



# Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

DIRECTOR

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

Dear Ms Holmes,

## **Re: National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia**

The Catholic Education Office (CEO) for the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn makes the following submission in response to the Terms of Reference for the National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia, established by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP. The Catholic Education Office prefaces its response by highlighting these issues:

- Decrease in real terms in contact hours required at all levels of undergraduate to postgraduate study that has occurred since the early 1990s.
- Aging of teacher education faculty staff.
- Replacement of permanent academic staff by part time sessional lecturers. This has resulted in overall decreases in accessibility to lecturers, student services provided, level of coordination, and course development.
- Increasing need for courses to be marketed, which results in less emphasis being placed on units that are customised for Australian needs.
- Emphasis placed on providing for short term, full fee paying overseas students.
- Massive increase in salary differentiation between university faculty and experienced educators coming from either a primary or secondary school background. This has resulted in a major problem attracting skilled and experienced staff.

### Terms of Reference

1. *Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses.*
2. *Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.*
  - *High academic results.*
  - *Personal attributes.*
  - *Interview process.*
  - *Life experience.*

In responding to the first and second Terms Of Reference, the Catholic Education Office believes that a balance needs to be sought between high academic achievement and appropriate personal qualities. Students seeking entry into teacher training courses must have achieved high levels of literacy and numeracy during their secondary studies. Selection criteria should also recognise the personality attributes required of teachers. The CEO encourages exploration of the merits of introducing an interview as part of the application process for teacher training courses.

The CEO recognises the benefits of life experience and would welcome further inquiry into initiatives, such as a 'Gap Year', encouraging students to gain experience beyond the world of school between completing Year 12 and beginning University. It is clear that students who have some post school life experience gain greater benefits from studies such as psychology, sociology and, perhaps, student management.

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

- *Attrition as positive.*
- *Early attrition more desirable.*
- *Investigation re why students leave.*
- *Attrition rates early in the teaching career.*

The CEO considers that the decision to leave a teacher training course may be a positive rather than a negative outcome in some instances. If a student has determined that teaching is not a suitable profession and career, then the CEO would encourage and support a student's decision to terminate his/her studies. The CEO would encourage the implementation of strategies and experiences that would enable students to reach this conclusion earlier rather than later in their studies to ensure they are not liable for large debts as a result of tuition fees.

Investigation into the reasons students decide to leave teacher training courses would provide important information on which to base planning relating to this term of reference.

The CEO would welcome the extension of this inquiry to investigate the attrition rates in the five years following the completion of teaching qualifications. It would be essential to investigate the reasons teachers choose to leave the profession and also to consider the directions they took after departure.

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

- *Parity of salaries when compared to teachers and executive members of primary and secondary schools.*
- *Esteem in which faculty members are held.*
- *Criteria for promotion of faculty staff.*
- *Increasing workload.*

The Catholic Education Office is concerned about the massive decrease in parity between teaching staff in primary and secondary schools (especially at Principal level) and that of university staff. This lack of parity discourages experienced, skilled and credible teachers considering the possibility of applying for teaching positions at universities.

The Catholic Education Office is concerned about an observed drop in the esteem in which the wider education community holds tertiary faculty members. This is a complex issue and is interrelated to other comments made within this submission.

Criteria for promoting faculty staff that are based heavily upon numbers of publications are a concern. There is a widespread perception that academics, whose esoteric writings are widely ignored, are promoted over those whose writing is practical and readable.

The increasing workload placed on faculty members by the requirement to 'publish or perish' is resulting in an inability to provide supervision during practicum. The links between the theory and practice have become disjointed as outside supervisors are brought in for assessment during practicum.

With the decreasing number of face to face hours required within each unit, faculty staff are required to teach across a greater number of areas which in turn results in a decrease in specialist staff.

5. *Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses (including the teaching members used, course structures and materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.*

The CEO does not have available data to respond to this Term of Reference.

6. *Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other faculty disciplines.*

The CEO does not have available data to respond to this Term of Reference.

7. *Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:*
- i. *Teach literacy and numeracy.*
    - *Better understanding of how children learn literacy and numeracy skills by graduates.*

The Catholic Education Office believes that graduates in recent years have displayed a greater understanding of the many issues associated with literacy and numeracy than was evident previously. The skills, knowledge and understandings displayed by graduates reflects the efforts of both schools and universities to ensure that those completing teacher training courses are able to teach and develop these skills in their students.

Graduates are aware of current programs and strategies regarded as best practice and are able to implement these successfully to enhance literacy and numeracy development.

- ii. *teach vocational education courses*
  - *lack of preparation*
  - *lack of skills and understanding of requirements*

The current teacher training courses do not adequately prepare graduates to teach vocational education courses.

Within a generalised Graduate Diploma, there is no opportunity for trainee teachers to explore vocational education or develop an understanding of this area. A majority of graduate teachers have no understanding of the competencies required by vocational education and therefore lack the capacity to effectively teach in this area.

- iii. effectively manage classrooms*
- *noticeable decrease in skills.*

The Catholic Education Office has observed a noticeable decrease in the ability of graduates to effectively manage classrooms and draw on a wide range of classroom management strategies.

The drop in real terms in practicum hours, when teaching courses changed from three years to four years, has resulted in graduates who have not had substantial classroom experience to support their theoretical knowledge. There is also a perception that too many faculty members are themselves unaware of current trends in this matter.

- iv. successfully use information technology*
- *graduates are highly competent and confident using information technology and implementing it in the classroom.*

Current graduates are highly competent and, in many cases, more competent than their school colleagues in the use of Information Technology. They are able to identify effective implementation of Information Technology across the curriculum.

In many instances, Information Technology that graduates accessed through the university is not as accessible in schools. This means that graduates are more advanced in their abilities than school resources.

- v. deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families*
- *Greater level of awareness of the issues.*
  - *Decreased levels of skills to effectively manage these issues.*

Generally there is a greater level of awareness of these issues amongst graduates. This is reflective of the greater media coverage given to bullying and disruptive students in particular. Graduates are aware of theories and research relating to the effects of bullying on students. Graduates are also aware of the difficulties caused by disruptive students, both to the teacher and to other students in the class.

The issue of dysfunctional families is complex and can never be dealt with satisfactorily purely through theoretical approaches. Graduate teachers recognise the need for a collaborative approach when dealing with this issue. They are aware of many of the various outside agencies that may be used as part of this collaborative approach.

The CEO believes that while graduates have an increased awareness of these issues they do not possess the skills required to manage effectively these situations.

As noted previously, the number of hours allocated to practicum experience over the length of teacher training courses has effectively been reduced.

It is essential that students enrolled in teacher training courses are required to spend an appropriate number of hours in classrooms. This enables them to observe experienced educators demonstrating effective strategies and requires them to implement strategies and effectively manage these issues.

- vi. deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities*
- *Graduates are more sensitive and aware of needs.*
  - *Greater range of skills to draw upon when teaching.*

Teachers who have graduated in recent years, in general, display a greater level of sensitivity towards students with special needs and/or disabilities. They are aware of the responsibility they owe to all students and are able to work as part of a team to support students.

Graduates are successfully implementing a wider range of strategies and skills when dealing with students with special needs. This is reflective of the greater emphasis being given to special needs and the importance of individualising the curriculum during teacher training courses.

- vii. achieve accreditation*

The CEO is not able to respond to this Term of Reference as accreditation to the NSW Institute of Teachers has only recently become a requirement and information relating to this term of reference is not yet available.

- viii. deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments*
- *Issues are becoming increasingly demanding.*
  - *Currently not adequately prepared.*
  - *Lack of skills to use when dealing with various groups.*
  - *Understanding of levels of accountability poor.*

Teachers are required to interact with a growing number of groups within and beyond the school community. The expectations being placed on all teachers, including recently graduated teachers, as they work with these groups is increasing.

Graduate teachers must be able to draw upon a wide range of skills when dealing with all these different groups. Teacher training courses need to provide opportunities for the development of the skills, strategies and knowledge appropriate to these scenarios.

Teacher training courses need to not only reflect an awareness of current needs within the teaching profession but also anticipate needs of the future. The level of accountability required is increasing. Effective communication skills and strategies are an essential requirement of teachers. It is important that students enrolled in teacher training courses have the opportunity to develop these skills and develop confidence when dealing with difficult or complex situations.

Teacher trainees require an understanding of the organisation and administration of education in Australia and the associated accountabilities of teachers and schools to students, parents, School Boards, system authorities and governments.

Currently graduating teachers appear to have little understanding of these matters. Consequently, they are entering a work situation with very limited appreciation of the link between what happens in classrooms between the teacher and a particular group of students and the wider context of their work. Little wonder so many appear alienated from the 'system' and leave the profession within the first five years following graduation.

A related point is the need for the Australian, State and Territory Governments to more seriously consider the nature of the workplaces to which beginning teachers are attracted. The physical infrastructure of many schools, particularly that of less well resourced schools, require substantial upgrading if they are to compare favourably with the general standards of work environments that other beginning professionals encounter when they commence their work careers.

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

- *Alignment of university semesters and school terms.*
- *Frequently based around lecturers needs/commitments.*
- *New models of course delivery.*

Many schools and staff are not willing to accept a role in the preparation of trainee teachers as the timing of practicum experiences is based on university timetables and, often, is not suitable for schools.

Longer periods of practicum experience often cause concern for schools and teachers as it a major part of the teaching term. While it is recognised that the presence of a trainee teacher in the classroom for a protracted period of time can be beneficial (eg ten week internship) there is an element of risk involved. If the standard of the trainee teacher is poor, then the class suffers and it is very difficult for the regular classroom teacher and the school to compensate.

The needs and commitments of the lecturer are often given priority over those of the school. As a result, schools and staff are less inclined to seek involvement in the preparation of trainee teachers.

The CEO is currently involved in a new model of teacher training for secondary schools. This model utilises the skills and strengths of both university lecturers and current teaching staff in secondary schools. University lecturers prepare and deliver materials that span all curriculum areas such as curriculum development, behaviour management, etc. Teachers in Archdiocesan Catholic secondary schools are responsible for preparing and delivering materials appropriate to specific faculties, eg Science, English, and Mathematics. This model allows for an economically viable course to be provided to a small number of students with identified majors spanning the curriculum. It also allows for the strengths of current experts in schools to be recognised and used in training the prospective teachers.

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

- *Opportunities and efficiencies to be gained by combining primary and secondary courses.*
- *Middle school approach.*

There are opportunities that should be explored and economies to be gained by combining primary and secondary teacher training courses. While some of the needs of primary and secondary teachers are different the theoretical basis of many issues, such as behaviour management, are the same.

The emergence of the Middle School approach in recent years is indicative of the overlapping nature of primary and secondary schools. Highlighting the strengths of both and applying these appropriately to the other context can benefit both.

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

- *Need for increased funding from the Commonwealth for the construction and delivery of courses*
- *Recognition and support of collaboration between systems and universities*
- *Grants/cost sharing possibilities*
- *Collaboration ensures quality.*

The CEO believes that a massive increase in Commonwealth funding for teacher training courses is warranted. This funding is required to construct and deliver courses that are appropriate for teachers currently in the workforce. The format of these courses must recognise the workload of teachers. They must be constructed in such a way that they allow teachers to examine current practices in light of the theories and research presented through these courses.

The CEO has sponsored a Master of Education and a Master of Educational Leadership as a joint venture with the Australian Catholic University (Signadou) for the past six years. The development of this course allowed for the recognition of issues that were and are of concern to the CEO and its Archdiocesan schools. Over eighty teachers and staff in positions of leadership have accessed these courses. Currently approximately twenty people are currently enrolled in these programs.

The CEO would encourage the introduction of financial incentives or support being offered by the Commonwealth to encourage collaboration between systems and universities. The linking of grants to collaborative initiatives would encourage and enable a greater level of joint ventures, which would be of benefit to the existing teaching profession.

Collaboration between universities and school systems ensures quality by encouraging teachers currently in the workforce to examine practices with academic rigour and in light of current research. The CEO believes that the Master of Education and Master of Educational Leadership courses, described above, have improved teaching practices and educational leadership in Archdiocesan schools. The benefits of these courses have not been limited to participants, but to other staff in the schools, as participants have shared their learnings with colleagues.

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

- *Funding levels currently inadequate.*

Funding levels directed at teacher training courses are currently inadequate.

The CEO believes that increased funding for teacher training courses, specifically targeting the issues raised in this submission, will further improve the quality of service provided by universities.

The CEO appreciates the opportunity to present this submission to the inquiry.

The desire by the Minister for Education to evaluate the strengths of current teacher training courses and identify areas for improvement is greatly appreciated.

The Catholic Education Office is committed to providing high quality Catholic education for all students in our Archdiocesan schools. The quality of education provided is dependent upon the quality of teachers in schools. Efforts to improve teacher training courses, which will ensure that graduates are well prepared for the expectations that will be placed on them as teachers, are very welcome.

For clarification or further information about any of the issues highlighted in this submission, please contact Ms Debbie Wilson, Principal Human Resources Officer: Professional Development and Support, phone 02 6234 5455.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Joy  
Director