



Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia

From
Lutheran Education Australia

1.0 Introduction

The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) through Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) operates 83 primary and secondary schools, and 30 early childhood centres, educating some 30,000 students. Lutheran schools have been operating in Australia since 1839, and they have been important community and regional educational agencies in Australia for 165 years.

LEA represents Lutheran schools and systems nationally and is recognised by the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) as a national interest group in its own right. It works closely with the Independent Schools' Council Australia and consults regularly with other national bodies to promote the needs of its schools.

Profile of Lutheran schools

Whilst there have been Lutheran schools in Australia for 165 years, there has been particular growth in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as indicated in the following enrolment figures.

1967	3 592 students
1983	9 956 students
1993	18 285 students
2003	28 706 students
2004	29 887 students

The growth in Lutheran schools has been very much part of the growth of the non-government sector. This growth reflects the church's commitment to serving its people and the community, and about one quarter of the enrolments are Lutheran. Further modest growth is planned in response to community needs.

In 2004, 2488 staff were employed in Lutheran schools across Australia as follows:

SA	NT	VIC/TAS	NSW	WA	QLD	TOTAL
778	89	289	75	146	1111	2488

[Based on August 2004 census]

Lutheran Education Australia knows that the strength of its schools is its staff. It is staff that delivers quality education and it is its staff who ensure the identity of the Lutheran school and its unique contribution to Australian education.

2.0 Background to this submission

- 2.1 Lutheran Education Australia has an active interest in teacher education, for it shares a responsibility with the Australian Lutheran College for the preparation of teachers for Lutheran schools in all Australian states. Given the number of such

schools, the current requirements each year are up to 250 teachers, of whom up to 50 are graduates. Since Lutheran schools have their own particular culture and philosophical framework, its teacher education institution has negotiated arrangements with Flinders University in South Australia, the University of South Australia, and Australian Catholic University in Brisbane, Queensland, whereby teacher education students undertake, as part of their degree work, a 'Lutheran strand', which includes subjects such as The Christian Faith, The Practice of Lutheran Education, Principles and Context of Lutheran Schooling and The Bible Today.

2.2 This submission is framed around advice received in interviews with the following:

- State Directors of Lutheran Schools, based in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane
- Australian Lutheran College's Director of Educational Ministry Program, and Campus Coordinator, Lutheran Strand: Flinders University
- Head of Middle School, Tatchilla Lutheran College and university/school liaison person
- Head of Senior School, Concordia College, and university/school liaison person
- Head of Middle School, Immanuel College
- School Coordinator – Practicums: Immanuel College
- Principal: Immanuel College
- Advisor: Targeted Program Authority, South Australia, in Literacy and Numeracy
- Lecturer in Mathematics Education, University of South Australia: Magill Campus
- Lecturer in Primary/Middle School Education, University of South Australia, Mawson Lakes Campus
- Eight recent graduates, who undertook their pre-service education at different university Schools of Education

3.0 The current inquiry

- 3.1 LEA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into teacher education. It concurs with the view expressed by Ms M Goos, winner of the Social Sciences category of the Australian Awards for University teaching for 2004, when she says: "Since teachers are the most precious resource of any education system, they deserve careful nurturing during their pre-service course, and also in the early years of their careers when inexperience, stress, and attrition are highest" (*Professional Educator*, iv: 1, March 2005, p. 26).
- 3.2 In making this submission, LEA notes that the current inquiry is the latest in a series of national and state inquiries going back over a quarter of a century – from the Auchmuty Inquiry in 1980, the Dawkins reviews in the late eighties and early nineties, the Ebbeck of 1990, the Adey report of 1998, the Senate inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession *A Class Act* of 1998 to the 2003 review *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future*. While some of the needs in teacher education have been addressed, the current teacher education landscape is suffering from priority bypass, with the associated signs of resource neglect, loss of morale in Schools of Education, and trenchant criticisms from those who have undertaken their initial teacher education in recent years.
- 3.3 Given the range of recommendations and policy re-development that have been generated by these reviews, LEA stresses the importance of the articulation of the outcomes of this inquiry with those of earlier inquiries. In this way the transformative effect will be much more powerful and the process itself will have more credibility in a profession which is over-reviewed and suffering from the effects of cynicism and change fatigue. For example, this submission notes the

impressive work that was undertaken in the 2003 review: *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future*. With appropriate funding and strategic care in the implementation of its agenda for action, that review could contribute in a highly significant way to the quality of teacher education and, through that, to student engagement in learning and achievement. To repeat, this submission urges appropriate articulation of the outcomes of the current inquiry with the substantive work of preceding inquiries. Any high level limitations attributed to teacher education in the future will reflect a lack of commitment or will to reform rather than a lack of evidence or data or professional advice. The 'research capital' available to current authorities is substantial.

Recommendation 1:

That the inquiry take into consideration the findings of the significant material gathered through earlier inquiries relating to teacher education, and build on and utilise this knowledge base in developing its findings.

- 3.4 LEA regrets that the inquiry's Terms of Reference have not been supported with a paper defining the scope and issues central to the inquiry. Accordingly, we have focussed this submission on four items of the Terms of Reference:
- Terms of Reference # 7: Preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates
 - Terms of Reference # 8: The role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers
 - Terms of Reference # 9: The appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training
 - Terms of Reference # 11: Funding issues: University Schools of Education
- 3.5 The challenges facing teachers and, by implication, teacher educators, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century are enormous. Their work takes place against a background where the culture in which students are immersed is much more attractive than schooling. The decreasing interest in learning for its own sake, and the uncritical use of 'personal relevance' as a benchmark for all educational activities, will have an unintended consequence for the place of knowledge and understanding in the future. Brain research, and its implications for how students learn, will radically change the classroom of the future. The place, potential, and effect of ICT are not yet well understood or properly integrated into educational practice. Enhancing the extent to which students are able to engage confidently in future problem resolution and accommodate change in economic, ecological, and social landscapes can be regarded as a *sine qua non*.

With all of this in mind, it is important for this inquiry into teacher education, in its final report, to discard the term 'teacher training'. As a way of describing the essential preparation for teaching and on-going professional education, the words are grossly inadequate.

Recommendation 2:

In light of the complexity of issues involved in the preparation of teachers, the inquiry discard the term 'teacher training' in preference for 'teacher education'.

4.0 Terms of Reference #7 Preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates

- 4.1 All groups interviewed expressed concerns about the lack of preparedness of teachers whose background was a degree followed by a Graduate Diploma. Lack of experience in the classroom in earlier years of undergraduate study contributed substantively to problems of class management.
- 4.2 Concern was expressed about the low level of capability in the use of ICT in graduates coming from some universities and the extent to which it barely meets

minimal needs in the classroom. Reference was made to one study which demonstrated that the level of ICT knowledge was lower in graduates than in the average teacher.

- 4.3 The theory-practical divide drew strong criticism. Theoretical studies were perceived to be only loosely related to the realities of classroom teaching. They were often seen to be taught in the abstract, and recent graduates lamented the fact that practice did not inform the teaching of theoretical subjects, nor theory inform the act of teaching. Several interviewees noted that some lecturers were not familiar with what is required of teachers in the contemporary classroom, and showed a reluctance to engage with the realities of that particular learning context.
- 4.4 Some recent graduates reflected critically on university teaching methods: the large numbers in tutorials, and lost opportunities in tutorials to address the connection between theory taught at that School of Education and the experience gained at practicums; the curious discrepancy in a lecturer teaching a constructivist learning theory while using a didactic style pedagogy.
- 4.5 Educationists who contributed to this submission commented on the critical balance between developing specific skills and techniques in teaching and depth of subject knowledge. As one put it: *"It is vital that teachers are well-equipped in theoretical dimensions, and not simply reliant on a kitbag of techniques."*
- 4.6 It is important for pre-service courses to develop in teachers a positive disposition towards literacy and their role as teachers responsible for literacy across a range of contexts. Teachers who were consulted in the development of this submission noted instances where teacher education teachers were themselves deficient in writing skills.
- 4.7 Preference was expressed for a combined degree such as BA/BSc/BMus with a BEd taken over four years. The use of the term 'combined' rather than 'double' points to the need for planned integration with early involvement in some classroom observation and some teacher assistance.
- 4.8 Given the greater number of entrants involved in mid-career shifts, flexible tracking into the teaching profession through a graduate program needs further development, along with financial support for those requiring it.
- 4.9 Because of the complexity of the role of the teacher in an ever changing educational environment, too much should not be expected of teacher education. Teaching and learning belong to a continuum incorporating life-long learning and, therefore, it is recommended that teacher registration be dependent upon professional renewal on, say, a three-year cycle.

Recommendation 3:

That teacher education courses be reviewed nationally on a three-year cycle to ensure that they meet the changing needs of schools.

Recommendation 4:

That teacher registration be dependent upon professional renewal on a three-year cycle.

5.0 Terms of Reference #8: The role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers

- 5.1 Since the value of close cooperation between university Schools of Education and school communities is uncontested, the task is to find ways of enhancing the role and input, and to build on the high level of service that schools provide.

5.2 Schools of Education frequently find difficulty in the placement of teacher education students in schools. There are schools with good reputations that are unwilling to take practicum placements, which fact overburdens participating schools. This is largely an industrial matter, where responsibility for placements is an additional load for busy and, in some instances, overworked teachers. The payment by universities to supervising teachers bears little relationship to the time involved and is, in fact, a disincentive. This needs immediate attention. Schools need supplementation grants that enable their administrations to negotiate a fraction of time built into the workload of selected practicum supervisors for this responsibility. Unless a broad range of schools can enter into a cooperative arrangement with universities, the all-important practicum is barely sustainable.

5.3 Recent graduates interviewed for purposes of this submission argued strongly for the following:

- Increased practicum time in schools
- The need for mentor teacher supervisors to meet criteria for this responsibility. They cited some instances of being assigned to teachers who were disillusioned, negative, unwilling and uninterested in trainees.
- The indisputably positive effect of supervising teachers who were committed to best practice, supportive, highly effective in the classroom and encouraging of teacher education students
- Early exposure to the classroom, with proper debriefing from the supervising teacher to help address the problem of attrition. According to this reasoning, it is beneficial for all parties if it can be determined at an early date whether the potential teacher is suited to a career in schools.
- Longer periods in schools of an intern kind, so that teacher education students can experience the full cycle of school events, including assessment and reporting, parent-teacher meetings, and staff professional development programs
- More support in developing behaviour management skills.

5.4 Various models of close school-university partnerships are in evidence around Australia, and this submission assumes that the inquiry will research practice in those models of teacher education. Particular attention might well be given to pre-service programs of recent origin in Queensland, that have been developed collaboratively by Schools of Education staff and school-based personnel, with some academic subjects being taken both at school and on campus.

Recommendation 5:

Because of the vital importance of school-university partnerships in the preparation of teachers, best practice 'school-university partnerships' be identified and implemented.

6.0 Terms of Reference #9 The appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training

The two-tier division of education in most schools around Australia is, understandably, reflected in the split between primary and secondary teacher education. In schools in the Lutheran network, as is the case in other independent schools, there are many which are P-12 institutions. Many of these have a three-tier structure, with primary, middle and senior secondary specialisation. Some have early learning centres as well.

In this light, it is suggested that teacher education is reconceptualised so that different stages of the learning continuum and their teaching-learning requirements are supported with the appropriate courses.

Recommendation 6:

That teacher education be reconceptualised so that different stages of the learning continuum are supported by appropriate courses.

7.0 Terms of Reference # 11: Funding Issues: University Schools of Education

- 7.1 Discussions with lecturers in education identify institutional prioritisation of vocational courses as the source of one important set of problems. One interviewee described education as belonging to a zone in which programs are regarded as fillers – as ‘add-ons’ to the more highly valued courses. To illustrate, in a certain university education programs are funded at a lower level than human movement, hospitality, and tourism. In another case, the School of Education employs only one full-time lecturer for Maths education in respect of students intending to become primary teachers. She has a part-time assistant to manage maths resources, and three part-time casual staff members. She cannot take sabbatical leave, because there is no one available as a replacement. In a third instance, given the pressure on lecturers, the School of Education outsources the supervision of practicums. This arrangement has only limited effectiveness, for in it there is an absence of ongoing working relationships between teacher education students and the supervisors of practicums, as well as a disjunction between the teaching/learning processes at the School of Education and the supervision of practicums. In these circumstances, it is less likely that theory and practice will work together in the development of the craft of teaching.
- 7.2 One solution to this is for the Australian government to offer targeted funding for teacher education, with accompanying funding guidelines and accountability requirements to ensure that funding is deployed in the way intended. Huge responsibilities rest on the shoulders of teachers – including those identified in *Australia’s Teachers – Australia’s Future*:

“Quality teachers make a difference. They are the single most important determinant of student achievement, making a significant and lasting impression on all our lives.” (*Australia’s Teachers – Australia’s Future – An Agenda for Action*, p.1)

Given this, the way current priorities in departmental funding disadvantage initial teacher education requires immediate redress.

Recommendation 7:

That the Australian government take steps to ensure adequate funding of university teacher education, possibly through targeted funding with appropriate accountability.

- 7.3 Lutheran Education Australia brings to the attention of the inquiry an equity issue in the provision of teacher education in Australia. Lutheran schools are part of the diversity of Australian education represented by the non-government sector, which provides Australian parents with choice in education. This diversity is possible because of staff who understand the special ethos of such faith-based and special character schools. Accordingly, there needs to be greater flexibility of funding teacher education to allow private providers of higher education to better prepare teachers for the growing plurality of Australian education and the multi-faith nature of Australian society. Such flexibility of funding would allow private providers, like Australian Lutheran College, to prepare teachers more effectively for schools in the growing non-government sector.

Recommendation 8:

That the preparation of teachers for the diversity of Australian education be recognised in the provision of funding for teacher education courses.

8.0 Conclusion

This inquiry comes at a time when the demographics of the teaching profession will change as those in the 55 years or older category (10.1% - 2003) and those in the 45-54 years category (33.3% - 2003) retire and a replenishment takes place. The scope of this shift underscores the onus on the Australian Council of Deans of Education, the Commonwealth Quality Teacher Program, the university Schools of Education, private higher education providers and other professional associations to ensure that the outcomes of this inquiry equip teachers to meet the ever-increasing demands and expectations made of them, and enable them to enjoy the professional status that is their due.

To repeat, the issues requiring to be addressed in teacher education have clearly been identified by previous inquiries and this inquiry has contributed to the research base. Any high level limitations attributed to teacher education in the future will, therefore, reflect a lack of commitment or will to reform rather than a lack of evidence or data or professional advice.

9.0 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That the inquiry take into consideration the findings of the significant material gathered through earlier inquiries relating to teacher education, and build and utilise this knowledge base in developing its findings.

Recommendation 2:

In light of the complexity of issues involved in the preparation of teachers, the inquiry discard the term 'teacher training' in preference for 'teacher education'.

Recommendation 3:

That teacher education courses be reviewed nationally on a three-year cycle to ensure that they meet the changing needs of schools.

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That teacher registration be dependent upon professional renewal on a three-year cycle.

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Recommendation 6:

That teacher education be reconceptualised so that different stages of the learning continuum are supported by appropriate courses.

Recommendation 7:

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