

## Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into Teacher Education

### Preparing for Teaching in a National Profession

1. Teaching Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important national inquiry and to demonstrate its commitment to strengthening the quality of teaching in Australia by improving the quality of teacher education.
2. There are many factors that influence quality teaching and teacher preparation is only one part of this. However Teaching Australia has no doubt that any attempt to strengthen teacher preparation will have a positive effect on quality teaching in schools, which in turn will improve student learning.
3. The active involvement of the whole profession is essential if significant positive change is to occur. The recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report 'Teachers Matter' is about teachers – their preparation, recruitment and careers. A recurring theme in the report is the importance of teacher engagement: "Teachers need to be very active agents in analysing their own practice in light of professional standards and their own students' progress in the light of standards for student learning" (2005, p.11).
4. Consistent with this view, the Australian Government decided to support the establishment and on-going operation of Teaching Australia as a national body for the Teaching Profession, "to enhance the status, quality and professionalism of teachers and school leaders throughout Australia for the benefit of all Australians"<sup>1</sup>. The Government's intention was clearly that although Teaching Australia was to be a Commonwealth owned company, the organisation should be conducted "to that end ... by teachers and school leaders"<sup>2</sup>.
5. This focus on the leadership, management and operation of Teaching Australia by members of the profession aligns closely with the OECD's statement regarding the importance of providing "critically, a mechanism for profession-led standard setting and quality assurance in *teacher education*, teacher induction, teacher performance and career development ... to obtain for teaching the combination of professional autonomy and public accountability that has long characterised other professions such as medicine, engineering and law" (OECD, 2005, p. 216 – *our emphasis*).

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching Australia constitution, Rule 1

<sup>2</sup> Teaching Australia constitution, Rule 1

6. Australia's teachers are acknowledged as achieving excellent learning outcomes for students in schools. Australian students continue to perform well compared on international benchmarks with students from other, similar economies. For example, OECD research indicates that Australian students are performing well compared with other countries. The OECD has assessed the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy skills of 15-year-old students on a three-year cycle.

7. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses how well students are equipped to participate as adults in our rapidly changing world, and enables countries to benchmark the effectiveness of their education in preparing young people for life beyond school. Australia was outperformed by only four countries in mathematical literacy (Hong Kong-China, Finland, Korea, and the Netherlands); by only one country in reading (Finland); and only four countries in scientific literacy (Finland, Japan, Hong Kong-China, and Korea). Australian students achieved mean scores significantly above the OECD average in all four assessment areas.

8. Forty-one countries participated in PISA 2003 including all OECD countries and 11 non-OECD or 'partner' countries. Although Australian students have performed exceptionally well by international standards, the teaching profession is concerned about the small but significant number of students, often from remote parts of the country, who are struggling to achieve the desired levels. The pre-service preparation of teachers contributes to the high quality of teaching required to attain these results but more needs to be done if the lower performing students are to improve their level of achievement.

9. Even so, in the competitive and changing international context, we cannot be complacent about quality teaching and must continuously seek to strengthen all contributing factors. Teaching Australia is actively involved in this work with other stakeholders and agencies, in particular with:

- a national charter for the profession;
- national accreditation of pre-service teacher education;
- professional standards for accomplished teachers and for school leaders; and
- supporting the entry to the profession of beginning teachers.

10. Teaching Australia, however, plays only a small part in this enterprise. It is important that the entire education community works with the profession - teachers and school leaders – in the interests of continuing to strengthen the quality of teaching and student learning.

### ***Who is Teaching Australia?***

11. Teaching Australia – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is the national body for the teaching profession, established in 2005 by the Australian Government, supporting and advancing the profession for the benefit of all Australians. Teaching Australia's focus is the profession as a whole, embracing the professional practice of teaching and school leadership in all settings, sectors and jurisdictions.

12. The Institute seeks to build the standing of the profession by developing a common sense of professional identity and unity of professional purpose, by sharing professional knowledge and by sustaining professionalism. Other important aims are to build links between the profession and the community and to give the profession a stronger influence in education policy-making.

13. Teaching Australia's role is to:

- support and advance the **quality of teaching and leadership**
- strengthen and advance the **standing of the profession**
- develop as the **national body for the teaching profession**

In delivering on these objectives, Teaching Australia will operate openly, collaboratively, efficiently and ethically.

14. Teaching Australia initiates and supports work in the areas of pre-service teacher preparation, professional standards, professional learning, research and promotion of the profession. All of these functions will help to improve the quality of teaching and teacher education.

#### ***What is Teaching Australia doing?***

15. A key outcome of Teaching Australia's work will be strengthening the capacity of the teaching profession. Teachers and school leaders will be better prepared and supported to deliver quality teaching and school leadership through strong professionalism, professional standards and professional learning.

16. Improvements in the quality of teaching and school leadership will impact on the effectiveness of schools and student learning. Quality schooling helps young people develop their individual capabilities and lays the foundation for social and economic well-being. It contributes ultimately to national social and economic prosperity. The quality of teaching and school leadership is the most critical element in quality schooling.

17. Teaching Australia will raise the status and standing of the teaching profession. Both the community's perception and teachers' own views of the standing of the profession have an important impact on its attractiveness, on retaining staff and on preparing future school leaders.

18. Teaching Australia will be a channel for the profession to be involved in and influence key education policy directions. Informed by practice, evidence and research findings, the profession can engage actively in shaping education policy directions and investment decisions to the benefit of student learning outcomes.

#### **Charter for the teaching profession**

19. Teaching Australia believes that the teaching profession will benefit from a charter that will be a unifying set of commitments and understandings of the profession for itself and the community. The charter affirms the principles that guide members of the teaching profession as we serve the community.

20. Teaching Australia is planning extensive consultation with the profession on the development of a charter for teaching. The purpose is to strengthen the teaching profession through a statement of what it means to be part of this key profession.

21. The aim is for the charter to serve as a unifying set of commitments and understandings about teaching, reflecting the ideals and dedication to the public good that teachers hold in common and conveying the complexity of the practice of teaching. The charter will be a high-level statement of what teachers collectively believe, value, know and do, and will affirm the principles that underpin the practice of teaching.

### **Accreditation of Pre-Service Teacher Education**

22. Teaching Australia acknowledges the importance of quality teacher preparation. From its inception, the Institute has been active in the promotion and development of and advocacy for teacher education as a profession-building activity. This is a major part of Teaching Australia's work program, and will continue to command a high priority.

23. A national accreditation system has the potential to lift both the quality of teacher preparation and the quality of teaching, and hence the status of teaching and the credibility of the profession. Ownership of such a national system by the profession itself through the national profession body would provide a much-needed rise in the profession's self-image and in consequence, its standing in the wider community. Such a national accreditation system would be voluntary taking into account and complementing existing state based course approval arrangements.

### **Background**

24. Teaching Australia aims to improve the quality of teacher preparation by developing a national system for the accreditation of teacher preparation programs. The Institute believes that the pre-service preparation of teachers represents the foundation of the teaching profession. A national system of accreditation of preparation facilitates national standards and identity for the profession.

25. Teaching Australia has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to review and evaluate current policies and practices for the approval of pre-service teacher education programs in Australia and overseas and to identify key issues in designing a national accreditation system. The Institute believes it is important that a national accreditation system be based on evidence of best practice, obtained through exploring and synthesising a range of approaches and models.

26. Teaching Australia will develop a discussion paper based on ACER's work, which will outline a possible framework. The views of universities and the profession as a whole will then be sought on the proposed framework. The discussion paper and consultation process will begin in mid 2006.

## Implications

27. It is too early to draw implications from the research being undertaken by ACER. However in a recently completed scan of research findings conducted for Teaching Australia, Watson (2005) found that documentation of the US experience 'confirms that teachers who meet the minimum entry standards for registration are more effective (in terms of producing student learning outcomes) than teachers who do not meet the standard but are permitted to teach' (p.32). Teaching Australia's interest lies in the preparation programs undertaken and the qualifications and skills of teachers. Teacher registration lies outside the ambit of Teaching Australia. Watson's finding also reminds us of the close relationship between pre-service teacher education programs and qualifications on the one hand and professional standards for admission to the profession on the other.

28. This research provides evidence that a national accreditation system can have an impact on the quality of teaching. Other countries have a national accreditation system for teacher education courses. Most professions within Australia also have a national system of accreditation. Currently Australia has no national system for accrediting teacher preparation although most of the states have their own system of accreditation or are working towards one.

29. For many professions in Australia the responsibility for national systems of accreditation of initial preparation programs lies with the national professional bodies for those professions. For example, for the engineering profession in Australia, the accreditation role has for many years been the responsibility of Engineers Australia. Consideration of engineering programs for accreditation is at the request of the specific educational institution and is not obligatory, and state registration authorities recognise Engineers Australia for the purpose of statutory registration of professional engineers.

30. Teaching Australia does not wish to duplicate work already done by the states but believes that a voluntary system that takes account of and complements existing state based course approval arrangements is extremely desirable. A national system would enable teachers to move more freely from state to state during their careers. It would also assist prospective employers in assessing a teacher's level of competence, regardless of where they completed their training. There are also significant advantages in a national accreditation system for universities with campuses in different jurisdictions. Indeed, most universities now find that significant numbers of their graduates obtain employment outside their own state. A national system would also raise the opportunity for the establishment of international mutual recognition arrangements.

31. Input from universities and the profession will be crucial in designing a framework for accreditation of teacher preparation. Teaching Australia intends to embark on a wide national consultation process so that any national system developed meets the needs and expectations of the major stakeholders.

## Proposed Way Forward

32. Teaching Australia believes that a national system of accreditation of pre-service teacher preparation programs will have many benefits and will greatly assist in strengthening both the quality and the consistency of teacher education in Australia. Further, Teaching Australia acknowledges the Australian Government's demonstration of its confidence in the profession through the establishment of the Institute and believes it is the appropriate body to be responsible for the development and implementation of a national system of accreditation.

33. While the design and development of a national system of accreditation are within the current work plan and budget of Teaching Australia, there are significant resource implications for sustainable implementation.

34. Some state and territory based agencies have statutory responsibility for such accreditation in their jurisdiction. In developing a national system, care must be taken for it not to be duplicative, that it adds value, and its implementation is of benefit in all jurisdictions. To achieve this will require a high degree of consultation and co-operation with the agencies and authorities involved.

## **Partnerships between schools and universities**

### Background

35. Many submissions to this Inquiry have identified quality and suitability of initial teacher preparation as critical issues. Perceived shortcomings include gaps in the curriculum, inadequate grounding in many of the professional and practical aspects of teaching and the need for more input from the profession. More effective partnerships between schools and universities should provide improvement in these areas.

36. In her scan of research on quality teaching and school leadership, Watson (2005) reported that the "best way to improve skills in teaching and learning is through more extensive professional experiences in schools". However Watson also found that "pre-service teachers must also integrate their practical knowledge with theoretical insights about teaching and learning" (p.19). There needs to be a balance between university-based and workplace-based learning, and the two need to be closely linked and supportive of each other. It is not necessarily how much time is spent in school-based professional experience that is important, but the nature and quality of the learning that occurs there.

37. Too often in the past, professional or field experience has been seen simply as an opportunity for student teachers to practise what they have learnt in their lectures and tutorials, instead of a real opportunity for learning that creates powerful links between theoretical and procedural knowledge. For the full benefit of these learning opportunities to be realised, there must be a strong partnership between schools and teacher education providers. Student teachers make valuable contributions to the schools in which they undertake their professional experience placements, and many schools acknowledge that their presence is a benefit.

## Implications

38. To strengthen the relationship between schools and universities is vital. The key is to find ways for teacher educators to be more involved in the practice of teaching, and for practising teachers to be more involved in course delivery and research in universities. These are characteristics of school and university partnership arrangements generally known internationally as “Professional Development Schools”, which provide opportunities for:

- improved professional learning in teacher education and professional development for teachers;
- improved school student learning outcomes; and
- the development of useful knowledge about teaching<sup>3</sup>.

39. Changing field experience or the practicum and pre-service teacher preparation alone are unlikely to produce short-term change in schools. However, there is evidence that the development of strong and effective school and university partnerships does lead to improvement in the quality of teaching and in better learning outcomes for school students. Recently announced substantial increases in government funding for clinical placements for nursing students indicate the government’s acknowledgement of the importance of such experiences in professional preparation, and Teaching Australia would welcome similar recognition and support for field experience in teacher education.

40. A paper prepared for Teaching Australia by Dr Vivian Evers (2005) identified characteristics of quality practice within the practicum components of pre-service teacher preparation programs and a set of draft guidelines has been developed for this purpose (attached). This work will be taken into account by Teaching Australia in developing a national system of accreditation.

41. The paper identified a need for much stronger connections between schools/systems and the higher education institutions in planning, implementing and supporting practicum activities.

42. Teaching Australia sees considerable benefit in supporting best practice in professional learning by funding some pilot projects that focus on better links between schools and universities. Pilot projects will provide opportunities to trial some innovative approaches to school – higher education provider partnerships. They will identify critical resource and other implications for successful, sustainable partnerships to work.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). (2001). *Standards for Professional Development Schools*. Accessed 19 April 2006 at <http://www.ncate.org/documents/pdsStandards.pdf>

## Proposed Way Forward

43. Teaching Australia has a real interest in the development of stronger and more effective partnerships between schools and universities, and will encourage all stakeholders to work towards developing these partnerships.

44. Teaching Australia is aware of the resource implications of conducting its pilot projects on school and higher education provider partnerships and of developing the sustainability of this partnership work. In particular this will involve supporting schools and universities in planning and implementing rigorous, committed partnership arrangements that increase the authenticity of professional learning for student teachers, for current teachers, and for the teacher educators themselves.

## **Professional Standards**

### Background

45. Teaching Australia recognises the important role professional standards play in raising the standing and status of a profession. The Directors of Teaching Australia have recently released a position statement on standards (attached) which sets the scene for the teaching profession to develop these across the country in all jurisdictions, sectors, specialisations and levels of schooling. The statement sets out the reasons why the development of national professional standards is so important.

### Implications

46. This interest in standards is based on the strong view that they play an important unifying role for a profession, raising its status and public esteem. Transparent professional standards are the foundation for public confidence. As set out in the statement, Teaching Australia believes that national professional standards for teachers and school leaders, defined by the profession, would serve three important purposes; they would:

- a. provide inspiration to aspiring teachers and principals, clarifying the expectations of the profession about the practice of our most accomplished members;
- b. offer guidance to members of the profession seeking to improve their professional practice through self-reflection, professional learning and other methods of personal development; and
- c. increase public recognition of the quality of the profession and understanding of the complexity and rigour of the work of teachers and principals.

47. In working with the profession in the development of standards, Teaching Australia recognises that we are not starting from a blank page. There has been considerable activity both within the profession and by employers in the area of standards and much ongoing work through the state teacher registration and accreditation authorities.



48. Our intention is to build on existing work and to bring the profession together to develop systems of standards that will provide a context for ongoing professional conversations about future practice relevant to changing student needs. We believe these will serve a different purpose from standards developed by employers, including those developed with significant professional involvement. The underpinning reason for standards in a profession is the improvement of practice. We also consider ownership, by teachers of standards through being responsible for their development 'by the profession for the profession' as essential to build commitment to the standards and to the professional values and principles that underpin them.

49. Our particular interest currently is in standards for highly accomplished teaching and for school leadership. Our contribution to minimum standards will come through our work on a national system of accreditation for pre-service teacher preparation

50. Our initial work has been directed at collecting evidence about national and international developments in systems of standards that are now in place. We commissioned ACER to undertake this research and are expecting to release two reports from ACER in July this year. We have also initiated discussions with the profession in a conference on advanced teaching standards held in August 2005 and a forum on school leadership standards in November 2005.

51. Our next step is to draw on the views of the profession and review the ACER research in order to produce a first paper for open discussion in the profession outlining ways forward to develop national professional standards. We expect through this process to bring together teachers and principals throughout Australia to define and develop standards for accomplished teaching and school leadership.

52. We would expect the discussion paper to be ready for release late in 2006 and to begin consultations with the profession early in 2007, with a view to having systems of standards developed and used by the profession within a few years.

### Proposed Way Forward

53. It is widely acknowledged that professional standards form the basis for a clear and strong professional identity and purpose, and a foundation for excellence in teaching and in teacher education. As the national body charged with building a national teaching profession, Teaching Australia will work with the profession to develop national professional standards which serve these purposes.

54. Professional standards will have a central role in the national accreditation of teacher preparation programs. By articulating the knowledge, skills and disposition needed for teaching, national professional standards will provide a soundly based framework that can be used in a national system of accreditation.

## Ongoing Professional Learning

### Background

55. Teaching Australia acknowledges that the quality of teaching is not determined by pre-service teacher preparation alone. Teachers' professional learning is an articulated process that proceeds through pre-service preparation, induction in to the profession as a beginning teacher, and career-long on-going professional learning. Thus high quality on-going professional learning is vital to the development of a quality teaching profession.

### Implications

56. Teaching Australia is committed to the importance of focussing on the future rather than on the past, using the resources provided by technological developments to capitalise and expand on opportunities that arise. These technological developments and the social change accompanying them also present challenges to policy and practice in teacher education as well as in all other fields.

57. Teaching Australia supported a national research project, Leadership and Learning with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) conducted in 2005 by Kathryn Moyle from the University of Canberra. The research explores how school leadership can best support the use of ICT in schools. It looks specifically at models of school leadership within Australia and overseas that support teaching and learning using ICT as well as how professional learning can help school leaders to support ICT use in their schools.

58. The research also addresses questions about quality in the use of ICT in schools to improve student learning outcomes and opportunities. The research brings together theory and practice to make the connections between school leadership models, school change, teaching and learning that includes ICT, and students' learning outcomes. The report of this research will become available on the Teaching Australia website (<http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au>).

59. The Institute is providing national leadership in several projects providing exemplary ongoing professional learning to teachers and school leaders. *Leading Australia's Schools*, *Open Book Scenarios: Teaching for Uncertain Futures*, *Promoting Professional Learning*, and *Professional Learning Using Mathematics Standards* are examples of such activities, additional details of which may be found on Teaching Australia's website.

60. In a submission to the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts (see attached), Teaching Australia has supported the introduction of a dedicated Australian digital education channel. Such a channel would provide many opportunities for school communities, including greater opportunities for the development and sustainability of ongoing professional learning for teachers.

## Proposed Way Forward

61. It is important that Teaching Australia continue to be forward looking, especially in regard to the ongoing professional requirements of teachers and teaching. Changing community needs and technological developments will continue to provide both opportunities and challenges, and Teaching Australia needs to be equipped to provide exemplary opportunities for teachers and school leaders to develop and exercise their capacities as life-long learners.

## **Centre for Pedagogy**

### Background

62. Teaching Australia recognises the central role that teachers and their work play in the achievement of school students' learning. This work is based on a combination of content knowledge and pedagogic skills. By comparison with many other professions, for example the health professions, there is very little investment in Australia in developing our knowledge about the nature of the work involved in successful teaching practices – the pedagogical knowledge and skill that is the basis of highly successful student learning.

63. Teaching Australia intends to explore options for the establishment of a National Centre for Pedagogy. A feasibility study will be undertaken and if the project proceeds Teaching Australia will be calling for proposals from appropriate bodies to establish such a Centre.

### Implications

64. There is insufficient hard evidence about the most effective pedagogies for teacher preparation. For this reason there would be value in establishing a national centre to support teachers in gaining pedagogical knowledge across different phases of their careers.

65. Functions of a national centre could include research into the nature of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of particular teaching strategies. It could address gaps in the research and facilitate school and university collaboration on educational change.

66. The existence of such a centre might also help address the 'brain drain' of talented educational researchers from Australia, and enhance the status of teacher education within universities by providing a clinical base for teaching.

67. Teaching Australia believes there is value in exploring the feasibility of establishing a National Centre for Pedagogy as a resource for providing evidence to support sound pedagogy.

## Proposed Way Forward

68. The feasibility study will explore alternative ways of sustaining such a centre, as well as its usefulness in supporting excellent teacher preparation, teaching and school leadership. The subsequent establishment of a National Centre for Pedagogy will parallel initiatives in other fields such as health where significant resources have been invested in such national priority areas. This initiative will also become a valuable source of information about teaching and learning for the parents of school students, and for members of the wider community.

## **National Clearinghouse**

### Background

69. One of the many features of a profession is that the work of its members is informed and validated by relevant, current, accessible and trustworthy evidence. Educational research that is relevant to classroom and school practice is too often inaccessible to teachers and school leaders. Teaching Australia is committed to making this research accessible to practitioners both through the form of its presentation and through its location.

70. Teaching Australia intends to examine the feasibility of establishing a National Clearinghouse for Educational Research. The challenge will be to identify and extract evidence based information about quality teaching and school leadership and make it available in a 'user-friendly' format.

71. A key issue to be addressed is the management of a national clearinghouse. It could be Teaching Australia or it might be contracted to a suitable body or organisation.

### Implications

72. Current databases are often difficult to use, inaccessible to teachers and insufficiently targeted to the needs of the teaching profession and other potential users. In addition, few resources are available that specifically organise educational research relevant to Australian schooling contexts.

73. As part of the proposed national clearinghouse, the research base for teacher education would be consolidated and strengthened to provide an evidence-based foundation for future planning and development.

## Proposed Way Forward

74. The feasibility study will explore alternative ways of sustaining such a clearinghouse, as well as its usefulness in supporting excellent teacher preparation, teaching and school leadership. The subsequent establishment of a National Clearinghouse will parallel initiatives in other fields where significant resources have been invested in such national priority areas. This initiative will also become a valuable source of information about the relevant findings of educational research for the parents of school students, and for other members of the wider community.

## **Conclusion**

75. Teaching Australia believes that it is vital to the national interest that teaching becomes a truly national profession. This requires the ongoing commitment of government and the development of the commitment of the profession. The latter is a long-term prospect, since Australian teachers have not previously been encouraged to consider their profession from a national perspective.

76. Teaching Australia will make a vital contribution to strengthening teacher education. While the Institute's development as the national body for the teaching profession in Australia will raise its capacity to influence and support change in areas such as pre-service teacher education, it will require on-going support into the foreseeable future to build and sustain this capacity. It will also need to continue to undertake its work in close consultation and co-operation with other agencies and partners, to achieve its objectives for the profession of teaching and school leadership, in the national interest.

77. There has been a consistent degradation of resources provided to universities for the preparation of teachers over recent decades. This well-documented trend (see, for example Watson (2005), p.12) is not in the national interest. The strengthening of the teaching profession through improving the preparation of teachers is both urgent and necessary, and the nation's investment in this activity needs to be addressed immediately.

78. Teaching Australia believes that the report of the current Inquiry will have the greatest impact if it is comparatively brief and is highly focussed; if it does not represent information that has been canvassed at length elsewhere and that is widely publicly available; and if its recommendations are limited to a small number of propositions targeted at achieving and assuring high levels of public confidence and of national consistency while encouraging the diversity and innovation that are positive features of current delivery of teacher preparation in this country.

79. Past attempts at reforming teacher preparation have been piecemeal, and have been less than successful in bringing about lasting change. This House of Representatives Inquiry is very important, and has the capacity to influence in a major way the quality of teacher education in Australia in the years ahead. Teaching Australia is grateful for this opportunity to assist the Inquiry, and looks forward to playing a significant role in any changes and initiatives resulting from it.

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## **Attachments**

- Eyers, V. (2005). *Guidelines for Quality in the Practicum*. Canberra: National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership.
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