



Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education

Introduction

This inquiry into Teacher Education is essentially about the preparation of quality teachers for our school system. The number one issue affecting this quality is the question of resources, or rather the lack of resources, for teacher education. The purpose of this submission is to explore how we reached the present situation of inadequate funding for teacher education and the impact of this funding on the preparation of teachers.

History of Teacher Education Funding

If one looks at the history of who is responsible for the decisions regarding the funding of teacher education in Australia, one sees a shift of responsibility from State to Commonwealth and then to University, which is where it presently resides.

Teacher education has been a State responsibility for most of its history in Australia. A variety of monitorial and apprentice models initially existed that gave rise to the development of teachers colleges during the first half of the twentieth century. Before World War II, both universities and teachers colleges were funded by the States. The emergency powers established by the Commonwealth during World War II eventually resulted in its ongoing responsibility for universities after the war. This created an anomaly in teacher education. Faculties of Education within the universities were funded by the Commonwealth, whilst each State continued to fund their teachers' colleges.

As a result of the Martin Report (1964), the Commonwealth began to fund teacher education courses that had emerged in a number of new autonomous colleges of advanced education. In 1974 the Commonwealth assumed full responsibility for tertiary education that was now made up of universities and colleges of advanced education. The binary system, as it became known, created new tensions for teacher education.

In the late 1980s there were moves by the Commonwealth to replace the binary system with a new unified national system. The Commonwealth funded universities through a system of block grants for teaching related purposes. In an attempt to provide some equity for the provision of similar courses across diverse institutions, a model titled the Relative Funding Model (RFM) was

devised. University subjects were divided into 21 disciplines and these disciplines were grouped into 5 clusters, with each cluster given a different weighting. For example, some undergraduate weightings are:

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Accounting and Law | 1.0 |
| Education and Mathematics | 1.3 |
| Computing and Nursing | 1.6 |
| Engineering and Science | 2.2 |
| Agriculture and Medicine | 2.7 |

Whilst this model was simple in its creation, the purpose was to provide a basis for allocating funds to universities in a block manner. The RFM was used only once for determining the 1991–1993 triennium Operating Grant and subsequent grants were calculated by making adjustments to this figure based on the consumer price index and funded growth. This model was never intended to be used by universities for internal allocations.

Impact of Relative Funding Model

The negative impact of the Relative Funding Model is well documented by such reports as *A Class Act, 1998 Senate Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* and *Quality Matters, Review of Teacher Education: NSW (2000)*.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the impact is to examine the budget details of a large Australian Faculty of Education as illustrated in the following table.

Budget, Student Numbers and Staffing for a Faculty of Education in an Australian University

| | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Education—base grant budget (Expressed in 1990 million dollars) | * | * | 11.53 | 10.47 | 8.97 | 8.61 | 8.19 | 7.71 | 7.07 | 6.93 |
| Student numbers (EFTSU) | 2650 | 2814 | 2782 | 2526 | 2393 | 2399 | 2301 | 2518 | 2432 | 2514 |
| Full time staff (FTE) | 151 | 151 | 149 | 133 | 128 | 116 | 115 | 101 | 85 | 70 |
| Casual Staff (FTE) | 30 | 42 | 26 | 35 | 32 | 49 | 51 | 56 | 50 | 37 |

* No Faculty budget available.
(Source: Goodrum et al 2001)

This table clearly shows the decreasing annual budget of the Faculty during the nineties. The student numbers during that decade oscillate around the 2500 EFTSU, while the operation grant budget falls from 11.53 million dollars to 6.93 million dollars in real terms. There are obvious consequences of this budget decrease. The number of full-time staff decreases from 151 to 70 staff with a subsequent increase in the student/staff ratio. The other impact that is not revealed in these figures is the substantial increase in the number of sessional or casual staff involved in the practicum.

Another interesting change during this period was the number of contact hours of instruction for students. In 1990 preservice primary teachers participated in 21 to 24 contact hours compared to 12 contact hours in 1999. Most research indicates there is a high correlation between instructional time and quality of learning. One can only conclude that these budget changes affected the quality of teacher education.

Reduced funding for teacher education during the past fifteen years has had the following impact:

1. reduced full-time staff
2. increase of sessional staff in teaching undergraduate courses
3. increase of sessional staff in supervising students in practicum (professional experience programs)
4. more mass lectures
5. larger tutorial class sizes
6. less rural practicum
7. less innovative practices like microteaching, development of school partnerships, use of technology
8. limited recruitment of new staff.

Each of these impacts has had an effect on the quality of teacher education in our country.

Conclusion

Research has shown that the most significant factor in improving student learning is the teacher. This highlights the importance of the 'teacher of teachers'. The simple fact is that unless we improve the funding of teacher education, the quality of the education system will suffer.

The single most important issue for this inquiry is the adequate funding of teacher education. Without adequate funding there is little hope that the quality of teacher education will improve, despite the best will in the world.



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References

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