

## **Introduction**

The Australian Technology Network of Universities is a group of universities which combines expertise in people and technology and the interface between them to help underpin the social and economic development of the communities in which we work.

The ATN has a solid reputation for graduate outcomes and is recognised as delivering high quality and relevant education and research.

A key objective of the alliance is to help secure Australia's reputation as the clever country, and contribute to its social and economic wealth, while championing the principles of access and equity that have ensured its members are the universities of first choice for students in several states.

Almost 20 percent of Australia's student population attends one of the five universities of the ATN. Collectively, we are the major provider of teacher education, language and literacy education, and adult education in Australia, with 18% of Australia's trainee teachers enrolled in an ATN university.

Of the approximately 15,500 students studying education at an ATN, around 9,000 are undertaking an undergraduate teaching degree, with an undergraduate student intake last year of approximately 5,700 students, making the Network a key supplier of the nation's teachers.

Issues surrounding the cost of thoroughly preparing our students to become teachers and the need for that education to be more adequately funded are at the core of this submission.

The ATN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this national review, but believes that fundamental to any meaningful outcome is a serious consideration of proper indexation for our universities. This is addressed in more detail in ToR 11. Proper indexation of Commonwealth grants is critical when considering the adequacy of funding of teacher education.

It is naïve to look at funding for teacher education courses from the perspective of internal budgeting considerations given that we are funded via block grants. If this national inquiry

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is genuine in ensuring that our universities continue to prepare quality teachers, then it cannot overlook the issue of adequate Commonwealth funding for our universities. Education is not a “low cost” discipline.

The attached submission addresses the terms of reference which are relevant to the Network as an alliance of five universities.

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

The ATN universities already attract high level students in Education as in other disciplines. However the current criteria, based on entry scores alone, is limiting and we believe there is a case to be made for selection to be based on a combination of entry scores, interviews and personal statements. Such an approach is cost prohibitive under the current funding regime, where Commonwealth grants are not properly indexed and where top-up fees are not allowed. Education also is limited in its ability to attract full fee international students.

Any shift in assessment of suitability for enrolment in teacher education courses would need to be matched by a funding commitment from the Commonwealth.

Entry scores across the network vary according to supply and demand on a year to year basis, however trend data indicates they are consistently high. At UTS for example, the entry score requirement for 2004 was 80, whilst at RMIT it was 76.5.

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

All ATN universities attract high level students. For example, the entry scores for Curtin tend to be the highest in Western Australia, whilst at RMIT, entrance scores are higher than they have ever been, and have been steadily increasing over the years.

In most cases across the Network, demand far outstrips supply.

A core objective of the ATN is to produce highly employable graduates and at the same time champion the principles of access and equity that have ensured its members are the universities of first choice for students. ATN universities have consistently managed to

attract students from diverse backgrounds. The University of South Australia's School of Education attracts students from target equity groups, particularly rural and remote students, Indigenous students, and those with disabilities, with 39% of all students registered in these categories, only slightly less than the University as a whole (42%) which sees its mission as providing accessible education to those traditionally marginalised by higher education. The University has run a teacher education suite of programs on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands) for over 20 years. It is one of the few providers with a consistent presence on the Lands and where the graduates remain working in their communities in remote northwest South Australia.

At QUT, scholarships are available to assist students from low-SES backgrounds. This includes a scholarship awarded annually to a student in the BEd Primary program, and a \$2500 one-year scholarship offered to a final-year student who is experiencing financial hardship.

While all of the ATN universities are active in internationalisation, the faculties of Education are not able to attract large numbers of international students. Globally, education programs tend not to attract students from wealthy families. Thus, most faculties pursue international enrolments via cohorts of government-subsidised, scholarship students or aid-funded programs.

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

This Term of Reference assumes a high attrition rate; however data collected from each ATN demonstrates that attrition is not a major issue in teacher education courses at these universities.

Retention rates in Education programs at RMIT are close to 96 percent, whilst at the UTS, the retention rate is 90 percent for students undertaking primary school teacher education, and 97 percent for those undertaking secondary school teacher education. Some students,

while interested in the profession, find themselves unable to perform well in professional placements, and transfer to other programs in the university. Life circumstances also intervene for a number of students, who defer or withdraw. Only a small minority fail key courses and withdraw from their programs.

Generally, if students do withdraw, it is in their first year as they discover they are not suited to the profession. Reasons for withdrawal tend to fall into the following groups: financial (often mature age students have families to support and need to withdraw or defer to work to accumulate enough savings to finance their studies); medical (often pregnancy or stress related illnesses).

The ATN believes attrition whilst undertaking studies is not the core issue, rather it is attrition in the first five years after entering the profession.

This may have more to do with workplace issues such as ongoing professional development opportunities, the workplace environment and salary scales, than with the quality of preservice education.

#### **4: Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members.**

All ATN universities encourage their academic staff in their professional development activities, to ensure the continuing and future high quality of its programs, courses and research initiatives.

Staff are selected on the basis of their research capacity and university teaching experience. In the case of entry-level academics, demonstrated experience in the field and quality of knowledge is also a major factor in staff selection. They are promoted on similar criteria, related to teaching, scholarship and service.

Recruitment over recent years suggests it is possible to source potential staff with excellent teaching/professional experience and who have solid research capacity – especially at the Associate Lecturer and Lecturer levels.

Across the ATN, new continuing staff normally have a PhD at entrance, although some are also appointed for their contemporary professional standing and industry currency. Financial rewards in academic life can be poor relative to teachers' salaries, with a Lecturer B at the top of the scale earning \$67,320 per annum and a Senior Lecturer offering leadership and program direction for a program with hundreds of students, for example, earning \$80,078 per annum at the top of the scale. However, it remains hard to recruit people from the profession into academic positions since their salaries are significantly higher (even without advanced qualifications). A principal of a medium sized primary or high school earns more than a professor. This will become a serious problem given the age profile in our sector, with the majority of the staff over 50 years and little scope under current funding approaches to attract new staff. There is already a severe shortage of senior level academics, given the ageing profile of Education academics.

Staff study leave is seen as an important condition for ensuring staff professional rejuvenation. At the University of South Australia, approximately 10% of continuing staff in the School of Education are approved for a semester's study leave in any one year. Most use it for visits to other institutions, for conducting research projects, for further study, or for international networking.

ATN institutions expect their staff to be actively involved in the scholarship of teaching or application as well as discovery and have sought to ensure that our reward structures, like promotion criteria, reflect this.

**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.**

The educational philosophy underpinning the ATN is one which is highly practice based and operates at the pragmatic end of the spectrum informed by research. The aim is to produce teachers who are inquiring competent individuals who can not only cope with the classroom at graduation but who have the capacity and resources to grow as educators over the course of their careers. There is need for balance between skills needed in the short term and the capacity to develop over the long term. There is a view that, to some degree, undergraduate courses need to be able to lead to post graduate and research degrees in the future

More broadly, the ATN strongly believes that involvement in research is essential to the definition of a 21st century university. The link between teaching and research is critical and many School of Education staff across the ATN are active in research. There is a close relationship between research and the development of leading edge course development, providing a high level of staff satisfaction, as well as contemporary courses. The inter-relationship of research and consultancy work with the continuous improvement of teaching programs is an integral feature of our quality assurance and a way of attracting new staff to the critical mass of researchers contributing to the profession.

However, given the missions of our predecessor institutions and the recency of our designation as universities, the ATN does not lay claim to employing only research active staff. Rather, we have defined our distinctiveness through the particular roles that our predecessor institutions had - educating professionals, applied research with industry partners and recognised the multiplicity of roles that modern universities must fulfil.

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

Whilst there is not a strong commonality across all of the ATN institutions, each university, at varying levels, has cross disciplinary interactions. At QUT for example, there are well established double degree programs with other faculties and educational researchers are building interdisciplinary linkages with researchers from Health, Law, Creative Industries, IT, Science, Humanities and Business. Further development of these transdisciplinary connections is seen as critical for the future of Education and educators in a knowledge economy.

**7: Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:  
(4) successfully use information technology**

A core objective across the Network is to promote the socially responsible use of technology in University programs to ensure the confidence of staff and students in using technology.

The five universities of the ATN are leaders in teaching and learning and educational research through the use of innovative technologies both in their pedagogical practice and in their course content.

Across the Network we recognise the importance of combining the latest theories with the practical experience of the workplace. We are continually informed by research and have a leading role in developing an understanding of the use of new technologies in teaching and learning practice.

To that end, the use of information technology is integrated into all areas of the teacher education curriculum, plus specific studies in all primary teaching and specialist studies in secondary teaching. An emerging area is that of on line delivery, which will continue to be



a major focus for ATN members. At UTS for example, UTS Online (enabling students to work remotely) is used for all subjects. There is also a core IT subject which all students complete. Lecturers liaise with an academic IT 'adviser' to determine how they can include IT content in their subjects. At RMIT University, information and communication technologies are integrated into all courses. As well, new ways with ICT is a core subject in Year 1. Students also can elect to do four additional subjects in ICT. UniSA prides itself on its use of online assistance for students, including administration with all students necessarily becoming ICT literate in order to participate in the life of the community.

At Curtin University most (almost all) units use to a greater or lesser degree WebCT as part of their delivery and communications systems. Students are familiar with the format and by the end of four years are skilled in its use. All courses have a compulsory core unit in ICT and education. These units combine content knowledge development and application of hardware and software into the classroom and school context.

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

The ATN is focussed on solution based outcomes which have an impact and make a difference in the communities within which we operate. We maintain strong linkages with the profession and see our professional community incorporating state, national and international educational organisations.

To varying degrees, each of the ATN universities work toward equipping graduates with the skills to engage the community within which they will operate. A specific course outcome of the Curtin University's Department of Education, for example, relates directly to teamwork and working with others. As part of their fourth year (induction into school year) students meet with Government officials who brief them on the transition into teaching and the requirements of accreditation and employment.

However across the sector the supply and demand picture for educators in Australia continues to be a complex one. While it is difficult to discern a uniform pattern across the nation and across levels of schooling, the demographic data appear to indicate growing demand for teachers (reflecting areas of population growth with patterns of teacher resignations and retirements). This demand will vary from location to location, from subject to subject and from level to level. These data also suggest that there will be an increasing demand for new leaders of the Education sector over the next decade - a situation which carries an important message for Educational Leadership programs and higher degree offerings.

The need for teachers to deal with a range of adults is accepted. In NSW, for example, it is one element of the standards for beginning teachers which is mandated by the NSW Institute of Teachers.

The difficulty for teacher education courses is that the range of topics which are regarded as compulsory by the States leaves little time for extra areas. This is particularly the case in one year graduate diplomas. It is with some dismay therefore that the ATN views the decision of DEST not to fund two year post graduate qualifications for aust study purposes. We believe that it is not possible to provide all the desirable skills and competencies for teachers in a one year qualification and ask that the Commonwealth work with the States to fund two year post graduate qualifications or at the least 18 month qualifications

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

Each ATN is committed to school placement and involvement in the preparation of our teachers; however our commitment is severely hampered by financial constraints and difficulty locating sufficient quality placements, as well as the administrative difficulties involved in placing students (e.g. police checks).

Across the Network more than 12,000 students must be placed annually. This is a massive logistical challenge and central to the success of field-based learning is the issue of funding available to support practice teaching. At QUT for example, the total number of practicum placements made for 2004 was 5005. Whilst placement numbers for this year are yet to be finalised, more than 2500 have been placed for semester one alone. Actual costs of practicum incurred by this University totalled more than \$3 million in 2004. These costs include operational expenses, payments to teachers for practicum supervision and academic salaries.

It is a similar situation at the University of South Australia, where some 5000 places are sought annually

If teacher education is to continue to provide a highly qualified professional workforce for the nation, a whole new approach to field-based professional learning will need to be developed as a matter of urgency. The current model is cost prohibitive and unsustainable.

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

There is a growing recognition in Australia of the specific learning needs of students in the middle years of schooling and the majority of ATN is starting to challenge the barrier between primary and secondary school teacher education and some are planning a middle school option, or have already put one into place, such as is the case with UniSA.

At UTS for example, from 2007 there will be an option for primary students to undertake a middle school option in their degrees to qualify them to teach in both secondary and primary schools.

The potential for developing new programs for Senior years of schooling and Middle years of schooling is exciting and innovative as it breaks the long tradition of the distinctions among Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary.

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

While ATN universities offer courses for teachers in the workforce to continue their professional development, this issue is predominantly influenced by lack of funding. Currently there are no salary incentives for teachers completing ongoing professional development in some states.

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

Resourcing teacher education at desired levels remains a major challenge for universities and is intrinsically linked to the issue of adequate indexation.

As well, whilst the HECS limitation advantages students, paradoxically it disadvantages the university in its ability to deliver quality teacher education. Modelling undertaken at UTS, based on current levels of Commonwealth funding, indicates critical funding shortfalls which will affect the ability of our sector to deliver quality programs.

The HECS limitation translates to a potential \$962 per place (based on a 25% HECS increase) that is unavailable to institutions for Education places. With around 50,000 domestic EFTSL in Education across the sector, this represents a potential \$48 million nationally. The Commonwealth contribution amount has been adjusted, ostensibly to make up this shortfall. However the relative funding model (RFM) for Education of the combined government and student contributions has actually *decreased* from 1.3 in the previous RFM to 1.2 using the maximum student contribution rates. Education now has available only 20% more funding than the lowest funded disciplines, compared to 30% previously.

The variation between the previous RFM and new relativity is in fact even greater, as:

- There is now no additional funding or weighting for postgraduate load (which represents around a quarter of the Education load nationally)
- The Commonwealth contribution rate now includes a loading for practicum that was not previously incorporated into the funding model

Demand for our courses continues to increase, however additional places cannot be offered without adequate Commonwealth funding.

The current arrangements provide a partial contribution only toward the real additional costs faced by universities and result in an effective annual squeeze on university resources, independent of any other changes to Government funding.

In the short term, the indexation funding shortfall has meant larger class sizes and reduced student staff contact time. It has contributed to an increased difficulty in appointing high quality academic staff, with implications for the longer term quality of university teaching and research.

It would be remiss of this inquiry to simply look at the funding issue in the context of individual university budgeting processes. The issue must be addressed at a far broader level.