

20 April 2005

Janet Holmes
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Janet

Please find attached a submission from the Teachers Registration Board, Tasmania for the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training in response to its National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia.

The Board welcomes this Inquiry as it believes there are some very serious issues which need addressing and it is hopeful that the outcomes of this Inquiry will facilitate this.

Please note that not all of the terms of reference have been addressed, as several of them are clearly in the purview of the Faculties of Education in the Universities across Australia.

If the Committee is planning to travel to the various parts of Australia, including Tasmania, as part of its Inquiry, the Board would be pleased to meet with the Committee and discuss its submission and indeed any other matters the Committee raised with it.

Yours sincerely

Penny Cocker
Manager



Submission from the Teachers Registration Board, Tasmania
to the
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia

Background

The *Teachers Registration Act 2000* has been in effect in Tasmania since its proclamation on 1 January 2002. Copies of the Act and Board policies are available on the TRB website trb.tas.gov.au.

There is one University in this state – the University of Tasmania, and its Faculty of Education has offered the following three pre-service teacher education courses for many years now:

- Bachelor of Education (four-year undergraduate degree)
- Bachelor of Human Movement (four-year undergraduate degree)
- Bachelor of Teaching (two-year postgraduate degree).

Graduates from these degrees are usually very well-regarded and schools are pleased to have them join their teaching staffs.

Also on offer now from the University of Tasmania are four new combined degrees:

- Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Teaching
- Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Teaching
- Bachelor of Information Systems and Bachelor of Teaching
- Bachelor of Computing and Bachelor of Teaching.

Due to their recent commencement in 2004, there are not yet any graduates from these courses.

ToR 1: Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses.

The Board believes that there should be a more comprehensive and sophisticated process of selecting students for enrolment into teacher education courses.

While a high level of academic achievement in either Year 12 studies or in the first degree is a very important criterion for a career in teaching, it is not sufficient. Prospective teachers also need to have a particular set of personal attributes if they are to be successful in the teaching profession. For example, they need to:

- have a passion for teaching – to actually like children and young people and have a desire to help prepare them for a successful life;
- while being self-sufficient and able to show initiative, be able to work effectively with others;



- be active learners themselves;
- have a sense of responsibility for both themselves and more widely;
- have good communication skills; and
- attain specified standards of literacy and numeracy.

The Board believes that prospective teacher education students should go through a thorough and consistently implemented interview/counselling process as part of the selection process. As this clearly would have significant resource implications for a Faculty of Education, the Board considers that this responsibility could be shared and undertaken by appropriately trained, experienced registered teachers. Numbers of panels of such teachers could be established across the State as required, with the Teachers Registration Board perhaps playing a facilitating or co-ordinating role amongst the key stakeholders. Prospective student teachers would contact a (conveniently located) Panel and arrange to be interviewed/counselled, after which the Panel's assessment would then be forwarded to the candidate and the Faculty. If there was a negative assessment, then subject to an appeal process and probably an opportunity for an interview with a second panel, this would mean that the enrolment could not proceed.

The Board also believes that there are issues to be addressed with regard to the literacy and numeracy standards of prospective student teachers in Australia. As part of the teacher registration process, the Teachers Registration Board requires applicants who have not completed their pre-service teacher education qualification in an exempted country to demonstrate English language proficiency at a level which enables them to communicate in English at a professional level with students, parents, colleagues, and other educational professionals.

The Board requires that such applicants have a score of 7 or higher in the academic modules of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The exempted countries are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom and United States of America.

This means that the Board makes no judgements about the English language proficiency of most of its applicants for registration. The Board would not consider it inappropriate if there was also some entry level testing of literacy and numeracy skills, the failure of which would preclude enrolment in the teacher education course.

While there may need to be a provision for 'exceptional circumstances cases' to allow certain candidates into a course, it would have to be clearly understood that such persons must meet all the required standards in order to graduate as a qualified teacher.

ToR 2: Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences

Other than noting that it believes it is important that pre-service teacher education courses attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences, the Board wishes to comment on one aspect of this item.



There is clearly a demand from mature age persons wishing to become teachers, often via a career change. Because of their personal circumstances, there is often a need to study the course part-time and possibly via flexible delivery. The Board is concerned that, while such options should be available, the quality and content of qualifications achieved this way should not be different or compromised solely because of these factors.

ToR 11: Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administrations.

While the Board does not have actual quantified data, there is a widely held understanding that there have been large cuts over quite a number of years to the funding of teacher education courses and Faculties of Education, with significant impact on lecturers' workloads and, as mentioned below, there is now an inability to properly resource the school experience components of the courses. The Board is not in a position to comment authoritatively on the reasons for this inadequacy of funding, but believes the situation needs urgent remedying.

Other comments

The following comments do not match directly with any of the Terms of Reference but are very important in the Board's view. There is some intersection with ToRs 8 and 10.

The Board wishes to comment on the school experience components, ie practicums and internships, of the pre-service teacher education degrees offered by the University of Tasmania's Faculty of Education. The Board considers them to be crucial components of the degrees, and particularly values the internship which is undertaken towards the end of the degree.

However there are several issues which the Board believes should be addressed.

The key one is that the Board firmly believes that a student teacher should not be allowed to graduate as a qualified teacher unless they have passed their Internship. This position generates several consequential matters.

As the Internship is undertaken well into the final year of study, there should be appropriate 'filters' in place so that student teachers can be advised much earlier than then of their (possible or definite) lack of suitability to be a teacher, and then be counselled to consider other options. There should also be an alternative graduation pathway which would allow several years possibly of study not to be 'wasted'. Of course, such an alternative qualification would not be acceptable to teacher registration authorities for the purposes of registration.

A significant issue is the resourcing of the practicums and internships. The Board is very concerned that inadequate resources prevent adequate supervision of the student teachers by Faculty members. Associated with this is a perception that there is insufficient respect given by Faculty to supervisory teachers' recommendations regarding poor student teacher performances in their school experience sessions.

The Board also recognises that there are considerable difficulties for the Faculty in arranging all the required placements. As well as some schools either not being interested



or unable to participate, personal commitments (often part-time work) can make it very difficult for the student teachers to undertake school experiences at some distance from where they live. There is also the issue of the willingness and (prior) preparation of registered teachers to undertake the supervision and mentoring of student teachers, both in terms of their ability to do it well, and the resources to support it, including recompense.

Thus there is a significant opportunity here for a major revamp of the absolutely essential school experience components of the pre-service teacher education courses, provided that there is a large increase in funding to support it.

Given the funding, the Board, the teacher employers and the Faculty could work together to develop processes whereby registered teachers could be appropriately trained to be supervisors/mentors, the Board could recognise the work for the purposes of renewal of registration and the Faculty could more effectively supervise and monitor their students in the schools, and have greater interaction with the teachers.

This last aspect would also facilitate increased collaboration between the Faculty and schools in general, so that teachers could access current educational research and updated professional learning and lecturers could gain insight into current school practices and exemplary teaching.

There should also be a flow-on effect in that beginning teachers also need mentoring as they commence their employment as teachers and this aspect could be included in the professional learning undertaken by teachers and similarly recognised by the Board.

Consideration could also be given, with increased funding, to pay some sort of allowance to assist student teachers to do some of their school experience sessions 'away from home'; and thereby have an opportunity to probably experience a greater diversity of schools as well. This would also allow more schools to become involved and reduce the pressure on schools close to the university to repeatedly take student teachers.

While the following two issues are not necessarily a direct concern for the Board, the Board is aware that there is not necessarily a good match between what student teachers choose to study

- (i) in terms of sectors (early childhood, primary, secondary), or
- (ii) in their first degree (which may not prepare them well with an appropriately rich knowledge base for the learning areas they subsequently select as student teachers)

and what the employers' actual and predicted teaching staff needs are. A consequence of such choices is that there will be newly graduated teachers with no suitable job vacancies available for them, a very unsatisfactory outcome.

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As mentioned in the accompanying letter, the Board would be pleased to discuss its submission with the Committee if the opportunity arose. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Penny Cocker
Manager



Teachers Registration Board
Tasmania