



Council of Catholic School Parents

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SUBMISSION

1. The Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training Inquiry into Teacher Education.
2. The Council represents the interests of parents of 236,000 students enrolled in 586 Catholic schools across New South Wales and the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn. NSW Catholic schools collectively employ approximately 17 695 teachers.
3. Parents have a particularly important role to play in the educating community as the primary educators of their children and therefore have a natural interest in teacher recruitment and training.
4. Teachers play a critical role in the lives of children and young people not just as educators, but often as mentors, social workers and/or pastors. Because of these other pressures/roles a lot is often expected of teachers in modern classrooms and increasingly an awareness of and sensitivity to changing social and cultural dimensions is necessary.
5. Teachers ought to be people who have the ability to choose from a wide repertoire of pedagogical practices to enhance students learning. In this sense, teachers should be innovative, flexible and creative in their teaching. It is the role of teacher education to give teachers this knowledge and skill base.
6. The Council has limited its response to matters relating to the Terms of Reference as outlined below:

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

The Council believes that there is more to being a teacher than just achieving a particular UAI. There is room for more discernment in the selection of student teachers by universities. Attrition rates reflect, in part, a mismatch between some students and the "vocation" or profession of teaching. The Council also recognises that there is no common standard across universities and that this may be addressed somewhat, in NSW at least, by the NSW Institute of Teachers.

There are particular attributes, not least a desire to teach and an ability to relate to children, young people and the community, that are beneficial and are common to persons suited to the profession. These attributes need to be considered as part of

selection criteria and balanced with performance in the Higher School Certificate or similar major public examination leading to tertiary studies.

Universities should also seek to educate families on the programs they have on offer. Parents often play an important role in helping their children choose a particular course of study. It would be beneficial to promote the value and worth of education courses to parents.

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

Teacher Training courses need to be academically rigorous and they need to demonstrate that they are as rigorous as any other degree program leading to professional accreditation. The accreditation processes being developed by the NSW Institute of Teachers will help build credibility and recognition for teachers.

Ideally, the composition of the teaching profession should reflect the cultural and social diversity of the students it teaches. The Council supports the push to attract more male teachers, more teachers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and more teachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds. There is also something to be said for attracting mature age students to teaching who may have life experiences that would compliment or enhance their teaching.

Incentives by way of scholarships are one way to encourage students to teaching, but arguably not enough to attract *and keep* high calibre teachers without also examining salaries, working conditions, opportunities for career progression and issues of long term job satisfaction.

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.

As parents with children in Catholic schools, the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses is particularly relevant. Parents with children in Catholic schools are oftentimes selecting a school that is congruent with their religious values and beliefs and have therefore expressed a preference for the particular ethos or charism of Catholic schools. Schools, then, need to be able to select staff who can support schools in their mission.

We are lucky to have a diverse education system that reflects the pluralist nature of Australian society. Teacher education must reflect this pluralism and diversity. It is therefore important that teacher education courses be accessible to a wide range of candidates, that there are a wide range of accredited providers of teacher training courses, that courses are founded on a recognition of the diverse needs and identities of children and that school education is essentially about helping children to realise their full potential as human beings.

Teacher Education Faculties need to be developing courses that reflect the above elements while also providing for the intellectual, emotional (and in some cases, spiritual) development of trainee teachers themselves.

Teacher education courses must be reflective, responsive and forward thinking: they need to reflect an awareness of current needs within the profession and school

communities more broadly, be flexible enough to change and adapt to changing circumstances and must also anticipate the needs of the future.

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

In order to achieve the aim of having well-rounded, knowledgeable and inspired teachers it is crucial that teacher education courses are not limited by narrow subject offerings. Courses from other faculties should be available to student teachers and students should be encouraged to study across faculties such as Law, Science and Economics in order to access courses in psychology, health sciences and the like. This would contribute to the aim of creating more academically rigorous outcomes for students, satisfying the intellectual curiosity of students and also adding to the credibility of teacher training.

It would also be highly beneficial for students to have access to professionals from complementary external agencies such as Departments of Community Services, Child Protection agencies, child/family psychologists, clinicians in childhood medicine, family lawyers (“professionals in the field”) in order to enhance their learning and knowledge of practical issues such as managing disruptive students, dysfunctional families, bullying, children with special needs. Trainee teachers should be exposed to examples of best practice in all these areas in order to enhance their teaching and understanding of the social, emotional and physical wellbeing of their students.

7. Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:

- **effectively manage classrooms**

Many parents recognise the very difficult job teachers have in managing the sometimes competing demands of students. They also recognise that tools to effectively manage classrooms are learnt over time and that there is no universal rule or strategy that will work in every classroom all the time.

It is not for the Council to say whether there has been a decline in the ability of teachers to manage classrooms, but suffice it to say that classrooms, like society, are not static environments and change over time. Consequently, the skills required by teachers also must change. There is a need for new teachers to have an ability to call on a repertoire of different strategies and in those cases where current teachers do not have that ability there is a strong case for professional learning/development that focuses on giving teachers new skills and knowledge.

Practicum experience is important in exposing students to well run classrooms and also supporting students’ theoretical knowledge, but this in itself is not enough to guarantee good classroom practice.

- **successfully use information technology**

Current graduates tend to have a high level of information technology skills that can be used to enhance the learning experiences of their students. However, it is also clear that many schools do not have the IT capacity of universities or indeed other professional workplaces and in this sense graduate teachers can not make full use of their IT abilities. This represents a loss for the graduate teacher, the students and the school.

- **deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families**

There is considerable awareness of issues, like bullying, in the community and one would presume that graduate teachers share this awareness. The question is, do graduate teachers have the requisite skills to effectively manage these issues in the classroom? If not, how are these skills best learned?

It is unclear to what extent increasing the number of practicum hours will help trainee teachers learn these skills, especially given the special nature (in the case of bullying and the effects of dysfunctional families it is often hidden, long-term and manifests in a variety of ways) of the issues and the somewhat “staged” atmosphere of the classrooms on show to trainee teachers. Time and privacy issues also impact on the ability of the classroom teacher to meaningfully impart information and strategies to practicum students. The practicum experience is also heavily reliant on having exemplar teachers involved.

The skills to manage the effects of dysfunctional families and disruptive behaviours in students cannot be fully developed by practicum alone, one complementary strategy has been mentioned above and that is to have other professionals (health workers, social workers, child psychologists) involved in teacher training. This allows for some innovative learning for student teachers including, for example a case study approach examining more closely the issues of bullying, disruptive behaviours, and the effects of dysfunctional families on students and also examining best practice when it comes to effectively managing these issues. Having other professionals involved in the teacher training is also important because it reinforces that a collaborative approach is often needed in these situations.

- **deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities**

Since its establishment in 1995 the Council has recognised the wide diversity associated with this area. The expectation that teacher training can provide all primary and secondary teachers with all the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching across this wide range is unrealistic. However, parents expect that all teachers are able; to recognise and have some understanding of the special requirements particular students might need: to know how to work collaboratively with the specialists and: to do this in a manner that protects the rights of the student and the student’s parents.

Teachers should not be expected to handle the special needs of children alone. They should be supported by more senior staff and their peers, there should be tangible links to external help (universities and other agencies), and they should be engaging the parents/carers of the child in collaboration, particularly in the setting up of programs.

Support networks are particularly important for teachers in rural and remote schools and a collaborative approach between home and school is all the more important.

Given that” mainstreaming” children with special needs is becoming the norm, there is a need for ALL student teachers to have training in this area while they are at university.

- **achieve accreditation; and**

This is currently being addressed by the NSW Institute of Teachers.

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

There is an increasing inter-relatedness between schools, governments and the home. Changes in statutory and accountability requirements, particularly as they relate to parents are often not understood by senior school staff let alone graduate teachers. Over time too parents' expectations have changed and at times there is a mismatch between the expectations of parents, governments and teachers in relation to schools and education.

Awareness of the need to interact with parents on a whole range of issues is growing, but there is an important opportunity for teacher education courses to better prepare graduates to do this. The Council believes that teacher education courses should include modules on parent involvement. This sort of module would ideally cover: why parent involvement is beneficial and important; what are the social or political drivers for increased parental involvement; how to deal with "problem parents"; strategies to effectively engage parents as volunteers in the classroom and school environment, including school boards, the accountability requirements under the relevant legislation as they pertain to parents, the trends in relation to parent and community involvement in schools, best practice in Australia and overseas.

Given the need by teachers to interact with a wide range of people, including other professionals, teacher training courses must teach effective communication skills and strategies. Above all else, teachers must be good communicators.

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

The Council believes teacher education courses require more funding, in order to address the issues outlined in this submission. The Council believes it is not helpful to consider the funding issue as one which applies essentially to 'pre-service' training. Equally important is the funding of 'teacher development'.

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