



Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in Australia

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Ms Janet Holmes
Inquiry Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Education and Vocational Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

13 April 2005

Dear Ms Holmes

Re: Inquiry into Teacher Education

Enclosed please find a submission to the above inquiry on behalf of the Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in Australia.

The Association is grateful for the opportunity to make input to this important inquiry, and looks forward to the report of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Mary Ciccarelli
Executive Officer

Inquiry into Teacher Education:

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training

Submission from

Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in Australia (APCSSA)

The Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in Australia (APCSSA) is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry into Teacher Education. The following represents a perspective from the school sector, rather than from the tertiary institutions which are responsible for delivery of teacher education and preparation.

The reality is that, as with all school-leaver applicants, the basic selection criterion for undergraduate teacher education courses is a 'cut-off score' based on the student demand for enrolment in teacher education courses as opposed to demand for enrolment in other tertiary courses. The 'cut-off score' or its equivalent (that is, the minimum required tertiary entrance score) for entry to teacher education courses – as with other courses – is not established by anything other than a supply and demand mechanism.

In general, the cut-off score for entry to such courses is in the lower range of scores for university courses. It fluctuates according to the general economic and job-market prospects for entering students, and is thus closely related to the perceived benefits and attractions of a teaching career.

For mature age entry students, selection is again generally simply by achievement of appropriate STAT results or by recognition of prior learning (RPL) procedures established in individual institutions.

Entry to Accelerated Teacher Training Programs (such as those in NSW) is based on trade certificate or TAFE diploma qualifications, plus relevant trade or professional experience. These programs are designed to meet particular specialist shortfalls in technology, mathematics and science (physics).

For students undertaking a graduate teacher qualification (generally a one- or two-year course designated a Graduate Diploma of Education, or similar), a pass undergraduate degree is the pre-requisite.

In few instances is the credential basis of selection supplemented by any other requirement. At the University of Notre Dame, for example, students usually undergo an interview prior to enrolment –there are, however, no published criteria related to selection of students in teacher education courses, and the interview appears to be used as a confirmation of selection to the University as a whole rather than to the teacher education course in particular.

The use of other processes to assist in determining suitability (e.g. psychological testing, interview) does not always appear to be successful. For example, the use of the UMAT for entry to Medical and Health Science courses has not attracted universal confidence. Nevertheless, there is a case for trialling broader selection tools to determine suitability for the profession. It is also important that prospective students are fully aware of the range of roles, responsibilities and duties involved in professional practice. Many entering students believe that their school experience and observation of teachers has provided them with this understanding, which is often limited, inaccurate and misleading.

Without knowledge of the figures involved, a certain level of attrition from teacher education courses is neither surprising nor problematic. Many students, when confronted with the realities of the teaching experience and the demands of the profession – often during practicum placements – realise that their ambitions are misplaced. Provided suitable support and counselling is in place, it is generally better for all concerned that students re-shape their career plans during their studies rather than after graduation.

The extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality applicants is largely dependent on the extent to which the teaching profession is seen by potential students as an attractive career. Objective evidence (the level of cut-off scores for entry to undergraduate teaching courses; the number of Honours graduates enrolling in graduate courses) would suggest that the profile of the teaching profession is not high enough to attract large numbers of higher-quality students.

The most objective form of a society's valuing of professional performance is in levels of remuneration, and it is clear that remuneration for teachers is not perceived as substantial enough to ensure that the status of the profession is attractive to students who are eligible to undertake other high-demand courses. Whilst the perception of a high amount of annual leave may be attractive, it is not sufficient to overcome the significant salary disadvantage of the teaching profession against many others.

The experience of Principals suggests that in many instances practising teachers are either averse to encouraging, or actively discourage, secondary students – particularly high-achieving students – from entering the profession.

Further evidence of this is in the high rate of separation for teachers in the first four or five years of professional practice – research indicates that between 25 and 50 per cent of newly-recruited teachers leave the profession within three to five years. (Manuel, 2003; AEU, 2003; Preston, 2001). The 1998 Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers itself noted the ageing of the teaching cohort, and the considerable reduction in the proportion of teachers under 40 years of age – from 79 per cent in 1979 to a (then) projected 42 per cent in 2002 (Senate Inquiry, 1998). In November 2001, the Victorian Auditor-General reported that approximately 45 per cent of the Victorian government school teaching work force would progressively reach retirement age over the next ten years Auditor General Victoria, 2001). There is nothing that would indicate that figures would vary greatly between the Victorian public school system and other states and sectors.

Whilst remuneration and general professional status is obviously not the only cause of this rate of attrition, it is clear that the 'rewards' of professional practice are not sufficient to encourage a large number of qualified practitioners to continue to meet the professional demands of teaching. There is no evidence to suggest that the Senate Inquiry has led to any improvement in the status of teachers or in the attraction of the profession to high-achieving potential trainees.

The under-supply of qualified teachers is a matter of concern to Principals of Australian Catholic secondary schools. There is a particular concern in relation to teacher shortages in specific curriculum areas – food science and technology, computer science, materials design and technology, mathematics, science (physics).

DEST figures (Ballantyne and Bain, 2002) indicate that in 2001 only four per cent of secondary teacher graduates qualified to teach senior physics, six per cent senior chemistry, seven per cent senior mathematics, four per cent secondary information technology and eight per cent LOTE subjects. The Home Economics Institute of Australia has identified a growing shortage of home economics teachers and a lack of appropriate tertiary teacher preparation courses in the discipline (Home Economics Institute of Australia, 2000). The implementation of curriculum change (for example, in Western Australia, the introduction of Courses of Study – especially relating to Levels 7 and 8) means that the need for specialist teachers with high-level knowledge, understanding and skills in these areas cannot be underestimated. Figures provided by the Australian Education Union (AEU, 2003) would support the experience of APCSSA members that appropriately-qualified teachers in specialist areas are sometimes impossible to find. This difficulty is very much greater for schools in regional, rural and remote areas.

The problems of teacher supply, insofar as they relate to the profile and status of the teaching profession, will not be addressed solely by the introduction of teacher registration. The teaching profession will be attractive – and remain attractive – to

high-quality students and practitioners when they are appropriately supported and remunerated.

It is clear that effective classroom management is an essential pre-requisite for effective teaching and learning to occur (Beaman and Wheldall, 1997). Whilst not a sufficient condition for successful learning outcomes, it is a necessary base-line skill if students are to achieve. Research, both overseas and in Australia, indicates that teachers believe that they spend more time in classroom management than they should do (Beaman and Wheldall, 1997) – effectively robbing them of time and energy for more learning-effective activities. The research also indicates that the great majority of activities that are troublesome to teachers are relatively trivial although persistent, and that boys are perceived as more troublesome in this regard than girls (Beaman and Wheldall, 1997). It is therefore of particular concern that the preparation of teachers focus clearly on classroom management issues that are most likely to create difficulties in their practice. It is also important that trainee teachers develop skills and understandings related specifically to teaching and management techniques for boys.

It is the experience of secondary Principals that new teachers consistently confide their view that they are under-prepared for their first year of teaching. For many newly-appointed teachers, simply managing the myriad bureaucratic demands of the role (absentee records, day-to-day procedures of the school, assessment recording, submission of teaching programs) is a significant task for which they feel under-prepared. Additionally, Principals would suggest that issues of professional conduct and of relationship management (staff/staff; staff/student; staff/parents) are also areas where new graduates often appear to be less than thoroughly prepared. Whilst many schools have sound induction and mentoring programs which can assist the inexperienced, this is not always the case – and nor do such programs obviate the need for greater preparation of students for the reality of the school experience.

The great majority of newly-appointed teachers suggest that greater time spent in the classroom prior to graduation or first appointment would be of great value. This is often particularly the case for those who come to teaching via a Graduate Diploma in Education following a first degree – these students often have only two school placements as part of their course.

The practical component of teacher training is extremely important, and experience of APCSSA members would suggest that more extended times of placement on practicum – such as the University of Notre Dame Australia model in Western Australia – is of benefit. The involvement of practising senior teachers in this and other areas of development and critique of teacher training courses is of significant benefit. It is not always possible to ensure that those charged with delivering teacher

training courses in tertiary institutions either have recent experience in schools or even had particularly successful experience in the past.

However, the current work-load on practising teachers, particularly in times of curriculum change implementation, is already often significantly beyond what should be considered reasonable. Involvement in teacher training – in supervision, mentoring and program development and critique – cannot simply be added to current duties. Funds need to be provided to schools to provide selected teachers with time relief for such activities – and the current shortage in some geographic and specialist teaching areas would still be a problem to be addressed.

The experience of James Cook University (Cairns) in the development of a post-practicum internship, without assessment of clinical supervision (Matters, 2002), appears to offer a valuable model for further development in the transition to teaching appointment of graduates and deserves further exploration and trialling.

Suitable structures are in place to encourage practising teachers to continue to upgrade their professional learning and to benefit from collegial experience. This is also being addressed with the development of requirements for ongoing professional development for teacher registration requirements in some states and territories.

However, the need to support this produces demands on schools that are increasingly difficult to provide. Schools can do so by providing time relief for teachers engaged in professional development, in which case the cost of relief teachers is a considerable burden, and the disruption involved can cause a detrimental impact on the teaching/learning program. Alternatively, teachers could be paid extra to attend such professional development out of school time, or a broader adjustment to salary and conditions to incorporate such a requirement could be negotiated. In either case, it is impossible for schools to continue to absorb increased costs within existing funding arrangements.



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