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July 5, 2005

Ms Janet Holmes
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Holmes

Re: National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia

The Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) wishes to make the following submission in response to the Terms and Reference for the National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia. As a preface to its response, the Faculty would like to raise the following points.

- The outcomes from the four year Bachelor of Education programs and the two year graduate entry programs offered in Queensland for the past seven years have been highly successful, as evidenced by increased professionalism and significantly increased efficacy of graduates. The Faculty is most concerned with the recent reduction in the requirements of professional teacher education programs from two years to one, and is concerned that this will be detrimental to the profession.
- Within many universities there appears to be a lack of transparency in the manner in which Government funding, allocated to professional experience supervision, is transferred to Faculties of Education. The focus on research output and the development of research centres in universities has the capacity to exacerbate this problem.
- Currently Queensland universities are in discussion with the Queensland Teachers Union in relation to professional experience supervision rates. The increase in costs that may eventuate has the potential to be a significant threat to the viability of Faculties of Education.
- Evidence from research indicates a variety of positions in relation to the content/process balance in undergraduate teacher education programs, and further research in this area is recommended.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. *Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training.*
2. *Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.*

Entry into USQ's Faculty of Education's four year undergraduate programs is based on tertiary entrance scores (OPs in Queensland). The Faculty of Education has filled the quota for 2005 with a median OP of 9. This OP score is such that indicates there is an increasing number of students who are choosing teaching as a first choice rather than a choice of last resort.

Entry into graduate entry programs at USQ is on the basis of successful completion of a prior degree.

In Queensland, legislation requires that intending teachers undergo a criminal history check and a 'working with children suitability' check.

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

USQ has collected no specific data in relation to this issue; however, it does not believe that the situation is greatly different to that reported by other Faculties throughout the nation. Of greater concern however, is the relatively high attrition rates of beginning teachers in the first few years of their professional lives. The role of major employers to support beginning teachers needs further investigation.

If we were to conduct appropriate research that controlled for factors such as mode of study and OP scores, it is likely that the attrition rates in teacher education would be no worse than in other courses. The work of Abbott-Chapman *et al* tells us that two-thirds of students not progressing into second year fail to progress for reasons that are entirely outside the influence of the Faculty (economic, family, and social factors, etc). This leaves only about 6-7% of year one students who the Faculty may be able to assist to remain in the course. Of these students, many make the decision to leave on the basis of their first experience in a school (either, there was no such experience in the first year causing some to see the course as insufficiently "practical"; or, they had a school-based experience and decided to leave the course as a result). In any event, the real issue isn't "How many left the course?", but "Were the people who left the course, the 'right' or the 'wrong' people to leave?", ie, not everyone who enters a teacher education course is 'cut out' to be a teacher, so if it is those people who are leaving, then attrition is a positive outcome for the profession. If however, the leavers would be assets to the profession...

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

Selection criteria, remuneration and HR practices do not differ between various Faculties at USQ. As teacher educators must be highly experienced, the importance of relevant, appropriate work history is considered alongside that of academic qualifications. Often, more experienced educators find that academic remuneration and opportunities for leadership are less than what is available in their current contexts; thus the incentive to work as an academic in teacher education programs appears to be diminishing.

Education is generally a bigger Faculty in smaller, regional or newer universities and a smaller Faculty (or part of a Faculty) at established research universities. Either way they often struggle for research funding (and funding in general) within their own universities. Salaries are modest (when compared to those paid to less qualified school-based colleagues). For regional universities in particular, it is increasingly difficult to attract, and then to retain, high quality applicants with a research agenda.

5. *Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses (including the teaching members used, course structures and materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.*

Programs in the Faculty are underpinned by sound educational research, and ongoing research informs the continuing evaluation of programs. Appropriate pedagogical and curricula innovations are incorporated into programs to complement outcomes.

6. *Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other Faculty disciplines.*

Faculties outside Education (eg Sciences, Arts, Business) need to work more constructively with Faculties of Education. This will be of mutual benefit for all Faculties and students of teacher education programs.

Although there exists a high level of goodwill between Faculties, the differential discipline area funding has the potential to negatively impact on decision-making in relation to the content/process balance.

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

- i) teach literacy and numeracy;*
- 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;*

In order to meet USQ and professional accreditation status in Queensland, the process of program development requires that issues as stated in items i) to vii) above are comprehensively covered. Furthermore, USQ has intentionally developed programs that broaden prospective graduates' experiences across the primary and secondary divide.

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

In an effort to address those issues associated with item viii), the Faculty continues to develop and strengthen links with the profession, and acknowledges that many of these issues are contextual in nature.

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

USQ recognises the need to have strong and substantial professional relationships with school staff. Initiatives to encourage these include:

- increased use of school-based sessional staff,
- mentoring programs with school staff at Wide Bay and Toowoomba campuses,
- formation of the Toowoomba Education Coalition,
- cooperative teaching practices between Harristown State High School and the Faculty of Education,
- involvement of Faculty members with both school-based research projects and practical activities,
- substantial secondment periods for experienced school-based staff into university-based programs.

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

The artificial divide between primary and secondary education programs was based on inaccurate and inappropriate historical traditions. The Faculty recognised that teacher education must take account of learners in the middle years, and this focus is incorporated into all current undergraduate programs.

However, the move to one year graduate entry programs in Queensland has the potential to weaken this approach due to lack of opportunity to experience all phases of learning in a shortened timeframe.

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

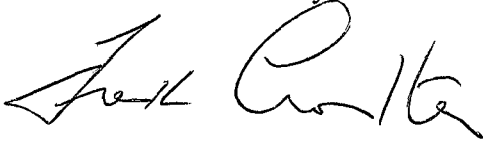
The Faculty believes that high-quality induction programs, support and ongoing professional development of graduates in the workplace is a key component of teacher education. The Faculty is actively committed to this process; for example, through the national IDEAS initiative, mentoring programs with local schools, and the Master of Education which endeavours to offer teachers relevant experiences. The requirements for continued registration proposed by the Queensland College of Teachers is seen as a positive means of ensuring the development of a structured framework across Queensland to replace the current *ad hoc* arrangements.

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

Funding to Faculties of Education across the university sector appears to be based on a number of different and tenuous funding arrangements and agreements. Unless formal agreement can be reached, there is the potential for Faculties of Education to lose funding under a funding-model that measures them against discipline-based Faculties and research centres. In addition, industrial pay issues for school staff have the potential to erode the amount of funds made available to Faculties of Education. As increased responsibility for initial teacher preparation is allocated to schools, the viability of separate Faculties of Education may be even further undermined.

The Faculty of Education (USQ) is committed to supporting this inquiry and trusts that this submission provides the team with a brief overview of some of the issues currently impacting teacher education at USQ.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Crowther', written in a cursive style.

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