enable more teachers to be released in work time to engage in professional development that will benefit their professional subject content and pedagogical knowledge as well as PD that focuses on personal development.