

EDUCATING FUTURE TEACHERS

*A Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training Inquiry into Teacher Education
July 2006*

On June 21, 2006 in Hobart, the University of Tasmania Faculty of Education convened a national invitational forum on teacher education. The purpose of the Forum was to bring together a broadly representative body of Australian educators to consider the future of teacher education with particular reference to the initial stages, the induction period and the early years of professional life. The intended outcome was a statement for submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training in its current Inquiry into Teacher Education. Following the Forum, a statement was circulated by the organisers to participants, with an invitation to attach signatures expressing their broad agreement with the text and endorsement of the recommendations. This statement, with signatories' names, is now submitted to the Committee for consideration in preparing advice to the Australian Government.

A changing school and societal context for teacher education

The learning of young Australians and their opportunities for the future depend heavily on the quality and dedication of people coming into and remaining in the teaching profession. In turn, Australia's continued social, cultural and economic growth and its success as a democratic nation are grounded on values, skilled knowledge and competence of a highly educated citizenry. Teachers, schools, colleges and universities are at the heart of this nation-building enterprise.

In a context of constantly rising community expectations of schooling, and in a global environment into which Australia is now closely integrated, the education of teachers presents massive challenges. They must be addressed systematically in ways that fully engage all the partners, meet national educational goals and ensure both high levels of public confidence in schools and colleges and esteem for the teaching profession.

Over several decades, large scale changes have occurred at all levels of schooling across Australia, to meet the goals of an increasingly diverse student population, maintain quality of learning and address national needs and priorities. Pre-schooling is expanding to ensure adequate care and a stimulating environment for children from the age of two or three onwards. In the K-10 years, there is a continuing emphasis on developing and strengthening basic skills for future life. Curriculum frameworks are being reshaped to ensure that in actively laying the foundations of student learning, teachers are mapping and mining broad fields of knowledge and human experience which themselves both reflect and impact upon the dynamics of social, cultural, technological and economic life. In the upper secondary years and beyond, study programs have broadened far beyond the academic domains and traditional trade training, to embrace new forms of technical and vocational education, new professions and a wide range of life skills. School subjects are being recast to connect them with individual student interests and social and civic patterns of contemporary life. Student diversity is increasing in tune with Australia's growing population, to include migrant and refugee children and international students. Meeting the needs of Indigenous students must be high on the agenda. The expectations and life circumstances of students who are disaffected from schooling or not adequately included in the life of the school need to be given greater attention, with a readiness to listen more to the student voice and relate to families and communities. Teachers are having to find new ways of bringing together student

experience and interests, the knowledge and skills needed for effective, continuing learning, and changing societal expectations and needs. Core values, citizenship and intergenerational relations are prominent in debates about the nature of a common, shared future. As a result, school learning goals and requirements are being restructured. Much of school culture and the content of the disciplines are being rethought in order to become sources for the development of students' understanding, competence and values.

These and other trends in schooling are posing enormous challenges which teachers must address. In order to do so, they must become more reflective, socially sensitive, self-aware and caring for the needs of others. They need conceptual knowledge, knowledge about child/ adolescent/ young adult development and learning, multi-literacy skills of expression and communication, together with skills in planning, designing, and organising individual and group learning. These are formidable demands; moreover in their work teachers are having to confront tensions and straddle diverse expectations. The high moral purposes of education embrace the good (as variously understood) for each individual learner and for human kind. But, for teachers, idealistic commitment to the self development of every learner and the quest for a satisfying, worthwhile life for the whole community are mediated on a daily basis in schools through a mixture of mundane tasks (yard duty, administrative chores), minor crises (absenteeism, family distress), the routines of schooling (timetabled lessons, staff meetings), the demands of syllabus and assessment requirements – and the challenges of engaging the interest, attention and active learning of diverse groups of young people.

Pressures on teachers have undoubtedly increased as the importance of schooling as a foundation of a successful life for individuals and society alike is recognised. All children and their families and carers, regardless of circumstances and whatever their needs, expectations and hopes, are brought within the ambit of the school. It is the teachers, working in partnership with other professionals devoted to the care and welfare of children and youth, and in family and community settings, who are in the daily life of the school addressing these needs, working to enable students to move towards free, independent and fulfilling lives. It is of the utmost importance that the nation has a teaching force of the highest possible intellectual calibre, well versed in and committed to the individual and social purposes of education and with a thorough appreciation of the relational quality of learning. Within this broad context, the practical pedagogical skills of designing and planning curricula, deploying varied teaching strategies, organising and assessing learning, and orchestrating patterns of group life in classrooms must be put to effective use.

Teachers must be educated to meet this very large, diverse array of professional requirements. In summary, the primary purposes of initial teacher education are twofold:

- *To enable all prospective and beginning teachers to understand the broader educational context and the individual and societal needs that teaching serves;*
- *To ensure that every teacher achieves the necessary practical, pedagogical competence to embark upon a successful professional career.*

With these purposes and the broader societal context in mind, the submission addresses six major themes:

- *Identifying, selecting and recruiting students for initial teacher education;*
- *Relating individual teacher education programs to broadly defined national goals, criteria and expectations of performance;*

- *Developing partnerships and linkages among schools, VTE/RTOs, universities, employers, other service sectors and communities in initial teacher education;*
- *Defining the structure, duration and core components of teacher education programs;*
- *Laying foundations of lifelong professional learning for teachers and teacher educators;*
- *Improving the knowledge base: R and D for teacher education.*

1. Identifying, selecting and recruiting students for initial teacher education

Identifying and recruiting teacher education students of the highest calibre is not just a matter of improved selection procedures. Fresh thinking is required about promotion of teaching as a career of choice for committed, intellectually able candidates. Increasingly, recruitment into teacher education programs is drawing in career-change entrants and people who have considerable experience with children including parents, carers and teacher aides. In addition to academic performance, relevant experiential equivalences are being given weight in recruitment and selection. Further steps can be taken in this direction, not just for career-change entrants. In identifying committed people of high calibre, whether career change, school leavers or recent graduates, more use should be made of interviews, structured references, portfolios and other evidence of understanding and acceptance that teaching is a vocation, not just a job. Costs will be entailed in more elaborate selection procedures and need to be met in funding arrangements for universities. Improved selection procedures in combination with concerted campaigns to raise the status and improve working conditions of teaching could both help to reduce attrition in the first ten years in the profession, and raise standards of entrants. Some institutions interested in developing a broader framework of selection to include interviews, portfolios together with academic performance and other relevant evidence of potential should be funded and their procedures evaluated. Interviews should be well structured and moderated for objectivity. Concerns expressed by some employers of teachers that more stringent selection procedures could add to supply difficulties should be addressed not by lowering standards but improving the attractiveness of a career in teaching. There is active promotion of teaching as a career across states and territories and this needs to be further encouraged by practical means in addition to subsidised study. While salaries are relatively attractive to beginning teachers, mid-career plateaus, limited promotion opportunities and an ambiguous public image of teaching as a career call for concerted action by state and federal governments, other employers of teachers and the profession itself.

2. Relating individual teacher education programs to broadly defined national goals, criteria and expectations of performance

Increasingly a national approach to schooling is occurring. This includes moves to set common standards for teacher registration; these will further impact upon programs of initial and continuing teacher education. While it is reasonable to establish nationally agreed goals and requirements for registration as a teacher, hence minimum standards, this does not and should not be seen to imply a single national teacher education curriculum. There is too much diversity for this – of types and levels of schooling and training, of institutions and programs and the constituencies they serve, of student teachers and teacher educators for this to be either desirable or feasible. There is value in maintaining a variety of approaches, within a broad national framework of agreed objectives and standards.

A key issue is the extent to which the teaching profession, including teacher educators and educational researchers, should be playing a more prominent role in setting standards and monitoring performance. The standing of teaching as a profession requires recognition of its intellectual foundations, the demanding nature of preparatory studies and the high degree of responsibility teachers have for the life opportunities of young people. Teacher educators and educational researchers have a close understanding of the profession and conditions affecting entry and successful performance. This is a rich asset to draw upon in policy and the setting of goals and standards.

In engineering, law, medicine, accountancy and others, members of the professions have a major role in determining entry standards, performance expectations, accountability requirements and continuing registration to practice. The teaching profession requires no less. An appropriate national authority, equivalent in standing to the Australian Medical Council, is needed to bring together the varied interests and to ensure a strong voice for the profession, teacher educators included.

3. Developing partnerships and linkages among schools, VTE/RTOs, universities, employers, other service sectors and communities in initial teacher education

Many practical steps have been taken to strengthen working relations among schools, universities and employers in initial teacher education programs to their mutual benefit. These include the establishment of formal partnerships. In principle, partnerships are strongly supported by the whole of the education community. They would be more widely adopted in practice were they to receive sufficient financial support. The school sector sees significant benefit from ideas coming from university staff while university staff do their best to ensure that their student teachers are involved in practice that is grounded on theoretical ideas. Highly experienced school and college teachers have a great deal to contribute and in many institutions are employed as part-time tutors in the university. Fruitful collaborative discussions lead to better understanding of the aims and purposes of the each of the stakeholders; this understanding often extends beyond schools and into the community when it is possible to engage parent bodies, local industry, businesses and community organisations in partnership agreements that address their concerns as well. However, further efforts are needed to strengthen the interplay between teacher education in the university, the work school teachers do with teacher education students in the school experience components of the program and system managers responsible for strategic operations, especially in curriculum renewal and assessment of learning processes and outcomes.

School placements are usually negotiated directly by university staff with individual schools. At present, universities are hard-pressed to maintain their current number of placements because of the general intensification of the day-to-day work experienced by many teachers. School principals report that their teachers are overwhelmed with curriculum and assessment changes, coping with difficult students, and by the cumulative effects of the negativity towards teaching as reported in the media. In many places, they are now less inclined to accept student teachers, especially if there is a risk that the students will require a high level of professional guidance. Universities are therefore faced with a dilemma since placements have always been negotiated on an individual school basis. In a key respect, the growth of their courses is constrained by the number of available placements which in turn is contingent on the good will of teachers in schools.

Some universities have sought to address this problem by forming partnerships with schools for which there is a *quid pro quo*. In return for the school's sharing of responsibility for some aspects

of initial teacher education universities contribute to the life of the school through various forms of professional engagement. However, such partnerships can be quite fragile, depending on the leadership of committed individuals who eventually leave or take on other roles. Also, teachers are often inclined to see the mentoring of student teachers as additional work and expect reasonable levels of financial recompense.

This is not a problem that universities can solve by themselves. Indeed, it is a problem of national significance with implications for the whole profession. While some universities have made headway towards extending their professional experience through innovative partnerships they have usually been on a small scale. There is good reason to be sceptical about the feasibility of up-scaling these initiatives across the whole of teacher education, unless much more determined, systemic steps are taken.

The key stakeholders - directors general, education secretaries, officials from the non-government school sector, university vice-chancellors and their deans, and leaders in the schools and colleges need to come together to review present pressures and opportunities and to analyse in concrete ways how best to share responsibility, making mentoring of student teachers a more attractive obligation for schools. This is likely to require give and take from both school and university sectors and it will have definite resource implications which must not be shirked. The problem is now too serious to be left to university course coordinators and school principals to address at the local level. Complex issues are arising which call for careful financial planning and management on agreed principles.

Partnerships between the universities, schools, systems and industry need to recognise and respect each others' work contexts and identify ways in which symbiotic relationships can be built. This recognition needs to occur at the top levels of the governance structures, beginning with the ministers of education, heads of school systems and the vice-chancellors at universities. The Commonwealth could facilitate the formation of institutional partnerships by arranging meetings of interested parties in a national context and funding their implementation.

4. Defining the structure, duration and core components of initial teacher education programs

The present typical basic structures of teacher education programs (arts/ science etc degree followed by a 1, 1 ½, 2 year teaching diploma/ degree; or 4 year B.Ed) has grown over time to reflect the variety of needs for different kinds of teachers and different educational settings. Double degrees respect the student/ practitioner option of career change. It is widely agreed within the education profession internationally that the combination of extended practical experience, a high level of content knowledge and a sound understanding of the theoretical bases of pedagogy, require at least four years or equivalent of higher education. When internship programs are built in, this can extend to five or even six years. Moreover, the kinds of systematic support beginning teachers need require a new agreement about just what the foundation of an effective, successful teaching career entails beyond the university years. Systematic induction in the first one to two years in the profession is certainly one of the requirements. International trends in higher education, including the Bologna process in Europe, and established practice in the United States combined with double degrees in Australia and the existence of a two tier degree structure (arts/ science followed by a teaching degree) suggest that it is timely to give consideration to new structures. Lacking at present is systematic evaluation of the diversity of models and their effectiveness in preparing high quality teachers. Different structures, modes and

methods in teacher education need to be evaluated through research and discussion of its implications.

Studies of attitudes of teachers in their first ten years in the profession indicates widespread dissatisfaction with the 'theory' component. Moves in several countries to strengthen their teacher education programs point in various directions signalled by e.g. 'inquiry', 'reflective practitioner', 'learner centred', 'deep conceptual understanding', 'hands on', 'case studies', 'behaviour management', 'curriculum planning', 'coherence' and 'demonstrable quality of performance'. Key features of programs given high ratings, for example by panels in the USA and backed by research findings, include: unity of purpose and structure, clear standards and expectations agreed by the partners, strong focus on content knowledge and pedagogy in the context of societal and school realities, support for individual learning needs of student teachers, and close, active cooperation between schools and universities. It is likely that these features would be widely supported by Australian teacher educators, but what is crucial is how well they are being incorporated into current practice.

5. Laying foundations of lifelong professional learning for teachers and teacher educators

The role of the university and specifically education faculties in the continuing/ lifelong learning of the teaching profession is not as strong and active as it should and might be. The connections between the student teacher and the university are too sharply broken on graduation, when it is assumed that the entry of the graduating teacher into the profession becomes the responsibility of the school, the employer – and the individual. There is much work to be done in forging continuing links – for which IT has great potential. Induction programs vary enormously in seriousness, quality and the support they provide. Industrial agreements and the needs of schools for teachers to teach do not adequately respond to the needs of beginning teachers who are still learning to teach. The links student teachers develop with universities need to be sustained once they are in the field. But this is virtually impossible under present resourcing arrangements and understandings of what it is to become a teacher. However, the practice of provisional registration does open the door to a continuing relationship between the new teacher and the university. The issue of a fresh look at partnership, identified in Section 4 above, must be approached from the perspective of induction into as well as preparation for entry into the profession.

At present there are too few inducements – salary increments and promotion opportunities – for teachers whether in the early years or later to undertake advanced study. Yet teaching should be presenting itself as a scholarly, *learning* profession. The development of professional standards and (continuing) registration requirements provides scope for addressing this issue with more attention to the structure and content of advanced degrees/ diplomas and access to them. It is important that university staff including teacher educators be fully engaged with these developments.

Continuing, lifelong education is an issue for all professions. Teacher educators need to ask themselves how they can best retain a close working knowledge of schools and colleges and the lives and learning of their students. Most teacher educators have been, in the past, school or college teachers, but even for those actively involved in supervising teacher education students in schools, this experience soon becomes dated. One widely canvassed suggestion is that teacher educators should spend periods teaching in schools and colleges. This will suit some but for others there are different courses to follow including working in curriculum and assessment

project teams with classroom teachers, engaging in local, school-focused R&D, sharing in provision of specialist services, for example in IT, counselling, special needs, giftedness and advanced subject expertise. However, there is a challenge for schools to be more open in extending invitations and providing access to facilities. Few schools are organised – or resourced – as hospitals are, to provide a working base for university personnel, but in the planning of new schools and development of existing facilities, there is considerable scope for engaging more closely with university faculty.

A question seldom addressed is the education of teacher educators. Higher degrees by research have an important purpose, but are inadequate for training the *educators of a profession*. It would be appropriate for some universities to be supported to develop programs of advanced study for future teacher educators since there is a looming shortage of people with the necessary and distinctive combination of field experience, advanced educational theory and research methodology.

6. Improving the knowledge base: R&D for teacher education

Despite the work of individual researchers, universities, the ACER, professional bodies, and occasional reviews and inquiries, our knowledge of the effectiveness and impact of different forms and elements of teacher education is not as strong as it needs to be for sound policy making. Major efforts are being made in the USA to revitalise teacher education through a series of national studies, reports and organisational structures, together with a renewed research drive. These reflect deep concern about the need to justify practices in teacher education through better knowledge of how they result in higher quality teaching and better learning by students in schools.

Evaluation studies carried out by the ACER indicate very wide disparities in teacher education student/ graduate satisfaction with their courses and there is a substantial body of evidence within universities of the levels of student and school teacher satisfaction with programs. However, overall there is not a strong research base. The Commonwealth Government, as the funder of teacher education, and the states and territories as principal employers, should be commissioning studies to improve this situation. What kinds of study would be of value? They could include a review of the findings of research in other countries, particularly North America, Continental Europe and the UK, and longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of different models of teacher education in developing highly capable teachers and learning outcomes of students in schools and colleges. Conceptual studies, as indicated above, should feature in research, most importantly to develop a better understanding of the kinds of educational knowledge and skill that underpin strategies for successful teaching and learning.

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