



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

**UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME AUSTRALIA (COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION)
SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY
INTO TEACHER EDUCATION**

Term of Reference 1

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

In a climate where there are shortages in teacher supply in particular learning areas and where there is a need to address a glaring gender imbalance in the profession there will always be a cry for the examination of selection criteria.

- It is the strong view of this College that while alternative and flexible pathways should be explored to attract the appropriate candidates into teaching, the traditional pathway for entry, via the TER, should not be compromised or diminished. The status of teaching can only be preserved through the perception, and reality that teaching requires vigorous standards of entry.

Prior to 2004 where the national pool of university applications dropped in numbers there had been a heartening increase in TER cut offs for entry into teaching. To see this cut off drop because of pressures to retain enrolment numbers and market share of students would be a backward step. Increasingly though, all Colleges of Education across the country are under pressure to maintain or increase student numbers because of financial demands. This can only have a negative effect on the quality of candidates entering pre-service courses. Teaching should never be the choice of last resort by those looking to enter a course merely because it has an attainable cut off.

The best teacher training programmes can only do so much with candidates who have a limited capacity for tertiary study and whose knowledge of the major disciplines is lacking.

- Having said the above, the exploration of alternative pathways should always be considered as no entry cut off can be definitive. This University in particular has championed the interview as a means of value adding to judgements made about offers of places. The interview has added a unique quality to the entry process and has been very well received by the community. In 2004/2005 the College of Education interviewed over 500 applicants.
- Schools have the capacity to play a vital role in the recommendation of students who have displayed outstanding qualities that are deemed to be highly significant in their chances for future success in teaching. No one is better able to make a judgement about a student's suitability for teaching than their teacher. UNDA invites applicants to supply such references and they can play a key role in the final decision when it comes to a marginal applicant.
- Flexible mature age entry has also been a very worthwhile avenue particularly where it recognises prior learning that has a close correlation to the degree to be studied.
- There is a strong case to recommend some minimum standards in literacy and numeracy particularly for Early Childhood Education and Primary Education. Most universities have a generic minimum entry requirement for literacy but in some cases it is waived and it can vary. In the College of Education at the University of Notre Dame, students who have marginal levels in Literacy and Numeracy are required to sit an additional test on enrolment day. Students who do not attain a 70% pass rate must then complete an additional unit in Literacy or Numeracy or both. If a student fails this unit they must re-sit. If they fail a second time they must apply to the Dean for special consideration to remain in the course.

All of the above argues for strong measures to ensure quality entrants but most importantly universities must ensure that having set such standards, those standards in turn are not compromised by the constraints of financial pressures to retain or increase numbers in courses.

Having a discerning entry process is one thing but how universities then train their graduates is another. Some of the following terms of reference can and should address that vital question.

Term of Reference 2

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

- The extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students is very much governed by the fact that the status of the profession is adversely affected by remuneration. While tradesmen can earn almost double a teacher's

salary universities will find it difficult to increase the status of the profession and attract high quality candidates, especially among young men. There will always be those who enter the profession for altruistic reasons but all deserve to be well rewarded. This is an issue for both State Governments and the Commonwealth. It is not a new observation and in fact many will remember the last major review **A Class Act: Senate Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession (1998)** where the notion of status was strongly discussed.

- We will very soon face a crisis in the teaching of science and mathematics in secondary schools, in fact some would argue it has started already. Urgent steps need to be taken to find means to attract students who are prepared to train as science and mathematics majors. While commerce and related fields offer the high salaries, students leaving schools with sound mathematical skills will always be drawn to the professions that are commerce based.
- There is an urgent need to attract those who have an ability and interest in physics and chemistry to train to be teachers in secondary schools. This shortage looms as a national crisis. The recent report **Who's Teaching Science (2005)** for the Australian Council of Deans of Science states that "*a large number of secondary school science teachers are manifestly unprepared to teach science to world's best practice levels, particularly in the area of physics and chemistry.*"
- The teaching of mathematics and science in primary schools needs considerable scrutiny. The confidence and competence of the average primary school teacher in mathematics and science is not high and increasingly we are seeing a large number of students entering primary teaching who are maths and science phobic with little and sometimes no preparatory background in even upper school maths and science.
- In relation to the above issues regarding mathematics and science teaching, the Australian Government need only turn to its own report **Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future. Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics (2003)**. This report made no less than **54** sound, pragmatic recommendations for action. One **must** ask to what degree has that agenda for action been furthered?
- This raises the inevitable observation that inquiries like this are only useful if the information collated is acted on, otherwise it is a futile bureaucratic exercise. Only last year the Australian Government canvassed opinion yet again on these same issues in its framework for schools **Taking Schools to the Next Level (2004)** and invited responses during April 2004. The number one item on a ten point agenda in the framework was "Supporting the professional standing of teachers." The number two item on the ten point agenda was "attracting the best people to become teachers". What has become of the responses gathered from this framework invitation?

- A more recent report yet again is **Step Up, Step In, Step Out: Report on the inquiry into the suitability of pre-service teacher training in Victoria (2005)** sponsored by the Parliament of Victoria. These numerous reports need to be referred to time and again to avoid needless replication.

Term of Reference 3

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

- Data show that attrition rates from teaching courses are not particularly high in comparison to other courses. It is important to note that where attrition exists it is often based on the school experience practicum where a student makes a decision that ‘this is not for me’. For many reasons this is often a good thing for both the student and the profession.
- **A more important issue is the increasing attrition of young graduate teachers leaving the profession during or after their first five years.** This raises the need for processes to be in place which nurture the professional development of young teachers and provide a transition phase to ease them into a very demanding profession. Perhaps a programme similar to articles in Law could be adopted. Another possibility is a reduction in class contact time for first year teachers, where they spend time in reflective practice with a senior mentor. This would require significant funding.

Another reason for the high attrition rate can be a lack of significant practicum experience. UNDA provides a very extensive practicum experience to overcome the intensity of the first few years of teaching. Our Bachelor of Education students graduate with 32 weeks of school experience which is strongly favoured by schools.

Disenchantment with salaries and lack of promotional opportunities is a real disincentive for young teachers and this also needs to be addressed.

Term of Reference 4

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

There needs to be a good mix between contracted staff, seconded and conjoint appointees who are practising teachers and administrators from systems and sectors.

One of the difficulties in attracting a high quality field to appointments in Education faculties from the school sector is that those who have risen to senior administrative positions in schools and or systems, sectors are often earning far more than a lecturer or senior lecturer in a University. The answer to this problem is again obvious.

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.

In the main it can be argued that the educational philosophy of teacher education is sound and provides an appropriate mix of content, pedagogy and strong links with key stakeholders. That is not to say that it cannot benefit from a review although some would say that it has been subject to more reviews than any other tertiary discipline.

Given what has been said about the content readiness of some candidates there is scope to consider more content based units within a degree structure. The problem then is finding the space for such units in an already crowded curriculum which seeks to cover a diverse range of necessary units in areas such as aboriginal culture, special learning needs, behavioural management, bullying, information and communication technologies etc. etc.

The need for methodology content units for Early Childhood and Primary teachers is extensively documented and can lead to a reduction in anxiety on the part of teachers who lack confidence in the teaching of mathematics, science, ICT and technology and design.

There may be a case for a programme such as a chartered accountancy programme where students take on additional study after graduation during their first few years of teaching which could also be used as recognition of prior learning in any future post- graduate study.

Term of Reference 6

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

UNDA has a strong interdisciplinary focus with a core curriculum of Philosophy, Ethics and Theology. As well, there is great cooperation between the other faculties providing specialisation streams of study for our primary and secondary students.

There is scope to further these ties in terms of links to pedagogy in the disciplines but again limitations arise in terms of time constraints on staff in other faculties. There is a readiness and willingness but again demands on time in their own faculties often prevent very good initiatives from coming to fruition.

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*
 - *Deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related departments.*
- Literacy and Numeracy units are a strong component of the University of Notre Dame degree and we strongly encourage this focus.
 - UNDA offers a Bachelor of Education (VET) as well as units in vocational education as electives.
 - UNDA offers behaviour management units in all its degrees in education.
 - Dealing with disruptive students and dysfunctional families is covered in units on behavioural management but this is an area where continued professional development in on the job training is an absolute must. Systems and sectors must work in collaborative programmes with the tertiary sector to provide the highest quality professional development in this area. The incidence of violent, disruptive students (and sadly parents) has never been higher in Australian schools. Initiatives like the Australian Government **Safe Schools Programme (2004)** developed through the **Quality Teacher Programme** have been a welcome contribution in this area but far more resources are needed to target this problem and provide a safe environment for students **and** their teachers. It is typically an area that can only properly be done in the context of the school site after graduation. Avenues should be explored for giving credit to teachers who do additional training in this area towards post graduate credentials.
 - Working with students with special needs and disabilities is a complex area. Providing pre-service exposure to theoretical understandings is important but it is clear that pre-service teachers require exposure to these students in their classroom as maturing graduates before they can fully appreciate the needs of such students. Post graduate study and/or professional development within the school context is important here. Again, collaborative partnerships with the Tertiary sector to provide such professional learning opportunities are vital.
 - Yet again dealing with senior staff, school boards, parents and parent bodies is an area that is better dealt with in an induction programme in the school context where it takes on a significant relevance and uniqueness to that particular school community. The importance of interpersonal relationships is examined in depth in UNDA introduction to teaching units but it is something that is honed in years of experience and engagement with others in the school community. Schools must take a responsibility for this development of young people and many schools have excellent induction programmes to monitor young staff in this area.
 - It is clear from all of the above that teacher training courses simply cannot do everything. If we tried to cover all of the above it would be superficial at best. There must be limits!

Term of Reference 8

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

- As discussed above there are many roles for capacity building in the ongoing professional development of both young and mature teachers.
- One significant area that needs close examination is the impact on school teachers in the preparation of trainee teachers during practicums. The University of Notre Dame prides itself on the duration of the school experience given to its pre-service students but it comes at a cost to staff in schools who are working under enormous pressure. In Western Australia, teachers are swamped by a tsunami of reform and the secondary school sector is undergoing the most extensive Post Compulsory Review ever seen in this state. In such a climate where teachers are suffering from reform fatigue and where there is a great deal of anxiety about outcomes based education we are seeing a drop in the willingness of school staff to take student teachers.
- With the increase in student teacher numbers and no commensurate increase of staff in university faculties of Education there is an increasing tendency for schools to take on more responsibility for the supervision and assessment of student teachers during their school practice. This is an area that requires significant financial support from both state and federal government departments. Teachers need to be properly remunerated to take on this onerous yet vital responsibility on top of an already demanding and ever increasing workload. UNDA conducts a unique programme where Heads of Professional Practice (teachers based in schools) take on a significant role with training provided by the university and with modest remuneration.

Teachers who take on this role often find it a positive experience in terms of their own professional renewal, modelling of best practice and personal self reflection. Taking on this type of role is good grounding for potential school leaders.

Term of Reference 9

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

There are good reasons for the split between primary and secondary training. While there is an argument for both groups of teachers to be more aware of transition issues between the two phases of schooling both groups of teachers have highly specialised needs and it would seem the current split caters to those needs well.

Term of Reference 10

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

As discussed above it is clear that the ongoing professional development of teachers will be a highly significant issue for the profession. There is a need for a maturing self regulating professional body to emerge and with the establishment of the **National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership** we may well see such a body capable of helping schools and systems in this profoundly important enterprise. The NIQTSL must closely liaise with school systems, sectors and the tertiary sector if it is to achieve the above.

Term of Reference 11

Examine the funding of teacher training courses by university administration.

Most university faculties of Education will confirm that teacher training is far more expensive than was first anticipated by “DEET Weights” introduced in the late 1980’s. (See the Australian Council of Deans Preliminary submission to this Inquiry). Nevertheless Education faculties across the country have operated and continue to do so, on very lean budgets given the extra requirements of supervision of teachers on placements and the time required of staff to do so.

With faculties of relevantly large numbers one of the common problems has been in many universities that teaching has to a degree cross-subsidized other faculties at the high end. This is a recognized reality in contemporary university administration.

Using the current industrial claim in Queensland to increase payment for teacher practicums highlights the need for a close examination of funding to teacher training. Teacher training cannot shed anymore fat. It will in fact undoubtedly be an area that will by necessity require more funding and resourcing.

A time may come when specific quarantined funding is required for the continued sustainability of high quality teacher training in our universities.

CONCLUSION

The College of Education University of Notre Dame Australia welcomes the review and is willing to participate in any further consultation. We are very interested in hosting a visit from the Inquiry Team when it visits Perth.

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On behalf of the College of Education
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