



The Secretary of the Committee
Inquiry into Teacher Education
Parliament of Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find enclosed a submission on behalf of the
Australian Teacher Education Association to the
Committee of Inquiry into Teacher Education.

We would be pleased to have to opportunity to discuss
matter raised in this submission with members of the
Inquiry at a suitable future date.

Yours sincerely

Richard Bates
President
Australian Teacher Education Association

Professor Richard Bates
President, Australian Teacher Education Association
Faculty of Education, Deakin University
Waurm Ponds Campus, Vic 3217

Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education

By

The Australian Teacher Education Association

Introduction

The Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA) is the major professional association for teacher educators in Australia. The mission of the Australian Teacher Education Association is to promote:

- * The pre-service and continuing education of teachers in all forms and contexts;
- * teacher education as central in the educational enterprise of the nation;
- * research on teacher education as a core endeavour.

The Association enacts this mission through several key strategies, namely:

- * fostering improvement in initial teacher education;
- * engaging in national advocacy for teacher education;
- * promoting and supporting the teaching profession;
- * forming strong links with individuals and organisations involved in educational change;
- * improving the nature, quality and availability of professional development for teachers educators, and
- * promoting and disseminating research, ideas and practices, innovation and evaluation in teacher education.

The Association has been actively involved in teacher education for over thirty years and sees the current inquiry as a significant moment in the development of pre-service teacher education. However, we would be

remiss if we did not point out two significant matters. Firstly, the current inquiry is simply one of many conducted at Commonwealth and State level over the past decades. Almost none of the recommendations of these inquiries have been implemented (see, for example the fate of the Auchmuty (1980) inquiry). Secondly, when the preparation of teachers was incorporated into universities the notion of teacher *training* was dropped and replaced by the idea of teacher *education*: a term much more appropriate to the preparation of a profession.

As is clear from our mission statement ATEA sees teacher education as a continuum from initial education through induction and into continuing advanced professional development. We are somewhat disappointed that (despite reference 10) the Inquiry is so much focussed on one stage of this process. However, we appreciate that it is the initial education of teachers that provides the basis for their continuing development in an increasingly complex and demanding context.

It is important to recognise that initial teacher education cannot fully equip entrants to the profession with all the skills that would be displayed by experienced teachers. The most it can do is equip prospective teachers with an initial understanding of curricular, pedagogical and assessment processes, the underlying bases of content in particular curricular areas and an understanding of the diversity of developmental, cultural and social issues with which they may be faced in schools. Schools are inherently diverse in their locations and characteristics and the adaptation of these initial understandings is central to the induction stage of teachers' professional development.

We are, as an Association, committed to the achievement of high standards in initial teacher education and we fully supported the Report of the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Project (Preparing a Profession, Adey, 1998). It is a matter for regret that so little governmental support for these standards was

forthcoming and that subsequently a plethora of varying standards has been developed by so many agencies at so many levels in various parts of Australia.

We also note that during the 1980s and 1990s the Australian Council of Deans of Education made considerable attempts to draw attention to an impending crisis in the supply of teachers across various jurisdictions on the basis of carefully constructed statistics (see, for example Preston 1997,2000). Little notice was taken of these projections by governments although the experience of the past five years has confirmed their accuracy.

In these three crucial areas, the condition of initial teacher education (Auchmuty), the development of standards (Adey) and the supply and demand for graduates (ACDE) the problem has not been lack of appropriate advice but, rather, lack of appropriate action.

Comments on Selected Terms of Reference

Term of Reference 1: Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses.

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

Two matters are frequently referred to in this area: academic ability and personal qualities. With reference to academic ability we observe that this is largely a matter of demand for graduates (in terms of the job opportunities for teachers) and the supply of university places. During the 1980s and 1990s almost all universities experienced limited demand for access to teacher education programs. This was directly related to the limited opportunities for employment for graduating teachers in comparison with other professional occupations. The rise in the demand for graduates over the past five years has reversed this situation and universities are experiencing greater demand with consequent increases in the cut-off scores for entrants to teacher education. This effect is compounded by the failure

of universities to increase significantly the number of places allocated to teacher education (except in the case of some one-year diploma programs for secondary teachers). This is at least in part due to funding arrangements and the cap on HECS fees for teacher education which provides a dis-incentive for the transfer of places to teacher education. Jointly these two effects have resulted in significant improvements in the academic ability of those entering teacher education.

In terms of personal qualities, there is little evidence to suggest that any of the instruments or interview schedules that claim to predict success as a teacher are particularly useful. Moreover, as many of these tests are culturally specific or culturally biased, their application has the effect of eliminating students from diverse backgrounds from entry to teacher education programs.

There is little reliable evidence on the social and cultural composition of the student body in teacher education. Anecdotal reports indicate that while there is an increase in diversity in terms of age, ethnicity and cultural background among entrants there is still some way to go in matching the diversity of teachers with the overall diversity of the Australian population.

Two matters are of significant importance here. There is an overwhelming imbalance in the gender of entrants and there is still significant under-representation of indigenous entrants. However where there are specific programs of pre-service teacher education built around indigenous issues and related to indigenous communities, universities have been quite successful in increasing significantly the number of indigenous graduates in teacher education as elsewhere.

Term of Reference 3: Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition.

There seems to be little evidence that attrition from pre-service teacher education courses varies from overall university attrition rates. However, two relatively unique factors would appear to encourage

higher attrition rates. Firstly, while students may initially opt for teacher education they may well find during their experience in schools as student teachers that they are not fitted to the profession. Secondly, on the basis of observation and teacher reports, staff may counsel unsuitable students out of the profession.

There are several other factors that might be related to attrition. With respect to three or four year undergraduate programs, many universities chose, during the 1990s to replace single degrees in teacher pre-service education with combined degrees that provided for majors in other faculties. There was frequently an option to transfer to a single degree in other faculties and some students may have chosen or been encouraged to choose this option. However, there is anecdotal information that student retention in many teacher education courses is in fact higher than that in other comparable degrees. Little evidence is publicly available on this comparison. It seems unlikely that there are significant attrition issues with regard to one year post-graduate diploma programs.

In fact, statistics from several state jurisdictions show that the highest attrition of teachers is not during their initial teacher education but during the first five years of their employment.

Term of Reference 4: Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members.

There are two matters of importance here. Firstly, over the past decade faculties of education have largely disappeared from Australian universities: staff and programs have been incorporated into mega-faculties or divisions. Indeed, initial teacher education is frequently a marginalised enterprise in such faculties where decisions regarding staffing and budgets, let alone programs, are no longer made with a sole focus on the interests of teacher education, but in the context of the wider needs of the faculty. This is a particularly crucial issue with regard to staffing, where many staff appointments may be made

on the basis of expertise in areas outside professional experience of schools and teaching.

Secondly, as universities have become more performance oriented (particularly in terms of research and the importance of the RQF agenda), staff in teacher education programs have been effectively discouraged from engaging in professional work with schools, curriculum development and materials production, none of which counts towards points on the individual or collective rankings on DEST comparisons.

Term of Reference 5: Examine the educational philosophy underpinning teacher training courses...

ATEA has membership across the full range of teacher education programs in Australia. As our annual conferences and journals demonstrate, it is doubtful whether there is an agreed philosophy of teacher education either across or within institutions. Indeed, this may be one of the strengths of teacher education in Australia as it provokes continual argument, debate and improvement in teacher education.

This is not to say there is not substantial agreement around practical issues or common use of textbooks and materials (many of which are Australian based and regarded as exemplary in other countries). Nor does it mean that there is not an 'Australian' identity among our graduates that easily identifies them as professional, knowledgeable and adaptable and places them in high demand in overseas jurisdictions. Moreover, the impact of Australian research (the bulk of which is conducted by teacher education staff) on Australian education is considerable, as was noted by the DETYA (2000) report on The Impact of Educational Research.

Moreover, teacher education programs and graduates have to meet initial teacher education requirements specified and monitored by each state jurisdiction. In most cases these requirements are broad and well founded, allowing some diversity within broad objectives but requiring fundamental attention to crucial issues. Most programs also give attention to

the requirements of the Adelaide Declaration which, in itself, presents a 'philosophy of education' which is generally accepted as an appropriate basis for school education and teacher education in Australia.

Term of Reference 6: Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other university faculty disciplines.

A TEA regards this as an area of considerable tension within universities. While teacher education staff (schools, departments and faculties) generally have cordial relationships with staff of other faculties, it is a matter of concern that so much of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of initial teacher education programs is divorced from the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices of schools.

Staff of other faculties, departments and disciplines are neither recruited for nor motivated by their interest in school education and are often unfamiliar with the requirements of teaching either primary or secondary school students. Moreover, many programs are structured in such a way as to prevent teacher education staff having any oversight or making any contribution to the teaching of 'disciplinary' units.

Again, while teacher education staff may teach as little as a quarter of the required units they are held responsible for the outcomes of initial teacher education.

Similarly, they may also be wholly responsible for supervising and monitoring the school experience of students, a matter in which staff from other disciplines take no responsibility. This, of course is also a source of budgetary tension, for while teacher education programs may bear the full cost of managing and supervising school experience, such costs cannot be spread across the program as a whole. This not an insignificant matter as such costs regularly consume a quarter of teacher education budgets.

Term of Reference 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, disruptive students, dysfunctional families*
- (vi) deal with children with special needs and/or abilities*
- (vii) achieve accreditation*
- (viii) deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards etc*

While we recognise recent public concern in the areas listed in this term of reference, ATEA finds it somewhat surprising that a broad inquiry into teacher education has not taken a broad view of education (such as, for instance the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century) as its starting point. The adoption of a broad view is surely necessary in order to avoid the possibility of making partial recommendations which privilege particular concerns over the broad goals of teacher education. The danger is that in making recommendations in such specific areas teacher education becomes a patchwork quilt rather than an integrated approach to the overall development of appropriate professional expertise.

We also hope that the Inquiry will recognise the formidable nature of the demands implied by this term of reference, especially when combined with those other requirements made in more general terms by state jurisdictions. In particular, we hope the Inquiry will consider how such an extensive list of requirements might be satisfied in preparation programs containing less than two years of professional studies.

Term of Reference 8: Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers

There is considerable variation around the country in the degree of responsibility taken by schools and

teachers for the initial education of teachers. Most programs are designed or monitored by groups that include teacher representation. Many are jointly taught by faculty and seconded teachers. Others are largely school-based. There is no single pattern.

Most teacher education staff express a strong preference for working closely with schools. There are, however, several serious impediments to closer liaison. Firstly, there is the continuing problem of payment of teachers for 'supervision' and the constraining nature of such a definition for 'partnership' or 'school-based' programs. Secondly, there are the logistics of placing students in (especially secondary) schools and with teachers where particular 'methods' combinations are available. In some instances this involves a faculty liaising with hundreds of schools. It is a significant administrative burden. Thirdly schools are not funded for participation in such programs and participation without appropriate re-sourcing displaces time and effort from attention to pupils. Fourthly, recent increases in the number of students in pre-service programs have led to considerable difficulty in placing students in schools for even the required minimum number of days of practicum placements.

Term of Reference 9: Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training.

The split presumed by this term of reference is no longer by any means universal. Dual primary/secondary programs, 'middle years' programs and programs covering early childhood and primary, secondary and vocational are now available in various universities around Australia. Such innovations are responsive to the changes occurring in schools and the demand for teachers who can 'cross boundaries'. Graduates from such programs are often highly regarded because of their flexibility. They frequently gain priority in appointment.

Term of Reference 10: Examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teacher already in the workforce

The past decade has seen a significant growth in the variety of options available to teachers for professional development. As well as post-graduate study at universities and in-house professional development provided by schools and authorities, subject associations have developed and delivered considerable professional learning and independent contractors have provided tailored programs, sometimes on a whole-school 'school improvement' basis. However, few large-scale initiatives such as the National Professional Development Program (NPDP) or those recommended by Kenway et al (1999) have been instituted. There is some hope that state bodies such as the Victorian Institute of Teaching and the Commonwealth sponsored National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership may undertake such responsibilities but their funding base is currently too narrow for them to be really effective.

Term of Reference 11: Examine the adequacy of funding of teacher training courses by university administrators

This is by no means a transparent area of university administration as the organization and funding of teacher education varies widely from institution to institution. Moreover, university administrators face some difficulties in allocating sufficient funds to teacher education programs. In particular the cap on HECS fees inhibits their ability to raise sufficient funds to cover cost increases as is possible for every other area of university study except nursing.

Again, while funds for school experience or practicum placement costs are made available to teacher education programs, they are often simply in terms of the value of funds for the required payments to teachers. The administrative costs of managing school experience must therefore be absorbed by general funding which does not always include a provision for such costs. Similarly the cost of staff time involved in school experience is difficult to assess. Travel costs must also be included, and as placement schools become more remote from universities these are increasing rapidly.