



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

19 April 2005.

Secretary  
Parliament of Australia  
House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training  
Inquiry into Teacher Education  
Evt.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Madam,

Please find attached a submission from Australian Catholic University to the House of Representatives' Inquiry into Teacher Education. As the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are broad, we have focussed on outlining some of the most critical challenges facing teacher education.

The Faculty of Education at Australian Catholic University would be pleased to provide additional information and also to meet with members of the Inquiry Panel. Please feel free to contact Professor Marie Emmitt, Dean of Education should you require further input. Professor Emmitt's contact details are:

Professor Marie Emmitt  
Dean, Faculty of Education  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Bag 4115  
Melbourne VIC 3065  
Ph: 03 9953 3314  
Fax: 03 9953 3625  
Email: [Dean.Education@acu.edu.au](mailto:Dean.Education@acu.edu.au)

I wish this important Inquiry well.

Yours faithfully,

(Professor) Gabrielle McMullen  
Acting Vice-Chancellor  
Australian Catholic University

Vice-Chancellor: Professor P W Sheehan AO

40 Edward Street, North Sydney NSW 2060 • PO Box 968, North Sydney NSW 2059, Australia  
Telephone: (61 2) 9739 2910 Facsimile: (61 2) 9739 2955 Email: [vc@acu.edu.au](mailto:vc@acu.edu.au)

BALLARAT • BRISBANE • CANBERRA • MELBOURNE • SYDNEY

[www.acu.edu.au](http://www.acu.edu.au)

Australian Catholic University Limited ABN 15 050 192 660  
CRICOS registered provider: 00004G, 00112C, 00873F, 00885B

## **SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO TEACHER EDUCATION, APRIL 2005**

Australian Catholic University (ACU National) is well placed to address the Inquiry into Teacher Education. The University has a long history in teacher education, through its antecedent institutions, and is committed to, and recognised for, providing high quality programs. The University's Faculty of Education operates across five campuses in three states and the Australian Capital Territory and is one of the largest faculties of Education in Australia. It prepares teachers for all sectors of education, Catholic, government and independent. The University takes seriously the responsibility it has in preparing informed and committed professionals who can meet the changing needs of schooling in the twenty-first century. In 2005, over 3,500 students are enrolled in pre-service courses across the University (see Appendix 1 for a list of different programs). ACU National offers both primary and secondary pre-service teacher education courses. In addition, teachers are enrolled in postgraduate and research programs. Currently, the pre-service courses are under 5-yearly cyclical review with new programs to commence in 2006.

We have noted the Inquiry's Terms of References and wish to comment specifically on the key challenges facing teacher education. We believe that detailed specific responses to the different Terms of References will be best achieved via direct contact with the Faculty for the required information. In this submission references will be made to the report of the Victorian inquiry, *Step Up, Step In, Step Out* (Education and Training Committee, 2005) and the NIQTSL report on practicum.

We note that there have been many inquiries into teacher education over the last two decades (more than twenty) with numerous recommendations made for change. However, very little support has been provided to enable the changes that are required. We are hopeful that this Inquiry which has been asked to identify problems related to teacher education and propose solutions will have positive outcomes for teacher education (Nelson, March 2005). We dispute the claims that the quality of teacher education is questionable. Such claims seem to be based on a small number of anecdotal comments. Feedback from employers of ACU National graduates has been positive (e.g. the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria's submission to the Victorian Inquiry). However, questions can be asked as to whether current teacher education practices are the most appropriate for preparing teachers for twenty-first century schools. We welcome recommendations and support to ensure that we can provide teacher education that will meet the needs of schools of the future.

### **PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION**

In the sector there is an appreciation that a different model of teacher education is required to meet the diverse needs of schools, but there are many challenges that are inhibiting such change. In order to determine the most appropriate model for pre-service teacher education we need a shared understanding of what can realistically be expected of a pre-service course. Currently, more and more seems to be expected, however the pre-service course is just the beginning of professional learning. Its graduates need to have developed a personal, informed professional framework/philosophy for teaching which will underpin their ongoing professional learning. Graduates also require functional skills to teach in classrooms but these alone are not sufficient for today's teachers. 'It is possible to become an expert practitioner by actually doing the job, by performing the skills, but true professional teaching involves another dimension, an intellectual dimension' (Mayer, 1999, p.8). Teachers need to be a flexible, lifelong learners, able to participate in ongoing change. In pre-service teacher education we need to balance the necessity for practical skills which can be used immediately

with foundations which will serve teachers in the growth and development of their professional capacities over a lifetime.

Central to change is a reconceptualisation of the relationship between universities and schools. To date universities' basic relationship with schools has centred on the practicum and teachers as supervisors and assessors of practical teaching. However, a much more complex relationship that encompasses more than the practicum, and certainly more than a supervisory role, is required. The relationship needs to be collaborative where the partnership is focussed on knowledge creation and teachers are involved as mentors and teacher-researchers as well as instructors (Toomey, Chapman, Gaff, McGilp, Walsh, Warren & Williams, 2005). Inquiry/problem-based approaches with a focus on practice should be the basis of collaboration between university and school staff as joint researchers. Practicum experiences with the classroom teacher as a supervisor are too often limited to socialising pre-service teachers rather than having their views on teaching and learning challenged and professional identity developed. 'The pre-service teachers were moulded by experienced supervisors to fit the particular school environment' (Field & Field, 1994, p.47). More can be achieved with teachers as mentors where the role is more dynamic, involving interpersonal and psychosocial development, greater collegiality, professionalism and role fulfilment (Carruthers, 1993). 'It emphasises evaluating beliefs and practices, questioning personal views and theorising about practice (Walkington, 2005, p. 56). These should happen in university discussions as part of reflecting on and learning from university and school professional experiences but they should also happen in schools complementing and strengthening the professional learning. If the focus of teacher education remains on the development of functional skills and socialisation as a teacher 'the potential result is a teacher who knows how to "fit in" to existing contexts, but lacks the skills and confidence to make decisions that will make a difference' (Walkington, 2005, p. 63). Time needs to be made available both at university and in schools to encourage pre-service teachers to take an active role in reflecting on, and engaging with both the teaching context and their role within it, empowering their decision-making and learning through research in action. Importantly, teachers in schools need to be resourced to be able to fulfil the mentoring role. Factors limiting the implementation of such models of teacher education are:

- The intensification of the work of teacher educators
- Limited resources to support university staff working in schools
- The ageing profile of teacher educators such that many are disinclined or unable to devote time to develop rich school-university partnerships
- The complexity of university operations, such as course structures and timetabling, making it difficult to program flexible times for student experiences in schools
- The intensification of the work of school teachers leaving minimal time for quality mentoring of pre-service teachers
- The salary differential between school teachers and university teacher educators, which inhibits the secondment of teachers to the university sector and makes them loathe to become university teacher educators
- The lack of high quality teachers willing to be mentors
- The lack of resources in schools to support teachers to fulfil the mentoring role as teacher educators.

One of our concerns is the difficulty of achieving an inquiry-based approach to teacher education and meeting increased demands on pre-service teacher education in one-year graduate entry programs. We believe that teacher education programs should be a minimum of two years duration.

ACU National with campuses in different jurisdictions would welcome a national course accreditation process.

#### Response to the Victorian Inquiry

- The Committee recommended that Faculties of Education establish partnerships with local schools. We are most willing to do this but factors, as outlined above, make this difficult for both the University and the schools.
- The Committee suggested that most universities offer courses weekly from 9am to 5pm and that this excludes non-school leavers from entering the teacher education

courses. ACU National is willing to offer programs flexibly and is very supportive of encouraging students from a range of backgrounds to enter teaching. However, funding and our need to have students available for school placements during regular hours represent limits to our flexibility in course delivery. Our Commonwealth-supported places in current course offerings are fully committed (and fee-paying places have also been offered) and academic staff members have full workloads. With additional funding, alternative modes of delivery, such as weekend classes, would be possible. Currently, we offer alternative mode of delivery for the ATSI pre-service teacher education programs. However, with very small class sizes for some units, these courses are becoming non-viable.

- The Committee suggests that educational priorities such as classroom management, development of classroom resources, time management, and language and literacy skills are ignored. Descriptions of our courses demonstrate that these important areas are covered. However, as discussed above, we believe that the courses need to provide more than the functional skills of teaching, and we therefore offer strategically balanced courses.
- The Committee recommended increased time in schools for professional practice. In principle, this is supported. However, as was discussed above, the relationship with schools needs to be much broader than the practicum. Further, there are difficulties with increasing the amount of practicum, namely the challenge of locating sufficient high quality placements, the need for increased funding to reimburse teachers and the difficulty of finding sufficient appropriate school placement times outside the university academic calendar. In addition there is a need to provide placements in rural schools. This leads to considerable expense for the University and the pre-service teacher.
- The Report claimed that there is a divide between the ICT competencies of teacher educators and those of our students. We do not agree with this claim. Certainly some staff members are not as computer literate as others but considerable resources have been allocated to support staff professional learning. Many innovative programs have been instigated to develop our students ICT competencies and knowledge of how to use the technologies to enhance learning.
- The Committee recommended other selection procedures in addition to academic results. However, re-introduction of written applications and interviews is not practical with such large numbers of applicants and reduced staffing resources in Faculties of Education. There are also questions as to the reliability of such processes. We welcome support in employing more effective ways of selecting students for the teaching profession.

#### Response to the NIQTSL's *Guidelines for Quality in the Practicum*

The Faculty of Education is supportive of these guidelines but sees dangers in viewing practicum in isolation from the rest of the course. As discussed above, the relationship between universities and schools needs to be broader than the organization of the practicum. We are highly supportive of the recommendation that 'schools and school systems acknowledge the immediate and long-term benefits of high quality practicum activities and the contributions which schools make to them, by recognising and accommodating to the professional and time demands of these activities on the people who work in them'. To achieve the quality as outlined, additional funding to support teacher education, in both the University and schools, is required.

#### **IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION**

For lifelong professional learning high quality in-service education is essential. There is considerable value in teachers undertaking formal study as part of their ongoing professional learning. Through study, teachers have the opportunity to reflect on and be more analytical about the relationship between theory and practice and move beyond the functional/technician stage. ACU National offers a range of postgraduate certificate and masters' programs. However, with the intensification of teachers' work and minimal encouragement to undertake further studies the numbers undertaking such programs are limited. If ongoing teacher registration is conditional on demonstrating professional learning, postgraduate teacher education programs will be more viable and more flexible delivery

options will become possible. We are committed to collaborating with stakeholders to provide excellent postgraduate programs.

## CONCLUSION

This submission has highlighted some of the challenges facing teacher education. Current resources limit the development and implementation of the types of programs that we believe are necessary to prepare professionals to make a difference in the schools of the twenty-first century. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with Members of the Inquiry Panel and/or to respond to specific questions and provide further details of our teacher education programs.

From this Inquiry we look forward to other models of teacher education appropriate to preparing teachers for the future being provided for discussion along with the identification of examples of best practice. As an outcome of the identification of best practice, and the Inquiry more generally, we hope that more positive promotion of teacher education and an acknowledgement of its complexity will emerge.

## References

- Carruthers, J. 1993, *The Return of the Mentor: Strategies for Workplace Learning*, Falmer Press, London.
- Education and Training Committee 2005, *Step Up, Step In, Step Out: Report on the Inquiry into the Suitability of Pre-Service Teacher Training in Victoria*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.
- Field, B. & Field, T. 1994, *Teachers as Mentors: A Practical Guide*, Falmer Press, London.
- Mayer, D. 1999, 'Building teacher identities: implications for pre-service teacher education', paper presented at the *Australian Association for Research in Education Conference*, Melbourne.
- Toomey, R., Chapman, J., Gaff, J., McGilp, J., Walsh, M., Warren, E. & Williams, I. 2005, 'Lifelong learning and the reform of the teaching practicum in Australia', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol.33, no.1, pp. 23-34.
- Nelson, B. 2005, *Underpinning Prosperity: Our Agenda in Education, Science and Training*, speech at the *Sustaining Prosperity Conference* at the University of Melbourne, March 31.
- Walkington, J. 2005, 'Becoming a teacher: encouraging development of teacher identity through reflective practice', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol.33, no.1, pp. 53-64.

## APPENDIX 1

A Summary of Preservice Courses Offered at ACU National								
Campuses	Bachelor of Education (Primary)	Bachelor of Arts – Bachelor of Teaching (Primary)	Bachelor of Arts Teaching – Bachelor of Arts (Secondary)	Bachelor of Education (Primary) Graduate Entry	Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary)	Bachelor of Education (Secondary) Graduate Entry	ATSI Programme	
Brisbane	✓			✓	✓	✓	Primary – Diploma and Bachelor	
Sydney	✓		✓	✓	✓	Discontinued from 2006	Primary – Diploma and Bachelor; Secondary – Bachelor	
Canberra	✓				✓			
Ballarat	✓			✓	✓			
Melbourne	✓	✓	To commence in 2006	✓	✓			
		Discontinued from 2006						