

A submission from Adventist Schools Australia to the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training relating to an Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia

This submission has been prepared by the National Office of Adventist Schools Australia in response to an invitation by the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training to offer comment on the Terms of Reference for a proposed Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia.

Introduction

Adventist Schools Australia operates 56 schools in Australia with a total enrolment of 9,000 students. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates Avondale College at Cooranbong, NSW and most of our teachers are trained at this institution. However, the system employs teachers who have trained in many different institutions. For this reason Adventist Schools Australia will follow the Inquiry into Teacher Education with interest and looks forward to positive outcomes.

A comment on the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference as listed are worthy but the Inquiry needs to be backgrounded against the rapid changes that are taking place within Australian society. Therefore the Inquiry, in examining the training of teachers, needs to take careful note of:

- increasing multiculturalism;
- changing family values;
- the increasing number of single-parent homes;
- duty-of-care issues;
- the increasing vulnerability of teaching as a profession, within the legal context;
- and the growing corpus of research on child development and learning theories.

The Inquiry has the potential to refocus Australian education as a pre-eminent force in the preparation of teachers.

Terms of Reference

To inquire into and report on the scope, suitability, organisation, resourcing and delivery of teacher training courses in Australia's public and private universities. To examine the preparedness of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia's schools.

Specifically, the Inquiry should:

1.

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

Adventist Schools Australia believes that the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses in Australia should include an interview process as well as selection by examination results. Prior to that, there needs to be adequate provision of data on subject areas/specialisation and system requirements to enable prospective students to choose courses in training institutions. In order to complete a profile on prospective teachers, it could be useful to add reports from schools which may show leadership potential, communication skills, teamwork abilities etc.

2.

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

A training institution will attract students when it becomes known that the course is relevant and that their instructors are known to have a sense of excitement about the learning process. A further attraction comes when students know that their instructors have had recent experience in a classroom as a practicing teacher. There also needs to be recognition of the role that supervising schools have in managing and supporting student teachers during their courses.

3.

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

Attrition from teaching courses can occur for a variety of reasons. One will be the inevitable fall out of students at the commencement of any university course. Others drop out when they come to the realisation that teaching is not for them. This will often occur after the first practicum.

4.

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

The selection and appointment of education faculty members is an important part of training effective teachers. Lecturers who can inspire and excite students about teaching and have a genuine love for children are key people.

It may be beneficial to have some type of 're-cycling' of lecturers to give them a reality check as to what is the current status of student behaviour, demands, learning techniques, and behaviour management techniques, as well as parent and community demands which may have changed significantly since they were last in the classroom.

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 assess the extent to which it is informed by research.

ASA supports any overhaul of educational philosophy that may reposition teacher training to cope with the social changes of the 21st Century. The enormous increase in societal diversity has completely changed the teaching profession and training methods need to reflect this.

6.

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

Adventist Schools Australia would support any structure that enables students to cross-credit with other university disciplines in order to prepare graduate teachers with a broad base of offerings. Double degrees may offer significant benefits to the teaching profession.

7.

Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:

(i)

teach literacy and numeracy;

This has traditionally been seen as the preserve of primary education. Changes in society have seen literacy and numeracy issues impacting on secondary education as well. Thus it may be beneficial to include the remedial issues within the secondary curriculum to cope with numeracy and literacy issues which arise in secondary school.

(ii)

teach vocational education courses;

It is pleasing to note current initiatives by the Federal Government to address the need for increased vocational courses. There is need for a balance between academic and vocational careers after many years of giving greater emphasis to academic achievement in schools. Even though there is a move to integrate current educational practice with VET courses, there still needs to be special training for teachers of VET subjects focussing on competency based teaching and learning.

(iii)

effectively manage classrooms;

Dealing with unruly classrooms and disruptive students is one reason that many students cite as being the most intimidating situation that they meet during their training and at the beginning of their professional career.

(iv)
successfully use information technology;

It goes without saying that any teacher education faculty should offer instruction in information technology that would equip students for their careers. Upon employment, graduating teachers should receive inducements to obtain laptops, other than by salary sacrifice. Information technology needs to be recognised as a constantly changing tool and training needs to include the management of change

(v)
deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families;

Many students contemplating teaching as a career are put off due to the belief that the 'ground rules' of working with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families have shifted in favour of the student at the expense of teacher support and security.

(vi)
deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities;

This component of a teacher training course needs to address the issue of students with disabilities within a dedicated special needs classroom, a normal classroom and within a composite classroom.

(vii)
achieve accreditation; and

Teaching as a career is not seen as a 'glamour' profession due to the comparatively low status of teaching when compared to some professions (eg law, medical fields, accounting). The Inquiry needs to examine this view carefully. If teachers were paid at a rate commensurate with the impact they have on society, then they would be among the top wage earners. This would be pointless if there was not then a correspondingly higher expectation of performance. This would be a very difficult situation to achieve because no group of professionals takes kindly to having the bar raised on professional performance if they have not been conditioned to such a process. It would be a mistake if attempts to raise the status of teachers were to be simply linked to remuneration.

(viii)
deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments.

We often receive feedback from graduates who feel overwhelmed by the plethora of expectations and the many layers of groups and authorities who impact on the teaching profession. Some courses in relationships and communication protocols could be included in their training.

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

The impact of schools and staff during training can make or break a trainee teacher. The selection of supervising teachers is important and schools should be very proactive in making sure a trainee teacher receives support when they are at the school. In addition, the use of current teachers for special practical lectures would be beneficial.

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

It would be good to see greater commonality between the training of primary and secondary education trainees. This would minimise the complaint that training for secondary teachers tends to focus on the content of education whilst that for primary teachers is seen to be more focused on the process of education.

A significant part of the Inquiry should be to determine why it is that comparatively few males enter primary teaching and to directly address the issue.

With the proliferation of K-12 schools, there is a need for some specialisation of teachers in the 'middle school' years (grades 5-8). This would ease the transition from the traditional primary to secondary. This period of development is critical for students who need to be carefully nurtured by teachers with an awareness of their special needs.

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

See comments on #8.

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

ASA would encourage any increase in funding for teacher training courses, particularly in light of the current shortage of teachers and the anticipated increase of teachers approaching retirement in the next few years.

The Inquiry should make reference to current research, to developments and practices from other countries as well as to the practices of other professions in preparing and training people to enter their profession.

*Dr John G Hammond
National Director Adventist Schools Australia*