



**Queensland Catholic
Education Commission**

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File: JMCC:c:\Director\ National Inquiry into Teacher Education – QCEC Submission

19 April 2005

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

Dear Janet,

National Inquiry into Teacher Education

Please find attached the submission of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission in response to selected terms of reference for the above Inquiry.

This submission is the result of consultation with the members of the Commission's Education Committee which is representative of Catholic school authorities in Queensland and the Catholic schools' parent body.

Should you require more specific clarification of the submission, please contact myself –

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Kindest regards,

JOE McCORLEY
Executive Director

QUEENSLAND CATHOLIC EDUCATION
COMMISSION



RESPONSE
to

SELECTED TERMS OF REFERENCE

OF THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL
TRAINING

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO TEACHER
EDUCATION

18 April 2005

Preamble

The Commission exists to "coordinate and advance Catholic Education in Queensland". As such the Commission has a significant role to play in schooling, but also is linked to higher education particularly in the area of teacher education, because graduates from universities enter Catholic schools in Queensland. The Commission has made contributions to many reviews by the Australian Government, the House of Representatives and The Senate. One of the most recent reports (published 2003) was that of the *Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education*, chaired by Professor Kwongh Lee Dow of The University of Melbourne.

Our responses to such Inquiries, including this one, are built on consultative approaches and our past experiences in attempting to improve teacher education in Australia. On this occasion we have also contributed to the response from The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, as one of the stakeholders in that Board. We admit to being somewhat disappointed by the changes - or absence of change - which ensue, from most National Inquiries, and urge the Members of this Inquiry to consider why this should be so.

We offer this response as part of our continuing efforts to enhance the status of teaching, and to contribute to the effective participation of graduates to enter the profession.

Our response addresses only specific terms of reference, namely those about which the Commission has direct or significant knowledge at its disposal.

Response to Terms of Reference:

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

The selection of appropriate persons to be educated as teachers is critical to their success as teachers and ultimately to the success of the education system.

In many instances currently selection for teacher education courses occurs on a supply and demand basis with tertiary entrance requirements for selection decreasing according to the number of available tertiary places to be filled, rather than according to the suitability or capacity of the potential candidates for the teaching profession. The status and perceived rewards of teaching are not adequate to make teaching the first choice of many able candidates in further education and the diminishing tertiary entrance requirements for entry to teaching courses exacerbates the problems of lowered esteem already facing the teaching profession. The problem is thus self-perpetuating.

Given that teachers hold responsibility for the education of the next generations of Australians it is imperative that those who take on that task should be most able and well equipped for it. The current methods of selection of students for teaching courses do not address adequately the issue of appropriateness of candidates, in terms of their intellectual, social, and emotional capacities for the teaching profession. Australian Catholic

Universities do consider references for students applying for teacher education courses and do sometimes conduct interviews with potential teaching course candidates.

Catholic schools are often advantaged by the ability to select teachers to best meet their local community needs, but applying some more acute selection criteria in the entrance of candidates to teaching courses has significant advantage in terms of economical use of resources for teacher education as well as preparation of quality teachers. One of the disadvantages identified by institutions charged with teacher education is the considerable amount of resourcing required in attempts to overcome basic deficits in the capacities of some who present for teacher preparation courses.

QCEC recommends that research and analysis be targeted at the selection criteria required to identify potentially successful teachers to enter teacher education courses at pre-service level. A “supply and demand for courses mechanism” based on tertiary entrance scores alone is inadequate for the selection of high quality potential teachers.

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

Some of our comments in response to Term of Reference No. 1 are pertinent here. There is still a pervasive sense that teaching is a profession not highly regarded by Australian society. In some Asian countries, they have succeeded in improving the Status of teaching and making it culturally valued. In addition the remuneration of teachers is addressed using a scheme which rewards teachers with higher salaries for longer periods of service (see analysis by Dr Barry McGaw of OECD).

Some males are not attracted to teaching because career prospects and salaries are not attractive. More recently, in the teaching of young children, the risk of being accused of infringing child safety regulations is seen as a deterrent.

The issue of attracting a greater cross section of undergraduates from gender, ethnic, indigenous and socio-economic backgrounds remains problematic. The creation of special scholarships - which are well advertised and discussed in schools - could help attract some undergraduates from these backgrounds. The Commission applauds the efforts of universities (and Governments) to attract those from business and industry into teaching, bringing as they do, rich and diverse life experiences.

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

This issue is more the focus of university responses. However, the Commission is of the view that in some universities the experience of "the Practicum" is provided too late in the undergraduate course. We believe

that practical experience should occur early in university courses, preferably in first semester year one.

There are issues in Queensland about payment for the Practicum, and this may have some bearing on the provision of Practicum experience. We comment further on school experience in response to Term of Reference No. 8.

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 Commission does not use the phrase "teacher training" which has connotations that the profession left behind decades ago. We acknowledge that philosophical underpinnings to teacher education courses are vitally important considerations. However, there is a diversity of philosophies which impact on education theory and practice. What is significant is that undergraduates are assisted in their analysis of the relationships between each particular philosophy and the practices of teaching and learning.

Whilst individual university staff in teacher education courses may hold differing philosophical views, we consider it healthy that students be able to critique the options provided. There is rarely one "right" way to educate, and students appreciate the opportunities provided to help them be philosophically consistent in theory and practice.

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

The list of areas to be examined highlights the multi-faceted nature of teaching and the increasing demands being placed on teachers in schools. There is a need in examining the adequacy of preparation for teachers, to determine what is aimed for as an outcome of education and teaching. A clear focus is required if teacher education is to be shielded from responding in ad hoc manner to the plethora of social, emotional and economic challenges which are topical or in vogue at various times. One of the drawbacks of identifying such an itinerant list of areas of teacher preparation to be examined is that there are immediately apparent areas which could equally command examination but have been overlooked – specialist and academic education, rural education to name but a few.

QCEC recommends that in examining the content and manner of teacher preparation courses, attempts are first made to identify the key aspects of quality teaching that are essential to that preparation. The list may in reality be reduced to read something like

- Literacy (including computer literacy) and numeracy (i , iv)
- Behaviour management skills . (iii, v)
- Communication skills (viii, i)
- Specialist area education (ii)

In the preparation of teachers in specialist areas, we ask the Inquiry to consider making provision for all universities, in consultation with Catholic education employing authorities, to offer courses in Religious Education. Currently graduates from universities other than Catholic are required to do further courses in Religious Education if they wish to be employed in Catholic Schools. Graduates should be prepared by Universities to teach in all schools.

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

In Queensland a considerable portion of teacher preparation courses is currently conducted as “practicums” or extended practical sessions conducted in schools under the supervision of qualified teachers. Teachers receive some small payment for the supervision of “associate teachers” but this in no way compensates for the time or effort involved in supervising associate teachers. In more recent years there has been considerable pressure on schools to place associate teachers – it is apparent that there are too few places available in schools to effectively accommodate them.

Recent moves by tertiary institutes in Queensland to relinquish any responsibility for coordinating or financing practicums for associate teachers has drawn industrial response from unions representing teachers and is likely to place even more increased pressure in terms of the ability to find supervised school placements for those associate teachers undergoing preparation courses. In reality, whilst most teachers are quite generous in giving their time to supervising associate teachers, their good grace can be eroded by experiences with poor quality associate teachers placed under their care. Difficulties in “failing” poor quality associate teachers during their practicum and the task of “catching up” classes who have been affected by inadequate teaching on the part of poor quality associate teachers, will further erode the willingness of qualified teachers to supervise future associate teachers.

In the absence of well qualified teachers willing to accept responsibility for the supervision of associate teachers, that responsibility risks being passed on to less qualified or inexperienced teachers in the school setting. These staff may not be best placed to assist the preparation and development of quality teachers.

QCEC recommends that the Inquiry should give serious consideration to the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of those in teacher education courses. Schools play an integral role in providing teaching experience for associate teachers. In a time of increasing concern about work intensification amongst teachers, some form of incentive, not necessarily monetary, will need to be investigated in order to encourage high quality teacher involvement in the development of those being prepared for entry to the teaching profession.

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

It may be more appropriate if education courses prepared undergraduates to be more flexibly prepared to teach in the phrases of schooling called "early", "middle" and "senior" phrases. In this way classes previously labelled as "junior secondary" could benefit from teachers who also have a background in the former "primary school" years. In general the old notion of primary and secondary teaching needs to be re-examined.

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

This term of reference has as its focus about 95% of the teachers currently employed in schools. Professional development of continuing teachers is a major issue for employing authorities who conduct schools, and expenditure on it is regarded as an investment in the future of teachers.

The Commonwealth Government has had a long and valued history of supporting such Professional Development, and our Commission would not want to see this support removed or diminished.

Since 1986, the Commonwealth Government has helped to build collaborative partnerships among schooling sectors, the universities, TAFE, parents, business and industry. More recently the same Government has focussed its funding support on a "national agenda" which has reduced the effectiveness of schools in addressing the most pressing of local needs in the professional development of staff. Curriculum development, which is largely the responsibility of State Governments, is intimately linked with teachers' professional development needs.

The review could provide a useful mechanism for improving dialogue between Commonwealth and State officials about the future planning and funding of professional development for teachers.

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

We have only anecdotal information on this topic, but a common view is that education courses tend to attract large numbers of enrolments and thus education can become "a cash cow" for other faculties within administrative decisions of universities. The Inquiry is encouraged to consider the provision of a framework for the funding of Teacher Education courses in universities. In addition, attention should be paid to the effects that changes in Government Policy (eg. increasing HECS) has on enrolments in Teacher Education courses.

Conclusion

The Commission trusts that this brief response will later be augmented by discussion with the members of the Inquiry at State and / or local levels.

We look forward to these discussions and ultimately to a program of improvements for Teacher Education Courses in Australian Universities - a program of funded actions.

JOE McCORLEY
Executive Director
Queensland Catholic Education Commission

18 April 2005