

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO TEACHER EDUCATION

on behalf of

NSW Teacher Education Council

April 2004

The NSW Teacher Education Council (TEC) draws its membership from all universities engaged in teacher education within NSW and the ACT. It functions as an advocacy and support organisation for the Teacher Education Deans and Heads of School in order to promote and sustain harmonious relationships among providers and between universities and the range of employing bodies with which we deal.

The NSW TEC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Terms of Reference for the Review, and does so in the hope that the recommendations that eventuate from this Inquiry will work to enhance both the standing of teaching as a profession. We also hope that the ability of teacher educators to produce teachers who have been educated in a climate that values the intellectual and pastoral domains of their work will be enhanced, so that student teachers will have access to the most appropriate pre-service instruction and practice to enable them to teach, and teach well, all the children of our nation.

This submission endorses the content of the Australian Council of Deans of Education's submission to the Inquiry, and is offered as a companion piece to that document, moving beyond the issues raised there to highlight and raise additional issues of particular importance and substance to the NSW situation.

Term of Reference 1

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

There is much to be said on this issue. The TEC is highly supportive of the ACDE's recommendation that higher entry scores to teaching are the single most important means of raising the status of the teaching profession in relation to other 'High UAI' professions such as Medicine and Law. However, we also stress that the preparation of a teacher needs to be recognised as a far more complex process than has been recognised in our structures, funding and systems to date. As well as ensuring that teachers are experts in the knowledge that they are to be employed to teach, most Teacher Education Faculties strongly believe they require expertise and practice in dealing with the implications of the formal study of sociology, pedagogy and classroom management in order to know how to teach appropriately in different situations, and with different students.

For these reasons we recommend that it would be of benefit to the nation if its teachers were able to enter teacher education only after they were already in possession of either an initial degree, appropriate training or equivalent life experience that ensured them some distance on the situation of schooling. Even a cursory reading of the history of teacher education in Australia makes it clear that teachers have often been in short supply, and that teacher education providers have needed to respond to this undersupply by tailoring courses of teacher education that can be completed in as short a time as possible, to meet employers' needs, and that offer the highest quality possible given these constraints. Over a century ago, here in NSW, the Knibbs-Turner Review for the NSW Government of the day and the

Department of Public Instruction led to the reform of the then-current methods of ‘on-the-job’ teacher training. This had produced a ‘trained’ but poorly educated teaching force that was unable to deal with the social and economic change that characterised that period in our history. The outcomes of that review led to the establishment of a richer, extended and complexified ‘teacher education’ at the newly-founded Sydney Teachers College affiliated with Sydney University. Within only a short space of time, though, the increasing demand for teachers to service the increasing population of the state, and in particular to serve the needs of rural families on whose labour the new nation was flourishing, meant that corners needed to be cut, entry standards diminished and courses curtailed. Even in the present day, employer demand in this state has led to a new range of ‘short’ courses for accelerated teacher training and retraining that rely for their success on the subject matter, or pedagogical and management expertise, respectively, that entrants bring with them to the courses.

Given the need that teacher education providers have to respond to market needs and devise programs that best serve the interests of beginning teachers entering that market, the TEC takes the view that the selection of candidates for teacher education should be a matter for the universities offering pre-service teacher education to determine. This is because the introduction of the NSW Institute of Teachers (and its counterparts in other states) means that all universities will now be subject to a process of on-going course accreditation and assessment, and the nature of the student teacher population taken in will be a factor in this assessment. No further regulation is needed, or desirable, we argue. The situated practice and curriculum of the range of universities offering their programs up for scrutiny to enable graduates to be registered as New Scheme Teachers will be regulated by the profession, in line with the 2000 Ramsey Review of Teacher Education in NSW, *Quality Matters*. We welcome this accreditation process for our pre-service and continuing teacher education courses, and are keen to work with this process to enable and encourage different universities to offer specialised or differentiated programs for teacher education – in line with their differing geographical, social, intellectual or spiritual contexts and strengths.

The TEC agrees that it would be desirable to have a selection procedure which uses written applications and interviews to select our teacher education students. The only barrier to this is money and the time between the need to make student offers and when courses commence in late February. Neither of these are available at this time. As a result of Federal funding freezes to Higher Education over the past five years, there are few Faculties of Education currently operating with a full complement of academic staff. Most must rely heavily on casual workers to fulfil the teaching responsibilities of their programs, in order to ensure that experienced and knowledgeable full-time academic staff members are able to work in positions of most responsibility, which include responsibility for the selection of new entrants. These staff also have teaching, research, and other administrative duties. We believe that all institutions would warmly welcome an increase in funding that would enable staff renewal and greater interpersonal involvement in the selection of student teachers. There is no Faculty among our membership that does not give this important process its highest priority.

Term of Reference 2

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

Again turning to our history, and to the concerns that inform the current Inquiry, it is clear that the ‘normal school’ teacher education pathway that still structures the programs on offer in most pre-service primary and early childhood pre-service teacher education, where school leavers enter University for four years and then return to school, has not produced teachers who are prepared for and able to deal with change. The rapid nature of social change

currently registered in the student populations of our schools means that this 'in system' linear approach to teacher supply is no longer sustainable. Members of the TEC have long welcomed entrants to our programs who bring with them the benefits of a diverse range of cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds and experiences.

Following from the discussion on suggested changes to the structure of entry to teacher education, above, is the potential for a non-school leaving student teacher population to be necessarily more diverse. This of course has impact on the nature of the resulting teaching workforce, which schools and systems are already experiencing as different from the 'institutional life workers' that have mainly populated the profession in the past. As this large population of baby boomer life-time teachers nears the end of its working life, all systems are facing the problem of attraction and retention of teachers into the future. They are also slowly facing the reality that teachers for the 21st century will not work, and certainly not for a lifetime, under the hierarchical, poorly-paid and centralised systems organisation that still characterises our major state education departments. Recent systemic review, such as the NSWDET *Futures* project, can be seen as indications of this system's recognition of these social changes and their own need to reform in order to be able to maintain itself within them. University Faculties of Education face similar challenges, and there is increasing national recognition and acceptance that a 'one size fits all' approach to higher education, including teacher education, is not a sustainable option for the nation. We see and welcome the need for diversity of teacher education pathways, programs and philosophies.

Term of Reference 3

Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition

As noted in the ACDE submission, attrition rates from teacher education courses nationally are generally not high in comparison with other programs, and NSW is no exception. Attrition from teaching is most noticeable four to five years after graduation, and as the 2003 DEST review of innovation in science, technology and mathematics, *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future*, highlighted, this is an industrial issue that remains outside of the control of providers of pre-service teacher education. All evidence available on the reasons for attrition from teaching seem to point to industrial issues relating to salary, lack of professional development and incentive to stay, rather than lack of preparation from initial teacher education.

Term of Reference 4

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

With regard to the selection of Education faculty members, the impact of the culture of research performativity in the higher education sector over the past two decades has led to the need for Faculty recruitment and selection processes increasingly to prioritise research training and experience as well as teaching experience. Simultaneously they have needed to ensure that existing teaching staff, often recruited because of their outstanding abilities in school classrooms are professionally developed through research training, usually through the completion of doctoral studies. The TEC notes the impact of this culture on the working lives of teacher education academics, who, as we have noted above in discussion of the first Term of Reference, are required in their job descriptions to teach, manage subjects, courses and student welfare, maintain relationships with schools and teachers, as well as carry out and report on research through peer-reviewed publication. It is the role of Faculty management to ensure that appropriate balances are found across and among staff members' interests and

career profiles to ensure that all performance targets are met with due consideration of employee welfare and OHS. Increasingly, as among our own member institutions, Schools and Faculties of Education are merging with other areas of higher education provision in their home universities in order to ensure their viability as units within this higher education climate.

With regard to the issue of rewarding Education faculty members, we note the reliance on the altruism and goodwill that still characterises the work of many teacher educators. In several institutions, too, the more recent national emphasis on improving the quality of university teaching has been enthusiastically embraced, although formal education for tertiary teachers often resides outside of Faculties of Education. However, there is considerable continuing demand on the time and expertise of many teacher educators to involve themselves in the professional teaching education of their colleagues, thus maintaining the perception of Education faculty as service providers. The large student load and high staff : student ratios often experienced by Education staff in comparison with colleagues in other Faculties reinforces this perception, in spite of the success of Education researchers in also contributing to the Research Quantum and income. Current criticism of educational research as ‘soft’ science and as undervalued in research productivity counts is not helpful in assisting Education Faculties to maintaining staff morale and the goodwill on which so many rely.

There is also concern, and it is a matter of some little delicacy for many TEC members, with regard to the very worthy recently-introduced national schemes and programmes for rewarding outstanding University teaching. These awards appear, from their reported citations and descriptions, to be rewarding pedagogical practices that many teacher educators consider (and introduce to their students) as everyday essentials for the production and support of good learning – not as markers of excellence. For this reason we believe that it would be rare for Education Faculty staff to seek or value recognition of this kind, although we welcome the recognition of the value of good teaching, and acknowledge that the rewards are significant.

Term of Reference 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 the extent to which it is informed by research.

As a body, we find it impossible to speak definitively of ‘an’ underpinning educational philosophy that characterises the programs offered by all our member institutions. We also believe that this is as it should be, and reiterate our position that the benefits of diversity and difference in initial teacher education provision may be of far greater benefit to the nation than uniformity and generality across the sector.

Term of Reference 6

Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other university faculty disciplines

Many NSW Universities have moved to formalise their interaction and the relationship between initial teacher education programs and other Faculties through the development and marketing of double degrees or combined degrees offered. For instance, at the University of Sydney students can enrol in either a BA or BSc/ BTeach, or in an end-on MTeach qualification after completing a first degree. The double degree is described as “an integrated program in which Education studies are commenced in 1st year.” In the first two years of the

double degree, “students engage in a broad tertiary education, which includes subjects in the Faculties of Arts and Education & Social Work. In the third year of the degree students begin the full professional program in teaching and curriculum. The professional program involves the study of teaching and learning as well as methods of teaching the school curriculum. The two degrees are completed in five years. However, it is possible to leave the course at year three with a BA only, or at year four with a BEd only.”

At Charles Sturt University, where staff from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education offer a combined BSocial Science(Psychology)/BTeach degree, there is considerable contribution and involvement across the Faculties in terms of course design, review and implementation. In courses such as this, where Professional Standards from two accrediting bodies (the APA and the NSWIT) must be met, there are considerable advantages in this close cooperation and monitoring of student outcomes. Members of TEC are proactive in the initiation and development of this sort of cross discipline interaction, and as at the University of Western Sydney, provide an obvious opportunity for students graduating from other Faculties to add value to their initial qualification with a teaching degree.

Term of Reference 7

Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:

- *Teach literacy and numeracy;*
- *Teach vocational education courses;*
- *Effectively manage classrooms;*
- *Successfully use information technology;*
- *Deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families;*
- *Deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities;*
- *Achieve accreditation; and,*
- *Deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related departments.*

Each of the areas nominated with the exception of teaching vocational education courses and dealing with adults has for some time been mandatory in NSW. Given the development of the standards for beginning teachers by the NSWIT, all these areas (except vocational education) will remain essential if university courses are to be accredited.

While we would not claim that all teachers are (or should be) expert in all these areas at the beginning of their careers we are confident that the vast majority of our recent graduates are competent to deal with all them. All our teachers undertake practical experiences which enable them to begin to come to grips with these and other issues. If they fail to cope adequately they do not pass the practical experience components of their courses and hence do not graduate. It needs to be remembered that supervision of these practicums is largely in the hands of experienced teachers in schools who alert university staff to problems in individual cases. Nevertheless when there are problems with individual students, extra visits and tuition are always arranged and if a student still does not deal with the areas outlined they will not graduate. Members of TEC consider that it is a great pity that the lack of funding does not enable university staff to undertake as many visits to schools as might be ideal, though we are also aware of the potential to rethink the retention of even this traditional ‘accreditation’ role by university staff with the advent of the NSWIT. If the profession is able to regulate and enforce standards for graduate teachers, we are open to the possibility of inviting professional input into the final Internship assessment of our student product.

Clearly it would be desirable for teachers to be able to deal with vocational education and to undertake studies in adult education in addition to the studies they already undertake in the KLAs and their specialist teaching area. It is not possible to crowd any more into the curriculum of one-year post-graduate courses – so in that area it will not be possible without sacrificing something even more important in the current curriculum. The only solution in this case is to increase the length of courses to two years or to combine with State governments which would enable universities to work with teachers in their first years of teaching. The only barrier to this, as with other innovations in teacher education, is funding.

Serious consideration should be given to such matters in undergraduate courses and in the case of the adult education competence this is part of the standards framework so will need to be incorporated in courses if they are to be accredited. The teaching of vocational education courses is a more complex issue but we believe it would be desirable to investigate this further, and we would welcome the possibility of joining with TAFE colleges to implement this.

Term of Reference 8

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

As mentioned in the ACDE submission, most teacher education programs have a higher level of involvement of school staff in initial teacher education than has ever been the case – partly because of the increase in the university staff : student ratio over recent time, and partly because of increased attention to the development of professional partnerships in teacher education.

The TEC has been actively involved with the NSWDET in 2004 to review the traditional arrangements of secondment of school teaching staff to University positions as a limited term (generally two years) ‘transfer of duties’, which has been of great mutual benefit, but has suffered a reduction because of the inability of university salary scales to remain comparable with those in the schools. This has meant that the costs to universities have become prohibitive, and we have sought to find ways to maintain these relationships.

Term of Reference 9

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

We agree with the ACDE submission that there is an unhelpful division between primary and secondary education, and point to the emergence of innovative programs such as the Bachelor of Education (K-12 Middle Schooling) at Charles Sturt University which breaks down this division. This degree prepares teachers for both primary and secondary school settings, in a limited range of secondary teaching areas that build on a strong primary foundation (English, Mathematics and IT). There is a focus on issues related to adolescence, transition, community and teaching practice. The course provides the opportunity to develop student teachers’ understanding of relationships, community building and rural issues, and provides professional experience in primary and secondary settings.

We also note with concern the omission of reference to early childhood teacher education, which we believe is central to the national program for improved literacy, numeracy, science and values education in our schools. Members of the TEC strongly support legislation to require the employment of only trained early childhood specialist educators in all pre-school and child-care centres.

Term of Reference 10

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

The TEC welcomes the moves towards teacher professionalism through the NSWIT, and the associated incentives for ongoing professional learning to be both required and rewarded by the profession itself. We see this as a major issue for consideration in the present Inquiry because of the relationship it implies between the nature of on-going professional learning for teachers and the ability of university based teacher educators to be engaged in active research into all aspects of education, learning, teaching, schooling and society. Educational research in collaboration with teachers, schools and systems is of high and continuing importance to the work of teacher education academics, and the dissemination and associated application of our research findings needs to be an ongoing facet of teacher professional learning. Current suggestions that some Australian universities might be reclassified as 'teaching only' institutions are shortsighted in this regard, because of the necessarily applied nature of so much research and innovation in this field. Education without inquiry is a contradiction in terms, and should be a key principle in the ongoing professional learning of teachers. For this reason the TEC strongly asserts the importance of university staff participation in and publication of research that is of benefit to teachers, schools and systems.

Term of Reference 11

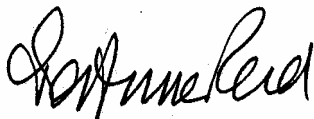
Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administration.

Our comments here remain in line with those in submission from the ACDE. This is the most important issue for the Inquiry to resolve. The NSW Teacher Education Council sees the adequacy of funding to support and improve the work of teacher education as a major priority for the future of the nation.

Conclusion

The TEC Executive is willing to be called upon to provide elaboration, detail or further examples of any of the points raised in our submission at any time during the Inquiry process.

Yours sincerely,



Associate Professor Jo-Anne Reid
President