

VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF TEACHING

Submission to the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training *Inquiry into Teacher Education*

February 2006

BACKGROUND

The Victorian Institute of Teaching (the Institute) was established as a statutory authority for the regulation and promotion of the teaching profession in Victoria under the *Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001*. This legislation took effect from 31 December 2002.

One of the Institute's legislated functions is to assess and approve teacher education courses for the purposes of registration of graduates as teachers in Victoria. This task is the responsibility of the Institute's Accreditation Committee using the policies, guidelines and standards of professional practice developed and recommended by the Institute's Council and approved by the Victorian State Minister for Education and Training.

The Institute's current requirements for the accreditation of programs are discussed in APPENDIX ONE.

The quality of pre-service teacher education has been the focus of many enquiries in recent years which have continually been critical of its quality. The Institute's responsibility for approving all pre-service courses and the recently developed Institute Standards of Professional Practice for Full Registration has provided the Institute with an opportunity to use these expectations to develop more informed criteria for the approval of pre-service courses.

The Institute has used this opportunity to establish the *Future Teachers Project* to develop new standards, guidelines and processes to approve pre-service teacher education courses from 2007. As a result of the work completed to date, consultation is about to commence with teachers and principals, teacher educators, employers and peak stakeholder organisations throughout Victoria on these proposed new amendments.

The Institute's *Future Teachers Project* has been informed by developments at the national and state level, including the December 2005 report and recommendations of the *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy*.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

AFTRAA

Over the past five years, seven of Australia's eight State and Territory governments have moved to establish or re-structure regulatory authorities (known variously as Boards, Colleges or Institutes) to formally recognise, promote and regulate teaching as a profession. Nearly all these authorities have very similar roles, which include developing or articulating standards and processes for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses.

In July 2003 the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed the *National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching*. Subsequently in May 2005, MCEETYA agreed that all jurisdictions align their teacher registration/accreditation arrangements with this National Framework by the end of 2006.

The recently established Australasian Forum of Teacher Registration & Accreditation Authorities (AFTRAA) acts as the national forum for the State and Territory regulatory authorities. AFTRAA meets twice yearly and shares state and territory approaches and progress in the development and implementation of Standards of Professional Practice.

Teaching Australia

Teaching Australia is also a recent valuable initiative. It will have a significant influence if it works within the agreed National Framework and complements the work of AFTRAA members, particularly in working with teachers to build the profession collegially and reflectively.

STATE CONTEXT

Victorian Parliamentary Education and Training Committee Inquiry

The Victorian Government's response to the Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee's inquiry into the suitability of pre-service teacher education in Victoria (previously provided), was handed down in August 2005. The Institute and the Victorian Department of Education and Training are now working to implement the Victorian Government's response.

New Standards for Graduate Teachers

It is expected that pre-service teacher education courses will produce graduates who can function effectively as teachers in government and non-government schools and meet the criteria for registration determined by the Institute.

The Institute's draft *Standards of Professional Practice for Graduating Teachers* are aligned to the standards for full registration, and specify what graduate teachers should know and be able to do as a result of their pre-service teacher education. The standards shape the criteria to apply to the approval of courses by the Institute and are intended to drive improvement in the quality of pre-service teacher education courses in Victoria.

The draft standards comprise three broad themes and eight standards which, together, describe the essential elements of teaching. More specifically, the three broad themes and associated standards are:

| Professional knowledge | Professional practice | Professional engagement |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Teachers know how students learn and how to teach them effectively. | 1. Teachers plan and assess for effective learning. | 1. Teachers reflect on, evaluate and improve their professional knowledge and practice. |
| 2. Teachers know the content they teach. | 2. Teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments. | 2. Teachers are active members of their profession. |
| 3. Teachers know their students. | 3. Teachers use a range of teaching practices and resources to engage students in effective learning. | |

Each of the eight standards are then spelt out in more detail in terms of the characteristics of effective teaching that all teachers graduating from a course of pre-service teacher education should seek to understand, and should have opportunities to consider and develop during their course.

Whilst the detailed characteristics are not intended as a checklist of competencies to be marked off, they provide clear guidance to pre-service teacher education institutions on the nature and structure of the courses they provide, and will be clearly reflected in the criteria to guide the approval of pre-service teacher education courses in Victoria.

**OVERVIEW OF
CURRENT TEACHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS
IN VICTORIA**

Context

Pre-service teacher education programs conducted in Victoria in 2005 are provided by the Australian Catholic University, Deakin University, La Trobe University, Monash University, RMIT University, University of Ballarat, The University of Melbourne and Victoria University. Most of these universities conduct more than one pre-service teacher education program on more than one campus (metropolitan and regional).

Various models of pre-service teacher education programs are used. For example, teachers may be prepared through four-year undergraduate programs, in either a single education degree (eg, Bachelor of Education) or a double degree where two degrees are completed at the same time (eg, Bachelor of Science/Bachelor of Science Education). Alternatively, graduates who already hold a non-teaching degree, such as a Bachelor of Arts or Science, may undertake their pre-service teacher education in a postgraduate course of one or two years duration, which may be titled Diploma of Education or Bachelor of Teaching.

Central to all pre-service teacher education is supervised teaching practice (known as the practicum), which currently in Victoria cannot be less than 45 days. Most one year postgraduate programs include 45 days, whilst most longer postgraduate and most undergraduate programs include 80 days of supervised teaching practice. Many also include longer periods of professional experience (not usually formally supervised teaching practice) in schools.

Criteria to guide the approval of pre-service teacher education courses

The criteria to guide the approval of pre-service teacher education courses provides guidance for the content, scope and outcomes expected of pre-service teacher education courses. It is recognised that those who design and conduct courses have the necessary professional expertise in both education theory and practice to develop an appropriate range of programs for pre-service teacher education students in Victoria. Hence the criteria outlined are more in the nature of broad guidelines for courses rather than specifications of particular content or time for study in various areas to be applied. At a general level, though, it is expected that those involved in the development and delivery of approved courses will be able to demonstrate current knowledge of, and experience in, the curriculum and teaching situation in Victorian schools.

Selection requirements for pre-service teacher education courses

It is expected that selection for the course is based on applicants' academic capacity.

For undergraduate courses, successful applicants will need to have good English and numeracy skills. This means that they should have a study score of at least 25 in VCE English units 3 and 4 or have sufficient English skills to be able to achieve an IELTS score of 7.0 by completion of their course, and that they should have satisfactorily completed a minimum of VCE Mathematics Units 1 & 2, not including Foundation Mathematics or equivalent.

For postgraduate courses, consideration must also be given by course administrators to the suitability of applicants' prior academic studies to meet the expectations of primary and/or secondary teaching in Victoria.

In applying these selection criteria, universities should encourage applications from students who have, or are likely to develop such attributes needed for teaching as:

- effective interpersonal communication skills;
- motivation to help children and adolescents learn;
- an inquiring mind and willingness to learn;
- flexibility and a preparedness to adapt;
- patience and a capacity to listen to others;
- a focus on outcomes and how these best can be achieved;
- enthusiasm and initiative;
- an ability to work independently, with others and in teams; and
- an ethical approach to their work.

General expectations of pre-service teacher education courses

Pre-service education courses should enable students to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for teaching in Victorian schools. They should provide students with an opportunity to acquire an appropriate balance of knowledge, understanding, critical thinking and practical skills. Graduates of pre-service teacher education programs are expected to have completed at least four years of full time academic study, including professional studies in education, discipline studies and embedded professional experiences.

The processes in the course for assessment and reporting of students should clearly acknowledge the student teacher's strengths and weaknesses, and students who do not perform satisfactorily in either their academic or practical work must fail the course.

Primary teachers must be well prepared to teach in the core areas of English and Mathematics, whilst also being able to teach in other core discipline domains such as the humanities and the arts. Secondary teachers must have a sound knowledge and understanding of the nature of the subject disciplines for which they are prepared to teach, with a depth of knowledge appropriate to the phases of schooling they will teach.

Practicum requirements

It is expected that all pre-service teacher education courses will place an emphasis on practical school experience, and include a defined period, or practicum, where the student teacher practises teaching under the supervision of a mentor who should be trained for the role.

The practicum is a shared responsibility of universities and schools. It should be developed in a collaborative way and the roles and responsibilities of the supervising teacher, the teacher educator and the student teacher should be clearly articulated.

The purpose of the practicum is to enable the student teacher to put into practice the theoretical components of their course related to:

- teaching and learning approaches;
- stages of child development, theories of learning and methods of teaching; and
- successful classroom management, assessment and reporting of student learning, and different school contexts and operations.

This is achieved by spending time with teachers and classes; observing; teaching small groups and whole classes; and undertaking the range of tasks that make up a teacher's role including planning lessons, and assessing and reporting on student achievement.

As the pre-service teacher education course progresses, it is expected the student teacher will take more responsibility for whole class activities, and exercise increased independence in both class and school operations. Over the course of the practicum, student teachers should take the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of teachers' work, including attendance at meetings, parent-teacher nights, out of school programs and the like.

The practicum should provide an opportunity for student teachers to work with a range of learners in a variety of settings, and student teachers should have the opportunity to practice teaching in all discipline areas they are being prepared to teach. The time spent in each setting should be sufficient to get to know the teachers, students and school learning environment, and to enable the student teacher to plan, teach and assess student learning and reflect on their experience.

The final period of supervised teaching practice before graduation should involve an expanded professional experience in a normal class situation where the student teacher takes as full a teaching role as possible, in cooperation with the supervising teacher, so they can be assessed on their readiness to assume responsibilities as an independent teacher. It is desirable for this period to be at least four weeks.

It also is desirable for all courses to include more extensive school experience than the minima prescribed, and course administrators are encouraged to seek ways of involving student teachers in additional school experiences such as observational visits to schools of different types, school based research for curriculum units, visits to community support services and so on.

Whilst universities retain control over the final assessment for their awards, it is expected that all student teachers have a pre-graduation assessment of their teaching practice, and only those who have demonstrated satisfactory skills in teaching practice will be awarded a degree or diploma in teaching. It is important in this context that the supervising teacher (singly, or in cooperation with other appropriate school personnel) writes an assessment report and that any disagreement between the school and the university about the assessment of teaching practice is handled through a process of moderation arranged by the university and communicated to the school.

The process for approval

Responsibility for pre-service teacher education course approval rests with the Institute through its Accreditation Committee, which includes teachers, school principals, teacher educators, teacher employer representatives and parents.

The Institute establishes and supports panels comprising practising school principals and teachers together with teacher educators from other universities to review, and where necessary visit and discuss, the proposed program before endorsing any program for Accreditation Committee approval. The emphasis is on reaching an outcome that will ensure graduates from the course meet needs of Victorian schools and are eligible for provisional registration as teachers in Victoria.

Ongoing monitoring and acceptance

Course approval applies for a maximum of five years. Where any significant change to the course is proposed, the relevant institution must advise the Institute and demonstrate that the changed course will continue to meet the criteria for course approval, and produce graduates who meet the standards for professional practice for graduate teachers in Victoria.