



Department of Education and Training
Government of Western Australia

Submission 156

TE Inquiry

Your ref:

Our ref: DO05/175746

Enquiries:

Ms Gillian Could
Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Could

Please find attached a submission from the Department of Education and Training Western Australia regarding the national inquiry into teacher education.

The Department has an obligation to providing quality educational outcomes for all public school students irrespective of their social backgrounds, economic circumstances and locations. The Department recognises that competent and dedicated teachers are essential to the learning and achievement of students and is keen to ensure that teachers entering its service have the capability of providing quality teaching and learning experiences for all children.

As the principal employer of teachers in Western Australia, the Department receives applications for teaching positions from three-quarters of graduates in each year and in 2004 over 700 graduate teachers were employed. The Department welcomes the opportunity to provide input into an inquiry examining issues that are so important to its successful operations.

I trust that this submission will assist in progressing this inquiry. If you require any further information please contact Ms Claire Williams, A/Manager, Workforce Planning. Ms Williams can be contacted on (08) 9264 5088.

Yours sincerely

PAUL ALBERT
DIRECTOR GENERAL

08 SEP 2005

Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training

Inquiry into teacher education

Submission by

The Department of Education and Training Western Australia

To examine the preparedness of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia's schools

Context

The Department of Education and Training is Western Australia's largest employer with approximately 28 000 full-time equivalent staff, of whom approximately 18 200 are teachers. Teachers are employed in nearly 900 worksites across the state ranging from large metropolitan schools to schools in rural and remote communities.

The Department is committed to ensuring that its students achieve the highest standards of learning possible and is in the process of enhancing many aspects of the public education and training system. In line with Government priorities, the Department is implementing strategies aimed at:

- improving literacy and numeracy;
- retaining more students in school or training;
- providing better learning environments; and
- raising the status and standards of teachers.

In addressing such priorities the Department recognises the contribution of motivated and capable teachers and school leaders is fundamental to achieving success. The Department must ensure that within a context of an ageing workforce, significant changes in education priorities and the risk of supply shortages in some areas of learning and locations that students have access to quality teaching and learning experiences. The availability of highly skilled and capable graduate teachers is of considerable interest to the Department.

Quality of pre service training

The reality of teaching causes new graduates most concern on the job. New teachers are confronted with the complexities and demands of the role, particularly in dealing with behavioural issues and large numbers of students with special requirements.

Feedback from graduates indicates that the strongest aspects of teacher training programs relate to the teaching process. They identify the need for more information about what to expect in the early years on the job and inclusion of more courses on managing student behaviour, assessment and reporting, inclusivity and communication with parents.

The delivery of course material in universities and the rigor with which courses are assessed against the knowledge, skills, attributes and commitment which the profession and the Department deem are required for teaching needs some further examination. In particular, the key elements of literacy, numeracy, inclusivity and indigenous education need review both in terms of the course structures universities provide and how well graduates are prepared to teach in these areas.

Within this context it is recommended that the development of teacher training programs reflect the *Competency Framework for Teachers* which explicitly states the desired outcomes of teacher training and the knowledge, skills, attributes and commitment which the profession and the Department deem are required for teaching.

The *Competency Framework for Teachers* provides a solid framework for examining some of the issues which are covered by the terms of reference, most significantly the areas of satisfactory teacher training and performance during practicums. Issues such as classroom management and student teachers' ability to deal with varying educational needs are quantitatively assessable, based on expected competencies in the *Framework*.

Ongoing program evaluation is extremely important in the refinement and development of any process. An evaluation of the one year teacher training course focussing on how Graduate Diploma and Bachelor of Education students cope as teachers would be useful.

Further consideration needs to be given to extending the current one year teacher training Graduate Diploma of Education program to two years. There are concerns about the level of pedagogical and technical skills acquired in 12 months. This has been highlighted in Graduate Diploma students in the Design and Technology unit where it has been found that the Graduate Diploma program does not provide sufficient experience to cope with teaching all aspects of Design and Technology after just 12 months, particularly related to safety for students using relevant equipment.

The extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences

A process to help prospective students determine whether teaching is the right career for them would help to ensure that highly motivated and dedicated applicants are attracted and retained in the profession. This would require the identification of particular attributes that potential teachers should have before considering enrolling in teacher education course. It is important that universities are aware of graduate teachers who are not suitably prepared for teaching and take appropriate action.

Currently, applicants applying for the Graduate Diploma in Education are only asked to identify the reasons why they have decided to become teachers and details of academic results from undergraduate degrees.

Experience has shown that in some instances, Graduate Diploma in Education students who have exemplary academic results in previous studies and have been very successful in their jobs may have limited aptitude for teaching.

This has resulted in students studying a Graduate Diploma withdrawing from their course after their practicum because they found that teaching was not for them, or it was not what they thought it would be. An opportunity for Graduate Diploma in Education students to experience a classroom situation near the commencement of the course would enable students to determine at an early stage if they are suited to teaching.

Although the labour market for teachers in WA is currently broadly in balance there are predicted shortages of highly qualified teachers in some disciplines and some rural and remote schools for the next ten years. The shortage in some learning areas has required the Department to place teachers into vacancies that they are not necessarily qualified to teach.

The Department is responding to the need to attract highly talented and motivated people to teaching in learning areas of need and for rural areas, by awarding final year teaching scholarships to the value of up to the \$40 000 per annum. Scholarship areas of need for 2006 are mathematics, physical sciences, home economics, design and technology, Indonesian, Japanese and Italian.

There needs to be further examination of these types of incentives, in particular funding arrangements. The Commonwealth does provide funding for scholarships in mathematics and physical sciences. However, qualifying FBT conditions for funding can be difficult to meet and may restrict the number of applicants accessing the program. In addition, universities need to ensure that they are providing sufficient places in learning areas of need.

Teacher practicum

Practicums have been described by many teachers as the most important aspect of teacher training. Current practicums in Western Australia range in length from 6 to 36 weeks, depending on the institution and the course of study.

The practicum for Graduate Diploma students can be a cause for concern for graduates and the Department. The current one year Graduate Diploma lacks the intensive and comprehensive level of in-school assessment and practice provided in the Bachelor of Education program. A close examination of the impact of the short period of teacher training provided in the Graduate Diploma is warranted.

The methods used by universities for assessing students during and after practicums is an issue that needs review. It is imperative that students who do meet the school-based portion of their training, and who may not be particularly well suited to teaching, receive appropriate counselling and career guidance. It is recommended that the assessment process for practicums is based on professional requirements related to knowledge, practice or attitudes which are competency based and explicitly stated.

The majority of the Department's teaching vacancies are in rural locations. Graduates are often unwilling to work in rural areas and when willing to do so are sometimes not well prepared for what they find in such locations. It is important concerted efforts are made to expose students to real school environments such as those found in rural and regional parts of Western Australia.

The Department's Student Teacher Rural Experience Program (STREP) aims to encourage more final year teaching students to experience country teaching in a supported teaching practice. Students are paid a stipend between \$100 to \$140 per week, depending on the location, towards living costs for the duration of the practicum and funds to assist with travel costs to and from the rural school. The Universities, through practice coordinators, facilitate student teacher rural placements. This program has resulted in increased numbers of student teachers completing long-term practicums in rural locations with a subsequent increase in teacher graduates applying for rural postings. The provision of additional financial support to enable expansion of this program is worthy of consideration.

The level of involvement of the practicum coordinators needs to be clarified. The practicum coordinators play a significant role in the teacher training program. There is, however, concern expressed that university staff such as practicum coordinators are not always aware of their responsibilities in the practicum process or proactive enough in organising practicums for their students. The Department holds regular meetings with the Deans of Education of the various universities at which such issues are addressed. In addition, a set of guidelines that elaborates the functions and responsibilities of the practicum coordinator would assist all parties involved.

There needs to be further consideration about the payment of practicum supervising staff both in school and in the teacher education institutions. With the additional work involved, some incentives and allowances would seem appropriate. Professional development should also be offered to all staff involved in the practicum to ensure they are fully versed in the development and assessment documentation, processes and policies.

Role and input of schools and staff to the preparation of trainee teachers

The practicum is a key part of teacher education. Professional delivery of the practicum process by all parties involved is of critical importance to the development of the student and their appreciation of teaching as a career.

Successful practicums rely on many factors including quality supervision in schools. Schools and school staff play a significant role in ensuring that student teachers are supported in their efforts in applying their theoretical knowledge in practice.

The Department encourages staff to participate in practicum programs. There are, however, a number of improvements that could enhance the effectiveness of the practicum. These include:

- selection of supervisors based on skills and understandings of the role rather than convenience;
- provision of training for supervisors;
- clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of supervisors;
- articulation of assessment procedures; and
- more involvement of teacher educators in the practicums.

The Student Teacher Rural Experience Program is an example of strategies that could be explored further as means of providing prospective teachers with a great opportunity to experience teaching in a rural setting and enhancing prospects of securing a teaching appointment.

The Department's commitment in supporting trainee teachers is highlighted in the *Government School Teachers' and School Administrators' Certified Agreement 2004* that introduces a new Senior Teacher classification. Senior Teachers are required to be actively involved as classroom supervisors and mentors for student teachers.

An area that could be explored is the introduction of a teacher internship program that combines professional education studies and teaching experience. This would enable students to benefit from experiences of practising teachers and allow the application of teaching methodologies in a supportive arrangement. Such a program would require more intensive school - university partnerships that would involve both schools and universities playing key roles in developing graduate teachers. Such a proposal would need to consider the impact of a potential need to extend the duration of the teacher training courses.

The Department has established an on-line support program designed specifically to meet the needs of graduate and new teachers, especially those in rural and remote locations. Providing final-year teacher training students access to the program is currently being examined. The link to the on-line support is <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/olps>.