

## **QATESOL Submission to Teacher Education Inquiry**

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

This issue is a complex one. Beyond basic academic and English language requirements, entry into teacher education courses is largely demand-driven and linked into individual universities' overall intake strategies. As a consequence, the quality of the teacher education intake can vary considerably from year to year and university to university. It needs to be considered whether the imposition of higher minimal entry standards is desirable.

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

This is an important and very complex issue. Questions of quality and diversity are to some extent inter-linked. The shift from an elite higher education system to a mass system, and equity initiatives offering alternative forms of entry to non-traditional students, have seen some diversification of the student population during the last two decades. At the same time, there has been considerable concern about 'falling standards'. To some extent, these concerns can be addressed through better quality university teaching. This is one of the reasons why 'teaching' has assumed greater priority in academic work than previously, and should continue to be supported from within and without universities. In this context, however, Education Faculties face particular challenges. As has been noted in the media in recent months, pre-service teacher cohorts average some of the lowest tertiary entry scores in the higher education system.

Firstly, it is necessary to note that attracting high quality students is a challenge not only for teacher education courses, but also for the teaching profession as a whole. Students' perceptions of the attractiveness of courses are clearly important in their course selection decisions, but so too is the attractiveness of the profession. Students choose a profession, not simply a university course. As has been reported in the media, there are many factors that seem to be disincentives to teaching careers, for example, remuneration vis-à-vis other professions, working conditions, limited career paths, the low status of the profession in the community and the media, and men's fears at a time of heightened awareness about child sex abuse. The attractiveness of both teacher education courses and the teaching profession must be given due weight in any discussion about the quality of teacher education students, and initiatives to redress the problem.

Secondly, it is worth examining the effects of some of the new pathways through teacher education, for example, graduate entry programs and double degree programs. Are these initiatives attracting (and retaining) students with high levels of academic capability, and with maturity, commitment and other personal qualities necessary for the teaching profession? Anecdotal evidence suggests this is the case, but reliable and valid data are required here.

While there has been some diversification of pre-service teacher cohorts, the teaching workforce remains less diverse linguistically and culturally than the broader community. As teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL), we are concerned about this situation. Deep understandings of multilingualism, 'ESL-ness' and cultural difference are required to work successfully with ESL students, even in mainstream classrooms. Teachers need to understand not only the cultural diversity of students, but also, students' learning needs, learning styles, learning preferences and learning goals. If, as teachers in schools or TAFE we can facilitate greater understanding and cognizance in these areas it will assist students to find ways of adapting to Australian society, but not at the cost of their own cultural identity. These types of understandings are not the preserve of people of non-English-speaking background: culturally mainstream, monolingual native-English-speakers can acquire the requisite competencies. However, it is unfortunate that the potential contributions of Australians of non-English-speaking background in this regard are not fully available to our education system.

It is necessary to find out why teaching seems to be an unattractive career option for students of non-English-speaking background. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that relevant factors include migrants' expectations about the status and remuneration of their professional futures, and perceptions of the difficulties of entering a profession demanding high levels of English language proficiency. However, reliable and valid data about the factors bearing on the vocational decisions of students of non-English-speaking background are required.

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

In recent years efforts have been made to increase the diversity of the pre-service teacher intake. Alternative entry programs have been put in place, allowing students with lower levels of prior academic achievement into teacher education courses. It is crucial to know the representation of these students in the attrition statistics. Are these students over-represented? If so why? Is resourcing for learning support, English language support and so forth adequate to enable these non-traditional students to succeed? The challenges here go beyond the capacity of individual academics to spend extra time with individual students. Whole-of-Faculty plans should be in place to provide systematic support.

At the same time, it is worth considering students' perceptions of the place of teaching education in their career pathway. It is not unknown for students to 'use' teacher education courses as a stepping stone to the higher scores needed for entry into the course of their preference.

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

Teaching is being given increasing weight in academic promotion. The place of student evaluations of teaching, and of the scholarship of teaching, in promotion decisions is evidence of this, and to be encouraged. While there is public recognition of the necessity for student evaluations, the same cannot be said for the scholarship of teaching. Yet, both matter. It is important at this time that education academics'

efforts to investigate their teaching, and disseminate the results, be recognised as critical to their ongoing professional development and rewarded. One of the most promising trends in school systems during the 1990s was the engagement of teachers in action research projects in their own schools and classrooms. Teacher educators in universities need to be rewarded for turning their (typically well-developed) research skills to similar ends in universities.

Remuneration is a particularly challenging issue. In building the expertise required for university appointments, teachers often attain seniority in school systems and make significant personal and financial investments in educational qualifications. However, university pay scales are such that these teachers often take significant pay cuts (in the order of tens of thousands of dollars annually) on entering teacher education as associate lecturers and lecturers. Indeed, academics with many years of teaching experience in schools and multiple qualifications can find themselves earning little more than the graduates from their classes. The willingness of these individuals to accept these conditions attests to their commitment to Education. However, it needs to be considered whether this situation is in the interests of higher quality education. The levels of remuneration at the lower levels of the pay scales may be appropriate in other Faculties where beginning academics are young and do not have prior professional careers. But in a field like Education, where a prior career as a teacher is highly desirable, questions about the appropriateness of the financial rewards need to be considered.

***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.***

A strong research base is crucial for high quality teacher education. Two types of research are important: investigations into learning and teaching in schools on the one hand (some of the content of teacher education); and in teacher education courses on the other (the processes of teacher education).

In the case of ESL in schools, we draw the Inquiry's attention to a major US study (Thomas & Collier, 1997)\* showing that ESL students in the middle school typically fall further and further behind native English-speakers. Cumulative achievement gaps emerge even for students who might have progressed well during the early years. These gaps occur because native speakers continue to develop cognitively and linguistically. In other words, academic success is a moving target. To close the gap, ESL students' academic gains must outpace those of native speakers over a sustained period. For example, an initial 3 year gap in mathematics assessed in English will only be closed if the student makes one-and-a-half years' progress per year for six years.

One implication of the Thomas and Collier (1997) study is that skills in supporting ESL students must be incorporated into all teachers' education, not just the education of ESL specialists. Effective responses to linguistic and cultural diversity must be part of the philosophy of all teacher education. At the same time, it is essential that teacher education institutions continue to offer specialised courses for ESL specialist teachers and that these courses have streams devoted to ESL in schools.

\*Thomas, W.P. & Collier, V. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. The George Washington University Center for the Study of Language and Education.

With respect to teacher education, it is crucial that as much attention be accorded the pedagogic approach as the content. There has been considerable psychological and social psychological work on adult learning that is valuable in this regard. And in the field of sociology, there is an emerging body of international research building a case for ‘mixed pedagogy’ (e.g., Neves, Morais and Afonso, 2004)\*\* drawing on the strengths of both traditional and progressive pedagogy. Teacher educators should be encouraged to ground their work qua university teachers in the findings of such traditions. University promotion systems are one means to this end; qualifications in higher education teaching are another.

\*\* Neves, I., Morais, A. & Afonso, M. (2004), Teacher training contexts: study of specific sociological characteristics. In J. Muller, B. Davies and A. Morais (Eds.), *Reading Bernstein, Researching Bernstein* (pp. pp. 168—186). London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

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

As research on teacher knowledge bases has shown, content knowledge for teaching is very complex (e.g., Turner-Bisset, 2001)\*\*\*. In addition to disciplinary knowledge (such as might be the focus in other university faculty disciplines), content knowledge includes curriculum knowledge (e.g., knowledge of syllabuses and programs), and knowledge of how certain content is best represented so that it is accessible to particular groups of learners (e.g., the analogies, diagrams, simulations and so forth that ‘work’). The latter two types of content knowledge are strengths of Education Faculties. Partnerships between Education and other faculties might be valuable in some cases to tap deeply into all types of content knowledge. However, it is crucial that a balance be maintained amongst the types of content knowledge. An over-emphasis on discipline knowledge creates the problem of teachers who know a lot about their subject, but are unable to deliver that knowledge effectively.

\*\*\*Turner-Bisset, R. (2001). *Expert Teaching: Knowledge and Pedagogy to Lead the Profession*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

## **7. *Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:*** **i) *teach literacy and numeracy***

As ESL teachers we are concerned about the conflation of ‘ESL’ teaching and ‘literacy teaching’ in some current educational thinking, policy and funding decisions. ESL students typically score poorly on literacy tests in standard Australian English. While some of these children might have literacy problems, there are also difficulties arising from the fact that the children are working with the phonology, graphophonic relationships, meanings and pragmatics of a language that is not their strongest. While some of the responses to these difficulties might be similar to those of literacy teachers (e.g., explicit teaching of English language phonology), the thinking behind those responses needs to reflect the specificity of the capabilities ESL students bring to English literacy tasks. When literacy and ESL education are conflated this thinking

is at risk and there is a danger of viewing ESL students as ‘deficit’ rather than as learners working in an additional language.

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

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

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

The historical split between primary and secondary school in teacher education has been eroded considerably in recent years. There are moves in some university Education Faculties, at least, to re-organise courses in terms of the early years, the middle years and senior schooling. Given the research by Thomas & Collier cited above about the achievement gap that typically opens up for ESL students in the middle school, these developments are promising. The identification of middle schooling as a distinctive phase of learning provides a context within which teachers might be better educated to prevent the achievement gap. This would require issues of linguistic and cultural diversity to be infused into the very core of middle school teacher education.

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

Ongoing professional development is essential for all teachers. As a professional association we are dedicated to the professional development of ESL teachers and mainstream teachers with ESL interests. A major part of our mission is to conduct 4 professional development workshops annually and a bi-annual conference. These activities target identified needs of our membership and encourage effective teachers and researchers to share their insights with peers. If teacher professional development is to be made more systematic as a result of this Inquiry, it is important for activities such as ours to find a place within new structures. Voluntary participation in activities provided by teachers’ associations should be acknowledged as a legitimate form of professional development. Teachers should be rewarded for taking responsibility for their own professional development.

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