

**A Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher
Education**

**School of Education
College of Arts, Education and Social Sciences
University of Western Sydney**

By

Associate Professor Steve Wilson, Head of School, School of Education, University of Western Sydney

Professor Toni Downes, former Head of School, School of Education and Early Childhood Studies, University of Western Sydney

Associate Professor Christine Johnston, Head of Special Education Programs, School of Education, University of Western Sydney

Associate Professor Wayne Sawyer, Head of Secondary Teacher Education Programs, School of Education, University of Western Sydney

Professor Margaret Vickers, Head of Research and Research Degrees, School of Education, University of Western Sydney

Dr Diana Whitton, Head of Primary Teacher Education Programs, School of Education, University of Western Sydney

Dr Mary Mooney, Head of Postgraduate Programs, School of Education, University of Western Sydney

This submission builds upon a preliminary submission tendered by the School of Education and Early Childhood Studies at UWS in May, 2005. Since that time, that school has merged with the School of Social Ecology and Lifelong Learning at UWS to form a single School of Education. The School of Education is in its early infancy and has not yet developed discourses around new directions it might wish to take in teacher education. Because of this, much of the original submission tendered by UWS remains intact. We have however flagged additional issues in this revised response, where possible attempting to capture the likely directions UWS may take in teacher education and in the provision of education more generally.

The point made in the earlier submission, that UWS academics are willing to be called on for further information and examples at any point of time during the review, still applies.

Before responding to the particular terms of reference of the review, and notwithstanding Term of Reference 11, it is important to draw attention up-front to features of the funding context that in our view will continue to impact upon the provision of quality teacher education. These are:

1. *The incapacity of teacher education programs to charge increased HECS fees.* While it is the clear intention of the legislation to attract continuing high numbers of students into teacher education programs by keeping HECS charges below the norm, this is unlikely to be the end result. University funding models are likely to allow increased HECS charges to flow only to those academic areas that have the capacity to charge more. Teacher Education at UWS will find it increasingly difficult to maintain quality programs with reduced resources relative to other areas of the university. We are clever, and are looking at how to maintain quality, but it will become increasingly difficult.
2. *Salary comparability with the profession.* Teacher education academics traditionally come from a professional education pathway. At UWS we need to increase academic salaries, because currently academic salaries are not comparable with those in the profession, and we are having increasing difficulty in attracting and keeping quality academics into universities. This exacerbates the funding difficulties we will have associated with our incapacity to charge increased HECS.
3. *Possible increases in professional experience supervisory payments to teachers.* Payments to teachers for supervising university students during school placements have not increased since the early 1990s. We note that the Australian Teachers Union has foreshadowed a salaries claim for increased payments to undertake this work. If successful, these increases, when added to the other financial pressures outlined above, will place an additional, and possibly an unsustainable, burden upon the School of Education at UWS.

It is our view each of these pressures places an incremental burden upon the School of Education at UWS, and a potential impediment to the maintenance of quality programs. Despite our continuing efforts to develop programs in teacher education of the highest quality, we are fearful that these efforts will be eroded by these external pressures caused by the disadvantageous funding environment.

Below, we address the specific terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Term of Reference 1

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

From 2007 onwards, all preservice teacher education programs at UWS will be graduate-entry programs of 12 months, 18 months or 2 year duration. We believe that the essential and sole criterion, bar English Language Proficiency, for admission to these programs should be a suitable undergraduate degree. Our practice is to rank applicants based on the GPA's achieved during their undergraduate degrees, and progressively offer positions based on rank.

A pre-service teacher education degree can be a suitable preparation for a wide range of education and training careers in school and non-school educational settings as well as business and community organisations. We believe, therefore, that it would be inappropriate to exclude academically-qualified candidates on the basis of judgments that might be based on psychological or motivational assessments, or the presumed benefits of particular life experiences.

UWS also has a five year part-time Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, where admission is based on tailored tests of literacy, numeracy and basic academic skills. The key reason for this special admission test, is that the vast majority of applicants are non-recent school leavers whose schooling results do not necessarily reflect their potential for academic study.

Overall, our experience indicates that most students are sufficiently self-aware to withdraw from the program if they discover that a teaching career, as experienced through their role as a student-teacher, is not what they expected. Staff do not hesitate to counsel student-teachers to reconsider their choices if and when ongoing problems and issues arise as a result of interpersonal difficulties or a lack of professional skills. Across all our programs, we have a suspension and exclusion rule for students who repeatedly fail to pass any unit, particularly professional practice.

At UWS our experience with student teachers whose initial undergraduate qualification is from a country where English is not the commonly spoken language, is that the general university-wide English proficiency admission requirements are not sufficient to demonstrate English proficiency in professional settings. Since 2004 we have set a higher level of English proficiency for admission and in 2006, we plan to trial a process where a further level of proficiency is required prior to professional placement and/or acceptance into our accelerated pathways. We are attempting to develop and research the efficacy of pathways and experiences that address both the language and cultural proficiencies required for professional practice.

Term of Reference 2

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

UWS has sustained a high quality academic candidate base across all its primary and secondary programs for a number of years. Recent UAI cut-off scores for school education programs have generally been in the mid 80s. The only exceptions to these have been secondary Science and Mathematics (where there is a need to accept candidates whose scores are adequate but not exceptionally high), and Early Childhood Education where it is a real struggle to attract large numbers of high-achieving school leavers.

UWS has a proud tradition of attracting into our programs large numbers of school leavers and non-recent school leavers from diverse social, cultural and linguistic

backgrounds from our local communities. Our retention rates are high, and we put energy into helping all our students complete the course in a timely fashion. Beyond this, the challenge remains to support them during their early years in the profession. While overall we have relatively low attrition rates, affordability remains a key reason for attrition of those who do not. Some cannot afford to stay on at University, and this impacts differentially on students from low SES backgrounds. Many of these students work 20 hours per week or more, and this has been shown to increase the likelihood of attrition (see Vickers and Lamb, 2003, LSAY Research Report No 30).

Attracting students with suitable prior training in Technology and Applied Studies, or recruiting career change applicants with expertise in wood and metal technologies, remains a challenge. In particular, we have no obvious undergraduate route into our graduate-entry programs for these people.

As mentioned above, a growing number of our candidates are talented professionals with a non-English speaking background; this includes those who have many years of experience in teaching overseas. We believe that it is extremely important in Greater Western Sydney to provide appropriate pathways and sets of experiences to develop the requisite cultural and language proficiency of these students. This remains a significant challenge for UWS.

Term of Reference 3

Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition

In our graduate-entry programs we have very low attrition rates. An area of concern for us is the attrition rate of TAFE graduates who gain significant academic credit to qualify for admission into undergraduate early childhood degrees. UWS currently has a research and development study being undertaken to improve transition support and services to these students. UWS also has a quality assurance focus on attrition generally, particularly relating to the retention of first year students, across all disciplines within UWS (this is now becoming a pilot project in the sector), and these data will lead to improved pedagogical and support processes being developed to sustain students in their first year at university.

A great concern, however, is attrition rates in the first five years of teaching. In the GWS region, there are the general concerns that all teachers express in relation to the working conditions that pertain in low-SES public schools. Many beginning teachers find these conditions to be very taxing and stressful. UWS and DET are currently exploring the trialling of a modified graduate-entry B.Teach (Secondary) course for secondary teachers (Classmates) that will prepare them specifically to work in schools that are considered to be 'tough' and are hard to staff. This, and other similar initiatives currently under discussion (for example, the possibility of forming some 'professional development school' partnerships with schools in the region) will allow us to develop more responsive and coordinated arrangements with local schools that will facilitate a more supportive and mediated transition between graduate study and professional entry.

UWS also has some preliminary findings from a doctoral study that indicates that adults making a career change to enter teaching careers face particular challenges within the staffroom and school cultures (these findings also apply to adults who have worked as qualified teachers in non-English speaking countries). UWS intends to continue to examine and take on board these and similar research findings as a means of improving our programs and practices.

Term of Reference 4

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

As well as rewarding the traditional research profile through promotion, UWS is quite innovative and unusual in the sector by rewarding through promotion both quality teaching and course innovation, and professional and community engagement. Many discipline areas within UWS, including Education, have had staff promoted to Professor, Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer based on excellence in these two criteria. In 2003, the Vice Chancellor's Teaching Award went to the Professional Experience Coordinator of our Primary programs.

There is however a lack of fit between our selection criteria and rates of pay when we are considering the appointment of highly regarded professionals, especially those who have not completed a Doctoral degree (the majority of skilled professional applicants). Common appointment practices within the University and differential pay scales between teachers and academics often mean that a talented professional, who could make a very significant contribution to teacher education, is not applying for a university position, or if applying is not being considered at all for appointment, or if offered a position, is required to accept a \$10,000-\$15,000 drop in salary. This problem will intensify if current proposals that bifurcate universities into teaching-intensive and research-intensive institutions are put in place. Universities aspiring to be 'research-intensive' would not find it in their 'research' interests to appoint talented professional teacher educators.

It is our view that, underpinning current national developments of teaching standards frameworks relating to accreditation, there is a need to encourage middle and senior career professional development through further formal study and the acquisition of higher formal qualifications. This would have the affect of reducing the 'divide' between professional and academics in the field, and encourage greater fluidity and movement between the academic and professional sectors (although this would still only address the issue of qualifications differentiation; not salary differentiation).

We also argue that universities and teacher employment bodies need to work more closely on the issues of joint appointments and secondments, and special medium and long term appointments where professional expertise and achievement, rather than just traditional research backgrounds are the focus. UWS has a proud tradition of a Visiting Teachers Scheme, a 6 or 12 month placement for a senior classroom teacher to teach within our programs. This Scheme has yielded long term benefits, but constraints in the University's budget mean that we can no longer sustain this Scheme.

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.

Our previous response to this term of reference suggested that the framing of this term of reference is problematic. It may imply that there is one single 'educational philosophy' that underpins all teacher education programs in Australia, or that there should be just one, or perhaps there is one but it is mistaken. All these issues can be interrogated - should all teacher education programs in all states and territories and in all regions be driven by a single philosophy? It is possible that all teacher education programs might - in the broadest sense - agree that their goal is to produce teachers who are committed to achieving the best possible learning outcomes for all students. This may translate into a commitment to 'quality teaching' but does not necessarily translate into a 'single philosophy'.

Having said this, we accept that the philosophy and praxis underpinning any particular teacher education program needs to be explicit, effectively communicated to the broader community, and accountable to the community and to the broad policy agendas of the nation. We draw attention to various discussion papers and charters developed by the peak body of teacher education groups, the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE). These papers clearly state that the context of teacher education is changing, and that new knowledges, and new economic circumstances requiring new skill sets and innovative capacities, are each requiring of teacher education groups the capacity to continually renew our own skills, knowledge, programs and pedagogies.

The School of Education at UWS accepts this challenge. Building upon recent course improvements and innovations, we will nonetheless in 2005-06 interrogate the fundamental purposes underpinning our programs with the intention of developing a clear and coherent philosophy that will then guide future course development and pedagogical methods. Our vision (or philosophy) will recognise the fundamental social and educational needs of our region and of urban and low socio-economic status communities more generally. We will commit to consulting with regional stakeholders in developing and testing this philosophy and vision, and will commit to using this philosophy to drive the development of our courses, teaching, research and community engagement.

This project will be built upon understanding community needs and educational best practices identified in the research of our own academics and in the research of others, and also through the institutional interrogations and quality assurance practices being developed by our own school, college and university. Various projects within UWS are interrogating mechanisms for student retention; effective on-line learning; assessment practices for quality and relevance; and effective university teaching practices. These will all inform the future development of teacher education programs at UWS.

Term of Reference 6

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

Within UWS, this relationship is two way. We are finding increasing number of students from other disciplines and professions seeking out undergraduate education units of study. All teacher-education students are required to study units that are offered by non-Education disciplines, that is, by Psychology, English, and so on. We are also finding increasing numbers of students from other disciplines and professions seeking to enrol in our units of study. For example, industrial design students undertake units in "Play and Development" in order to improve their foundation knowledge for the design of toys and equipment for young children; occupational therapists and tourism and hospitality students seek out our pedagogy units in order to support their one-to-one role as educators and guides.

Additionally, UWS has created within the School of Education a significant expression of transdisciplinarity with the inclusion of social ecology academics, and new research foci on neo-liberalism, globalisation, and non-formal education. The blending of the two former schools brings into play key educational concepts such as transformative learning, ecological thinking applied to learning (learning ecology), and learning, creativity and spirituality, which the school intends to exploit to improve the breadth of outcomes in our teacher education programs.

Given our move to a graduate-entry program profile, UWS will now face the challenge of creating a culture where "the whole university educates the future generation of teachers". We are responding to this challenging through the creation of a high-profile Education Major, which will be offered to all students in the university, and promoted particularly to those students who see themselves as future teachers. The Education Major is designed to capture the 'big' ideas in education, particularly those that apply to improvement and capacity building in our own region. Units in the major will treat content in ways that are applied and relevant to real world problems and solutions through educational practice, and will include the use of research and case studies. The Major will also utilise pedagogies that challenge, confront, and are transformative for participating students. Our goal is to have students enter into our graduate entry programs who are already aware of, and ready to challenge and engage with, issues, problems, thinking and practices relevant to the provision of education in our region. We feel this will considerably enhance outcomes for graduating teachers at UWS.

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; and,*
- *Deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related departments.*

Across our programs we address all of the above to a greater or lesser extent, and clearly, we are committed to achieving these outcomes for our graduating teachers. Emphases on particular areas do vary depending on the focus of the program, for example early childhood and primary would not have vocational education programs.

One concern for the staff at UWS is the absence from this list of items related to ethical practice, civics, cultural and gender diversity, interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues, and expertise in working with NESB and Indigenous students and their families, to name just a few.

We believe that the generation of such lists and their diversity of focus clearly indicates the increased complexity of the role and functions of teachers in today's society. Although we accept the desirability of beginning teachers to be competent across these full range of knowledges, we ponder whether we have created an unrealistic set of expectations for individual teachers, and point out that it is likely that it is impossible for any teacher education course to successfully inculcate all the attributes and skills on such a list – particularly given the proliferation of curriculum and mandatory associated areas required of beginning teachers. Increasing attention is being paid to teacher's deficits with regards to behaviour problems and disorders and dysfunctional families. It is sometimes implied that previous generations of teachers effectively dealt with these matters, while current generations of teachers do not. Rather than continue to blame teacher education graduates and their programs for their failure to address the growing academic curriculum (where nothing is ever cut, just added, to the traditional curriculum), and the additional list of social, welfare, vocational outcomes, maybe it is time to focus on restructuring schools so that they become settings where a range of professional and paraprofessional staff and services are available to support the core function of teaching and learning. This concept was advocated by the Commonwealth-funded Full-Service Schools program and the research conducted in relation to this program suggested that it was indeed an approach that should have been pursued and funded.

We point out that successfully negotiated transition, mentoring and induction programs which facilitate an effective transition, over time, between university and the first

professional placement would seem to be critical in addressing the developing competency base of beginning teachers, as well as retaining graduate teachers in teaching. While UWS is trialling a number of these, they are resource intensive, and not generalisable for the full cohort of students in the current funding environment.

We think it might be time to question the time-honoured tradition of expecting primary teachers to be expert in the teaching of literacy, numeracy, English, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Human Society and its Environment, Personal Development, Health, Physical Education, Music, Art, Drama and Dance to a diversity of learners. There have been successful examples in Australia where children as young as 5-8 years have been team taught by 3-4 teachers with different areas of expertise without compromising the integration of learning and the strong interpersonal relationships with children and families that characterise primary education.

Term of Reference 8

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

UWS staff have a tradition of exploring innovative and effective ways of embedding school experience and the expertise of current classroom teachers into our teacher education programs. We can provide the inquiry with many examples of these. They include the Nirimba project, where secondary Mathematics and Science teachers have enhanced their professional understandings and outcomes through an extended placement in the Nirimba community of schools, operating out of effective School Departments. In this ongoing project university academics work with teachers from both state and private schools, and our UWS students, in building effective communities of inquiry that lead to innovative teaching practices in these schools. Students completing this program are regarded as highly skilled and easily placed in the school setting, and are highly sought-after and quickly employed.

Additionally, we are developing a pilot project, Classmates, for implementation in 2006, to embed components of school-based teacher education, with components of school improvement programs to better prepare a particular cohort of graduates to teach in some of our most challenging schools. This program has been developed and resourced through a partnership between UWS and the NSW Department of Education and Training. A key element of this program is the emphasis on the mutual benefit to the schools involved and to the school-based teacher educators, and to practicing teachers who can engage with and benefit from the same program as the student teachers. Also, the School of Education's governing body in professional experience is currently conducting an investigation into the establishment of a 'professional development school' based on US models of school-university collaborative approaches to teacher education and school development. We are happy to provide more details on these projects.

Term of Reference 9

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

We strongly support any efforts to review and alter the artificial disjunction in schooling between the primary and secondary years. Teacher education programs in NSW are, however, constrained by the NSW-DET qualifying requirements for Primary Teachers and Secondary Teachers and by the fact that appointment to Government Schools remains organised according to these categories. Additionally, there is the added complication that teacher promotions, and career path advancement, are often closely linked in NSW to one's strong history within, rather than across, the primary and secondary sectors.

We would be prepared to consider stronger emphases in graduate entry programs in areas such as middle schooling, perhaps even to the extent of offering a discrete program in the area, if we were convinced that education systems in NSW would strongly support a career path for these teachers. Having said this, we do offer a Specialisation in middle years teaching in our Master of Education program, and are highly committed to its success. This program has a clear focus on engaging pedagogies, a focus of relevance, and on understanding and being responsive to the needs of emerging young adults in schools. It is interesting that, prior to the teaching of this specialization, primary school teachers tended to see middle years issues as the domain of secondary schools. We feel we have convinced both primary and secondary teachers, through this specialization, that the issues are broader than meets the eye, and that similar curriculum and pedagogical issues have currency across the primary-secondary divide.

We also see, as equally important to the primary-secondary issue, the development of a stronger emphasis in teacher education programs in relation to addressing young children's transitions to school, and the transition to work and post-compulsory education. These are critical issues in addressing social and educational disparities in western Sydney.

Term of Reference 10

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

We believe that the issue of professional development, in-service and the induction of teachers by the profession itself probably constitutes the single biggest issue in the professionalisation of teaching as well as the maintenance of it as a quality profession.

We particularly note what we believe is an unrealistic expectation of teacher education programs to produce "teacher ready" graduates or graduates that can "hit the ground running". This is not an expectation of professions such as medicine and law that have formal internship arrangements between graduation and professional employment. We

believe that between the step of graduate and beginning teacher there needs to be a formal period of internship or paid residency where interns/residents undertake a reduced teaching load under the guidance of a formal mentor.

In relation to professional training, we should note here that we have developed Masters programs in Education and Special Education that are designed to be workplace-focused and very responsive to the professional needs of teachers and other educators who undertake them. In both these programs the treatment of content and the construction of assessment tasks encourages participating educators to merge the professional issues and challenges they confront in their workplaces, with the capacity to analyse and critique them, and develop innovative responses and evaluate these, all through their course work assessment. Feedback we have from our participating teachers indicates they support and appreciate this approach to professional development.

Term of Reference 11

Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administration.

We answered this question in some detail at the beginning of this submission. We put these issues up front, rather than leaving them until the final term of reference, because we believe this issue is the fundamental factor which may ultimately determine the capacity of universities to deliver quality teacher education programs.

We therefore agree with the Australian Council of Deans of Education that this is the most important issue to be understood if the Inquiry is to be effective. We reiterate the ACDE position that there are two aspects to be considered. The first is to do with the funding of Teaching since the introduction of the 'DEET Weights' of the late 1980s. The second is to do with the internal distribution of funding in universities and its effect on teacher education programs.

First, we argue that the original DEET weight of 1.3 does not account for either the relative costs (against other social sciences) or the absolute costs of teacher education. The total costs of professional experience consume up to 20% of our total budget. The cost of professional experience has been an ongoing problem for teacher education for more than ten years. More recently the requirement to prepare graduates who can effectively use ICTS to improve student learning, means that ICT infrastructure, support and training costs are quickly becoming the second largest component of our non-salary expenditure. Neither of these factors existed when the original weighting was devised.

We therefore support the argument that a realistic weighting for teacher education should be 1.6. We believe that the 1.6 weighting is generally accepted within the sector as an accurate reflection of the actual cost of efficient and quality program delivery, including payments to teachers for supervision during professional experience placements. It should be noted that we have advanced other arguments, at the beginning of this submission, that unless funding is increased by some mechanism, that quality in

education programs is likely to be compromised in the medium term through an inability to attract quality staff (poor salary differentials), and an incapacity to meet rising payments to teachers to supervise our students during professional placements.

Additionally, we argued at the beginning of this submission that the inability of Education faculties and schools to increase HECS charges, in line with the broader institutional strategies within universities, will lead to teacher education within universities becoming clearly disadvantaged by university funding models. The question of the capability to levy increased HECS charges on places in teacher education does need to re-addressed.

Collectively we believe that one of the chronic and most important challenges facing teacher education in Australian Universities is to provide sufficient funding to Faculties and Schools of Education so that we can design and implement programs that extensive teacher education research has shown to be effective in preparing excellent teachers for their entry to the profession.