

**Submission from the Faculty of Education
University of Melbourne**

To

**The House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Education and Vocational Training**

For

The Inquiry into Teacher Education

**Submission: 'Setting a Direction for Excellence in
Teacher Education'**

April 2005

Introduction

The Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne wishes to make a substantial contribution to the Inquiry into Teacher Education currently being conducted by the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training. While this submission addresses only two of the terms of reference for this review the Faculty looks forward to making a fuller contribution over the course of this review.

The Faculty provides this preliminary submission to the Inquiry into Teacher Education against terms of reference numbers 4 & 5. While the Faculty recognises that all other terms of reference are important for this review and will submit further information on each of these points the main purpose of this submission is to stress the importance of continued and further support for research in teacher education. The employment conditions for academics and the educational philosophy that underpins teacher education programs are related concerns for teacher education. The key factor that links these two issues is whether teacher education is built and developed around an evidence based agenda or whether it is viewed as a service industry that is developed through a training and competency model. An appreciation of these different perspectives – and the inevitable tensions between them – is a critical issue for this review.

While research has demonstrated that the quality of student learning in schools directly and significantly reflects the quality of the classroom teacher, we have limited research evidence to draw on to determine how best to prepare teachers. The numerous recommendations for improved partnerships between schools and universities, more practicum, alternative pathways for career change graduates etc, that have been presented in recent reviews of teacher education have not been grounded in research with supporting evidence. For example Recommendation 5.3 of the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into the Suitability of Teacher Training Courses in Victoria states that there should be an increase in the number of days of practicum for accreditation purposes. However there is no research demonstrating what the optimum number of days of school practice should be or the conditions under which they should be conducted and any relationship to outcomes of teacher quality.

There is a dearth of contemporary reliable evidence about the impact of teacher education on, for example: teacher performance in schools; student learning outcomes; and, various aspects of school and community functions. The extent to which the organisation and content of teacher education courses is informed by research has not been seriously tested in Australia. Much of the effort is sporadic, local, largely about perceptions, and with very little reference to the

outcomes for either the graduates as they enter the profession, or for the students they teach. By international standards the funding for research in this critical area is seriously lacking. The research needed to elucidate critical factors in teacher education can only be generated if academic staff have the time and resources to support them as active researchers.

Faculty response to item 4

Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members.

The recent inquiries and the setting of national standards and guidelines for initial teacher education have not given detailed attention to the selection and reward criteria for academics in education faculties. Indeed, we strongly suggest that it is timely, as part of the current inquiry, to conduct a systematic analysis of the current qualifications and experience of teacher educators in Australian universities. At the very least this might deal with impressionistic and perhaps misleading accounts of recent changes in the staffing profiles of teacher education faculties

The employment of academics in faculties of education must be set in the institutional context. The national standards and guidelines for initial teacher education developed in 1997 made it clear that with respect to teacher education, universities 'should uphold the generally accepted standards of Australian higher education.' further, it identified as a minimum that a teacher education faculty should have:

'academic staff whose qualifications and expertise are consistent with the needs of quality higher education, and who are actively engaged in research and professional communities;' (1997:21)

It is critical to understand that the roles of teacher educator and classroom teacher are not the same. While they might share considerable common ground in their values and approaches, their orientations and outlooks differ in some critical respects. Teacher educators have a responsibility to open up new horizons for the improvement of learning and teaching in the classroom. They have a significant role to play in drawing together and disseminating the results of national and international scholarship as well as conducting research that informs professional practice. They have typically played a significant role in advancing understanding of learning and teaching and in promoting innovation.

The discussion of staffing standards refers to the need for an appropriate mix of research activity and professional activities 'sufficient to ensure that the program (of initial teacher preparation) meets the standards set...' (1997:17). The important point here is that there are no absolute or even minimum criteria for the selection and reward of teacher educators outside the context of the institutional and faculty context. There is a clear expectation that academics in teacher education should be of equal standing with their colleagues in other fields of study.

University policy and practice on employment criteria in the recruitment and selection of academic staff forms the basis of decisions at the faculty level. Likewise, the reward systems of particular universities shape the activities and focus of teacher educators. The outcomes of the responses to the Federal Government Issues Paper 'Building University Diversity' will be critical to this Inquiry with respect to diversity in approaches to teacher education.

At a research-intensive university, research performance is of course more likely to be rewarded, and most academics are employed on the assumption that they will pursue a significant research agenda over their careers. There has, however, been a significant shift towards the quality of teaching in all research-intensive universities. There is currently considerable diversity across the professional schools or faculties of the University of Melbourne in the emphasis given to specific criteria and there is considerable flexibility and room for discretion in the appointment process. Education emphasises both research and relationships with schools and the broader Education community.

Quality and innovation are more likely to develop from a system that acknowledges the significance of diverse approaches to teacher preparation across Australia. Institutional differences in staff selection criteria and reward systems are central to that diversity. Typically, the majority of teacher educators have come to the task with a mix of teaching qualifications and classroom experience. However, while this is generally desirable, some of the major contributors to the development of effective classroom teachers have come to the profession from alternative routes: many of them with a strong research orientation.

Faculty response to Item 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 suggested above the perennial issue of defining the educational and research versus the training and management roles of university-based preparation of schoolteachers cannot be avoided in this review. This is not a matter of either/or for the faculties of education, nor is there any value in attempting to draw a sharp demarcation line between the universities and the practitioners. Appropriately, the Victorian Inquiry into the Suitability of Teacher Training Courses recommended that the Victorian Institute of Teaching 'in accrediting teacher education courses, look for evidence that universities are delivering their courses through a balanced mix of academic staff and outstanding practising teachers.' (Recommendation 4.4)

A recent visit by staff from the Faculty of Education to teacher education institutions in the US and Canada has provided an opportunity for them to evaluate the impact of some of these developments in teacher education. Comparisons between programs offered at different teacher education institutions have demonstrated that where there are resources for the support of inquiry and evaluation teacher education institutions have commenced major reforms to their programs through an evidence-based agenda that will set new benchmarks for pre-service teacher education. The primary vehicle for this whole-scale review of teacher education has been the Teachers for a New Era project (TNE), initiated by the Carnegie Corporation as a program of teacher education reform. The TNE project commenced in 2002 with 4 selected institutions and now operates in 11 teacher education institutions with additional funding being provided by the Annenberg and Ford Foundations. The TNE agenda embraces the concept of evidence-based programs, the involvement of academics from other faculties, and the notion of rethinking teacher education as a clinical practice approach.

A pilot project to be conducted by the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne starts from a set of evidence-based assumptions about what constitutes an effective teacher preparation program. The philosophy underlying the project illustrates the possibilities that might arise from experimentation guided by evidence. The program will be based firmly on the belief that teachers make a significant difference to the lives and futures of the students they teach. Good teachers enable students to enjoy life at school, to learn to the best of their

abilities, and to succeed in their future endeavours. Poor teachers dull the lives of students and prevent them from achieving their potential.

The agenda for reform to teacher education being developed through the TNE project in the United States has been based on the single and most powerful observation that the quality of the teacher has a profound influence on pupil learning. The entire program of reform is shaped by this assumption. Three design principles are critical to the success of the program:

1. A teacher education program should be guided by a respect for evidence, including attention to pupil learning gains developed by the graduates of the teacher education programs.
2. Academics from arts and sciences schools must be fully engaged in the education of prospective teachers.
3. Education should be understood as an academically taught clinical practice profession requiring: close cooperation between colleges of education and practicing schools; master teachers as clinical faculty in the college of education; and residencies for beginning teachers during a two year period of induction.

The design and delivery of every subject in the pilot project, as well as the award program overall, will be guided by evidence of the performance and impact on the current and future lives of school students. The most compelling long-term evidence will be the impact that Melbourne graduates have on the students they teach. Establishing baselines for this data and using it for monitoring performance will be a central component of the faculty drive towards national and international leadership in the provision of teacher education. It will also play a key role in providing the faculty with insights into the dynamic and changing context in which it works, which will guide policy, course design, and the learning experience of teacher education students. With policy and practice driven by a faculty-generated evidence base, the faculty will be an exemplar of a research-led faculty – practising what it preaches.

The Faculty project will also be directly shaped by the available research on effective teacher education programs. At the same time, the faculty will also make a major contribution to the expansion of the knowledge base that shapes the future of teacher education nationally and internationally.

A further issue that needs to be addressed in the context of defining the educational and research versus the training and management roles of university-based preparation of school teachers is how does the tertiary sector

respond to the mounting pressure for alternative pathways for career change professionals? It is noted that the Victorian inquiry into teacher preparation recommends that alternative pathways should be in place by 2008 (Recommendation 3.3). While this approach to teacher education suggests there is a simple solution to teacher shortages there are a number of issues that need to be carefully researched, before programs of this type should be implemented. For example research overseas suggests that while programs for the alternative certification of teachers may contribute to more diverse characteristics of the applicants (eg in the United States a higher proportion of non white applicants) there are enormous variations in the quality of programs and there is a need for much more research to determine what are the key components of these programs.

Despite the lack of specific research information available it should be noted that there are many different kinds of research evidence that are relevant to teacher preparation. For example there is a range of evidence that might be collated about "what works" in relation to learning certain things (eg attitudes, skills, knowledge related to personal development, thinking strategies and discipline areas). Evidence for establishing links with teacher preparation can be derived from major research studies of various kinds that teacher education might also draw on. Research evidence that uses a cycle of monitoring and evaluating and developing the effects of particular practices by particular educators and teachers would promote modelling about processes where both teacher education academics and teachers are able to learn to use and develop monitoring practises as part of the normal cycles of evaluation of their learning and teaching processes.

Research and evaluation about teacher preparation also needs to consider the impact of programs on both the short-term (classroom readiness) and ongoing (good and inspiring teaching practices in a world of change) and view these as two essential components of teacher education. The professional standing of teaching also requires consideration of the provision and impact of programs that support the development of teachers in the long-term. Pre-practice education should not be regarded as the end-point of the professional preparation of teachers. The full professional development of teachers should be considered as requiring similar conditions set out for other professionals including doctors and lawyers etc who are required to complete their education with an induction phase, and are also expected to maintain further education to keep themselves informed about important changes in procedures and knowledge appropriate to their profession.

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