SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

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1.0 Terms of Reference

1. Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:

> *a. the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and*

> *b. the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.*

2. The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory.

3. How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

2.0 Position statements in response to the Terms of Reference

2.1 Introductory Statement

The Faculty of Education welcomes an opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the quality of teaching and teachers, as these are central to its own scholarly activities in teaching and learning, and research. The preparation of teachers for primary, secondary and tertiary education is the Faculty's core business and this is informed by its extensive research activity, which is used to inform that teaching, as well as policy and practice more broadly within the schooling system.

In sum, we support the need for quality teachers and teaching because we know they can make a difference. To achieve these goals, however, we also know that it is important to consider the range of factors which shape the context of teaching and learning in contemporary Australian schools. It is these factors as well as the individual and collective capacities of teachers, and the quality of their preparation and professional development that stand as important considerations for government policy, accountability measures, funding regimes and appraisals of teaching and teachers.

We recommend that the Committee notes that:

- considerations of the quality of teaching and teachers needs to be informed by factors such as readiness of students, the engagement of the school community, the resources and capacities of the school, as well as the attributes of individual teachers;

- an acknowledgement that measures of teaching and teacher quality include consideration of the range of contextual factors that either support or inhibit the teachers and schools achieving their intentions for high-quality educational experiences;

- in order to capture and maintain the interest of high-quality Australian teachers and to secure long and productive teaching careers, that there has to be commensurate conditions, support and engagement to assist that ongoing development and secure the retention of quality teachers;

- teachers' postgraduate education that engages, extends and improves that practice be acknowledged and rewarded as a form of effective professional development;

- the formation of literacy and numeracy competence be both an area of specialisation, but also embedded across the curriculum;

- academic standards require reconceptualisation to enable the affordances of new and emerging information and communication technologies to be capitalised upon;

- considerations for effective post-school pathways include the effective use and recognition of students' experiences outside of the school and that these experiences be actively engaged within schooling;

- measures of quality schooling include engagement with the school's local community, including local employers, and that resourcing be appropriately aligned to this goal; and

- a reconsideration of equity and social justice policies is required, because policy documents representing a shift from 'equity' and 'social justice' to 'inclusion' and 'students at educational risk' has tended to result in an individualistic-market approach which is an ineffective approach to equity.

2.2   Quality Teaching

The quality of teaching is as much a central concern for a Faculty of Education, as it is for the Committee. The OECD (2005) reports that raising the quality of teaching has provided an important focus for legislation and policies directed at education and training reforms for the future. In its report *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, it recognises, along with Teaching Australia, that quality teaching is not wholly captured by indicators such as qualifications, experience and tests of academic ability. Instead, these need to be considered in terms of personal attributes, relational attributes, teacher leadership, professional attributes and capabilities, ongoing professional learning, and professional standards and certification. Moreover, a consideration of the context in which the schooling and teaching occurs and in what ways contextual factors either support or inhibit the goals for teaching and schooling which the school seeks to enact. For instance, research being proposed by this faculty seeks to understand the experience of schooling from the perspective of students, their teachers, parents and local community members. Here, the concern is the transition from school to a life beyond schooling. However, it proposes that fundamental to the experience of schooling for students encountering this transition is how students engage in their school life, home life and life within their community, including the paid or unpaid part time work they do. Without understanding what is offered to them and how and why they elect to engage with what is offered them, there can be no confidence that teachers and teaching alone can be held to account for significant differences in their lives. It is these kinds of concerns that we attempt to impart in our programs of initial and ongoing (professional) teacher development. Hence, a more encompassing view of the teaching role and what constitutes teaching is warranted.

Indeed, recent reports have continued to highlight the importance of quality teaching in influencing student learning; e.g. *Top of the Class Report on the Inquiry into Teacher Education* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, Feb., 2007) which identified "the persistence of problems in teacher education" due to the current distribution of responsibilities in teacher education which has resulted in a fragmented approach to teacher education; the inadequate funding of teacher education; a lack of investment in building the partnerships required to bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly for the practicum; and the importance of the continuity from initial teacher education through to established, advanced and leadership stages". At a recent *Quality Teaching Forum* conducted by the Faculty, among the key issues identified were:

- the importance of partnerships and gradually inducting students into the teaching profession - from practicum, internship, first year induction, and continuing professional development;

- the importance of bridging theory-practice, knowing -doing gap;

- the need to focus on pedagogic processes and the design of learning environments;

- teachers are not only practitioners, they are also researchers who re-constitute their own knowledge, and produce new knowledge on a continual basis;

- teachers matter - quality teaching makes a difference to learning outcomes;

- individual teachers should not be held accountable for matters outside their field of responsibility;

- industrial matters are not separate from professional matters; and

- teaching is from the heart, and is about winning hearts and minds.

In seeking to respond to these kinds of concerns, the Faculty of Education has been proactive in establishing and strengthening partnerships with schools and industry partners. Examples of this includes the advice from industry partners in course and program design, the design and implementation of Work-integrated learning (WiL), professional studies, and Internships. Increasingly, our research projects are enacted through partnerships with stakeholders including schools, teachers and local community and employers: that is through research partnerships.

We support, in principle, the recommendations of the *Top of the Class Report on the inquiry into teacher education* and the *Teaching and Leading for Quality Australian Schools: A Review and Synthesis of Research-Based Knowledge*, report for Teaching Australia. However, we note that these are the most recent of many similar reports which have not been thoroughly and sufficiently resourced and acted upon. In particular, we know that teachers are increasingly experiencing heightened expectations and expanded roles, that go beyond the core task of teaching. These extend to being active, and in some cases proactive, caregivers for school-age children. These tasks are often complex and demanding. In one local school this very week these tasks included not only evacuating students during a school fire, but controlling students who were keen to take video images with their mobile telephones to forward to media outlets; administration arrangements with the exclusion of a number of students; the correct procedures for injecting students experiencing life-threatening allergic responses; and efforts to coordinate a regional response to student behaviour and engagement.

We are also aware that teachers, particularly women teachers, can have their careers disrupted by child-care responsibilities and relocation of spouses. Consequently we support, in principle, the recently released Queensland College of Teachers' *Professional Standards for Teachers*, and support the move for a national accreditation of teachers. This enables teachers who meet those standards to avoid dual accreditation processes. Instead, they are recognised as meeting the standards within their own jurisdiction, as well as meeting the national standards framework. However, beyond such regulatory arrangements, there should also be provisions for career mobility and work locations that reflect the imperatives of interrupted careers and relocations.

2.3 Attracting, Recruiting and Retaining Quality teachers

Securing and retaining quality teachers is likely to become a growing challenge for schools and schooling systems. Consistent with what has been proposed above, we concur with the need to attract, recruit and retain quality teachers. *The Survey of Final Year Teacher Education Students* (DEST, 2006), which resulted in 1875 responses, reported that respondents listed "wanting to make a difference" (87%), "wanted to teach/work with children" (82 %), and "wanted

to work in an area of specialisation/interest" (74%) as their top three factors for attracting them to study teaching. In relation to their University experience, respondents were most positive about the "value of the practicum" (91%), and identified "experienced and enthusiastic supervising teachers and mentors who have been well-informed on their roles and responsibilities" as the most important factor in gaining practical experience. For these reasons, the Faculty supports extensive practicum arrangements despite the cost burden that such arrangements placed on the overall faculty budget. These costs are largely fixed and not of the Faculty's making and control, yet represent a significant component of the budget.

We acknowledge that the student experience within undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education programs needs to be valued in terms of the strong contribution it can make to academic standards. The Succeeding@griffith framework, as an example, is conceptualised around 2 key components – a. development of Student-centred Success Culture; and b. Staff-centred Enabling Culture. This provides a conceptualisation of a systematic approach to teaching development through encompassing the student life cycle, including

- recruitment and preparation - A. focusing on enhancing student quality, B. effective preparation of prospective students;

- transition - C. effective preparation of commencing students, D. proactive academic advising, E. enabling transition in early learning environments);

- and the University student experience - F. effective program design, G. effective course design, H. enabling early academic success, I. strategic communication systems, and J. facilitating self-managed learning and problem-solving.

While this is a University-wide project, initiatives need to ensure that quality students are attracted to the teaching profession, that their preservice teacher education program is well designed, and that graduates are well prepared for their careers as educators. For this to occur, value needs to be assigned to the important work which University staff play in roles to support and lead this; e.g. student orientation and engagement, first year advisors, course convenors, program convenors, lecturers, tutors, general staff, and casual academic staff.

More particularly, within the Faculty, we have supported and introduced the concept of internship. This comprises a programme of transition from student teacher, to co-teacher (intern), to established teacher building upon the University experience through supporting the move from the Internship to Induction into the profession. This model is being expanded to become available for more student teachers as a compulsory component of their pre-service teacher education program. While we prize the Internship model, additional resources are required to make this a reality. In terms of the important transition from Internship to Induction, considerably more attention, support and funding is required to support induction. Data suggests that there are unacceptably high levels of attrition by establishing teachers in their first 3-5 years. Currently, induction tends to be ad hoc, poorly resourced, and individual schools report that they are unable to adequately induct beginning teachers due to the many demands they have. There is a general expectation that beginning teachers need to be able to 'hit the ground running'. Considerable improvements are needed for induction to be designed and implemented as a general principle of a process of transition to professional practice.

In terms of retaining quality teachers, research suggests that many teachers persevere as teachers due to intangibles, such as 'caring for children', they see teaching as a calling, and that education is seen as a means to promote social justice in our country. However, commencing salaries for both teachers and for teacher educators need improving to ensure that appropriate remuneration is provided so that it is commensurate with the importance of quality teaching. Evidence suggests that starting salaries for teachers in Australia are reasonably comparable to OECD competitors. However, the final salary in major competing countries is generally twice

that of starting salaries in those countries, while in Australia it is approximately 1.5 times the starting salary. This tends to have an impact on the most competent teachers who might choose to move into school administration at best, or leave the profession for more highly paid careers. In essence, we need government to act to provide working conditions and pay arrangements that will encourage more high-quality Australian teachers to retire as teachers at the end of their working life, rather than earlier.

The recent debate being undertaken into remuneration for teachers based upon performance has resulted in various perspectives. Positive arguments have been provided for performance-based payment for teachers. However, caution is needed as no clear methodology has yet been proposed which provides an understanding of the complex nature of teaching and learning, and which accommodates the collaborative nature of people working together to produce learning outcomes. Importantly, our research indicates that contextual factors need to be accounted for in considerations of teachers' performance. The opportunities for and challenges of being an effective teacher are not uniformly distributed across schools and schooling situations. To discriminate against teachers to work in schools and communities that fail to afford support for their activities will only exacerbate the social divide within Australia, erode the commitment and enthusiasm of teachers working in challenging schooling situations and further demark many public schools.

Whilst most jurisdictions in Australia require teachers to undertake and provide evidence of ongoing professional development, there are no salary increments or additional remuneration for postgraduate qualifications. The percentage of the teaching workforce undertaking postgraduate studies at the level of Masters or Doctoral studies has been in decline in Australia, while there are examples of greater recognition for these postgraduate qualifications in education systems elsewhere in the world. There are some examples of school-University linkages where credit for University qualifications can be gained by teachers; e.g. the Professional Development Pathways program in Queensland as a cooperative project being undertaken by Education Queensland in collaboration with 9 Universities, including Griffith University. Incentives for undertaking formal postgraduate qualifications could enhance quality teaching, outcomes for students, and the status of the teaching profession. This could be linked to stages of teacher development and with remuneration; e.g. establishing teacher, accomplished teacher, senior teacher, curriculum coordinator, head of department. There are no requirements for an applicant for promotion in schools in Queensland to have postgraduate qualifications. While most Universities now require a doctorate as an essential criterion for a lecturing position, a candidate for a promotional position in schools can be successful with an undergraduate qualification.

2.4 Literacy and assessment

The issue of whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment must take account stages of schooling as well as the provision of quality literacy and numeracy education at each stage.   A DEST-funded seminal study of the literacy demands of curriculum in the post-compulsory years undertaken by Faculty staff (Cumming and Wyatt-Smith) reported that literacy demands can present powerful barriers to success in schooling, irrespective of the strand (science, maths; arts, humanities; vocational education and technology) that a student chooses to take up. Further, the study identified the conceptualisation of *curriculum literacies* as a new way of thinking about the relationship between a curriculum area and its literacy demands (Wyatt-Smith and Cumming).   That is to argue that the literate capabilities required for success in history, maths, music, for example, need to be explicitly taught, especially as these relate to assessment activities. While basic decoding and encoding skills need to be taught and mastered, they are insufficient to enable a student meet the literacy demands they face in all curriculum areas. This conceptualisation has been influential in the development of the Queensland literacy education policy and Framework for Action. Given the recent introduction of this framework in 2006, it is too early to indicate the

impact of attempts to directly focus teacher attention of literacy teaching and learning as embedded in the curriculum. It is however fair to say that the research mentioned above and several other studies provide strong support for connecting the teaching and assessment of curriculum and literacy. More specifically, the work shows the need for curriculum and assessment policy initiatives that require teachers to make such connections a hallmark of their routine practice. This recognises the merit of the widespread practice of the dedicated literacy hour as part of the school provision in the timetable. It also makes clear however that literacy instruction, separated from the curriculum in the middle and senior phases of schooling, will mean that literacy demands in learning beyond Year 3 remain implicit and thereby restrict students' chances of reaching their learning and achievement potential. This observation pertains directly to the Inquiry focus on the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.

Other research undertaken by staff in the Faculty has identified key matters relating to how Queensland schools use the reported data from statewide literacy and numeracy testing. Of direct relevance to this Inquiry is the finding that the reported literacy and numeracy achievement data, as reported most recently against the national benchmarks, are not routinely used by teachers in conjunction with their own classroom assessment evidence. More specifically, teachers reported that they do not interrogate the reports for what they might reveal about needed interventions. This is largely a result of the teachers' lack of professional development about how they might use the data for improvement (as distinct from measurement) purposes. In effect, the reported data are seen as a series of terminal points instead of a means of tracking performance for individuals and groups over time. The reported data is therefore not used to realise the potential of the National Plan that linked standardised testing in literacy and numeracy, with benchmark reporting, and diagnoses and improvement for all children. Further, the potential of the data to generate inter-and intra-school dialogue and informed public discussion about literacy and numeracy levels in schools has not been fully realised. Upskilling of the profession in the analysis and pedagogical use reported achievement data in literacy and numeracy is a high priority. This is especially the case for students with learning difficulties.

In relation to literacy and assessment, there is a growing body of research evidence showing that quality assessment in the hands of teachers can leverage improvement for all students in ways not possible by large scale curriculum and testing reform initiatives alone. There is no doubt that socioeconomic disadvantage is a key consideration in analysing student achievement data. However, such disadvantage should not be an accepted explanation for continued or prolonged underperformance in certain geographic areas and groups in our society. Poverty does not equate to inevitable underperformance, though this assumption seems to be influential in the thinking of some teachers. The point is that by 'front-ending' assessment and ensuring that teachers have clear expectations of what will count as quality performances in schooling, pedagogy can be considerably sharpened. If educational disadvantage (caused by limited teaching and assessment opportunities) is to be addressed, then there is an urgent need for going beyond the alphabetic labels of standards to the formulation of clear statements of quality and the performance expectations at various levels (A to E, for example).

Currently, it is fair to say that Australia does not have a set of literacy standards that clearly link to curriculum at the different stages of schooling. Further, Australia does not have a set of literacy standards that demarcate expected performance features of quality. This observation relates to the Inquiry focus on *academic standards as they compare between states and territories and with those of other countries. In relation to literacy education, no standards exist for such comparison purposes and the equating exercises undertaken as part of the national benchmarking exercises do not constitute a sound basis for making such comparison.*

Further, a major area of needed review in curriculum and assessment in schooling relates to how successive stages articulate and build on one another. Much work needs to be done within and across states to identify the demands of the transitions or key junctures in schooling. This work will be critical in building confidence in the standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory. The work is also linchpin in building an evidential basis for studying how such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

2.5 Numeracy

The Faculty shares the Committee's concerns about the importance of teaching of numeracy and supporting teachers become more effective in teaching numeracy is a key goal for Faculty. Overall, in Australian education the work in numeracy is at a marked crossroads. For many teachers, the teaching of numeracy is simply the teaching of mathematics. There has been little change in orientations towards numeracy as being something different from mathematics. The separation/integration of mathematics/numeracy needs considerable input from education systems and teacher education. Work is required to identify the differences and enact this practice in schools. Some states, such as South Australia, have been working on identifying and making the differences explicit to teachers, while other states are not as advanced in this process. If there are to be gains in articulating and then enacting a numeracy curriculum, then work needs to be undertaken to identify what is meant by the construct and how it is to be enacted in schools. There is considerable hesitation in the teaching of mathematics (and numeracy) among teachers. Studies have sought to identify the mathematical content knowledge of teachers; the attitudes of teachers towards mathematics (fears, etc) and see these are problematic in the teaching of mathematics. However, this is internationally recognised as problematic. There is a clear need for more focused approaches that help teachers with the teaching of this key area. Approaches that move away from the shallow teaching (e.g. rote and drill, memorisation, algorithmic) to ones which focus on working mathematically. Research is showing how this can be done but it has been difficult to move away from the history of mathematics pedagogy which has tended to rely heavily on text books. The biggest challenge for numeracy/mathematics teaching is the shift from the historical legacies to approaches that focus on deep thinking and learning. This again highlights the importance of quality professional development that will influence the practice of teachers. Such changes are likely to be realised when teachers have the capacities to be effective with these novel practices. This requires development of both understanding and technique. Consequently, the existing provision of professional development might be extended to include and reward postgraduate studies in which teachers can engage in a constructive reappraisal and reconstruction of their teaching practice in areas such as numeracy and ICT. Thus, improving quality in maths education is more likely to arise from preparation and professional development that engage students in working mathematically.

2.6   Information and Communication Technologies

UNESCO (2002) has predicted that there will be as much change in the next three decades as there has been in the last three centuries. For UNESCO, the challenge will be for educational systems to transform curriculum and teaching and learning to provide students with the skills to function effectively in adynamic, information-rich, and rapidly changing environment. Academic standards require reconceptualisation to enable the affordances of new and emerging information and communication technologies (ICT) to be taken into account and capitalised upon. Research projects within the Faculty of Education has included research aimed to provide advice about how to prepare learners to engage in a changing world.

The importance of maintaining currency with ICT is becoming increasingly well understood within the schooling community. What is perhaps less well understood it is how this technology might best be used to improve teaching and learning in our schools. Research undertaken through the Faculty of Education (Zevenbergen) has explored the use of ICT to support numeracy learning, it was found that there were pockets of exemplary work where teachers created extraordinary learning opportunities for using ICT to support and enhance numeracy learning. While the literature is characterised with such case studies, the overall project showed that there is very limited use of ICT to support numeracy learning and that when it did occur it was in a very limited and restricted capacity. It was reported that teachers did not know how to use ICT in open-ended, exploratory ways, and needed considerable professional development to enable them to use ICT in these innovative ways. It was also found that where teachers did use ICT in numeracy learning, it was in the way that most mathematics/numeracy is taught - a lock-step, teacher-directed approach. Such approaches fail to capture the power of the ICT to develop rich numeracy learning and understandings. The equity dimensions of the project indicated that those students who are most at risk of educational failure also experienced the least innovative experiences in use of ICT in numeracy classrooms. This suggests that professional development options needs to include engagement with teachers in ICT and in ways that can enrich the learning experiences they provide for those students.

Indeed, in other research undertaken within the Faculty of Education, the focus has moved considerably from concentrating on models of professional development for teachers to integrate ICT to examining how ICT might transform teaching and learning (Finger & Jamieson-Proctor, 2006). Studies within the Faculty on preservice teacher education students' confidence and competencies in using ICT have indicated that graduates are confident and competent, however, this is not able to be capitalised upon in many teaching contexts which graduates find themselves in. The measurement of student use of ICT requires further emphasis as the amount of funding provided to schools for purchasing hardware, software, and enhanced connectivity, and the array of teacher professional development in ICT use, has not yet impacted uniformly on improved student use of ICT. The development of an instrument for measuring ICT use by students has been developed by members of the Faculty of Education for use by teachers in Education Queensland which enables systemic data collection (Jamieson-Proctor, Watson, & Finger, 2004). This instrument provides a strategic tool for schools to map both more effective ICT integration learning activities as well as mapping transformational strategies for improving curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

2.7   School to Work Pathways

Like the Committee, the Faculty is concerned to understand how best post-school pathways might progress, and has conducted a number of studies in this field. One project investigated school to work pathways in the senior years of schooling in Qld, NSW and Vic with a focus on the benefits and costs of these programs (Zevenbergen). In summary, what we found was that the programs have significant potential when certain characteristics are present - that the pathways must be quality and well supported (e.g. in industry and schools); that there is low status in schools for these programs as noted by staff and students despite the significant success of the programs; students in rural areas of Australia are disadvantaged by the limited array of choices in rural regions and need to go to larger towns or bigger cities to gain access to a good array of occupations. It was also found that where schools and industries formed partnerships (and not in competition for industries or students), there were greater strengths and economies developed in those communities. Overall, the project showed that the school-to-work pathways could add significant capital to school graduates when implemented appropriately. That is, the pathways need to be just that, pathways to work. Where the programs were not successful it was found it was due to misconceptions by schools about the role and value of the programs. Where students were placed in them to get them out of school, for the money they would bring into the school, or for testing whether the student liked that type of work, the pathways were unsuccessful. Such orientations towards the programs resulted in lost opportunities for schools and students but also meant that the potential for building strong

links with industry were lost as industry did not have the inclination to work with these schools again. Hence, there is a need for partnerships and obligations on the part of schools and local communities to work together in securing these outcomes. Therefore, we urge the Committee to understand the importance of developing and sustaining these partnerships.

In another study, research was undertaken to identify how the potential of students paid part-time work experiences might be used in schooling to be used to assist students understand the world of work beyond schools and to make informed decisions about post-school pathways. That research comprised engaging students in schools in Queensland and Victoria in reflecting upon their paid part-time work in order to understand the nature of work, working life and the school options (Billett & Ovens, 2007). The research process engaged the students into considering the kinds of work that were attractive to them, and the ways in which work was organised, rewarded and acknowledged in workplaces. In this way, drawing upon the students' own experience of their work and working life and sharing them with other students provided a resource which was held by the majority of students to be more effective than school organised work placement programs. Central to the success of such an initiative was the capacity of teachers to facilitate the learning process in which the students held the content (i.e. their workplace experiences). Importantly here, teachers' valuing of knowledge learnt outside the school was also central to the success of engaging the students in reflecting upon their work. So, learning experiences outside of schools can be utilised, acknowledged and integrated into the school curriculum to support school to work pathways.

Together, what these studies indicate is that experiences outside of the school can be used as effective bases to help students understand and developed competence for life beyond school, to inform postschool pathways and to assist students make informed decisions about those pathways. However, a key issue in merging in both studies is the importance of experiences outside of the school being valued and integrated within the schooling experience. A consideration of these experiences in terms of curriculum and assessment, may well assist organising more effective and successful transitions from school to work, particularly, for the many young Australians who struggled to make that effective transition.

2.8 Undergraduate Course in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

As part of this concern with alternatives and options, the Faculty, perhaps alone in Australia, has engaged all senior school teacher education students in a course on vocational education and training (4171EPS Work, Vocations and Vocational Education). Often times, it has been reported that students graduating from the Faculty quickly become acknowledged as having expertise in VET in Schools, within their schools because of their participation in this course. Moreover, as many, perhaps most, of these teacher education students have had little association with vocational education or students engaging in vocational education, this course provides important insights about the goals, purposes and procedures for VET in schools. This kind of initiative being championed by that Faculty of Education at Griffith may well be one which might be more broadly applied across Australian universities preparing teachers and those offering programs of professional development.

2.9 Broadening Post School Options through Curriculum Engagement

It follows from the research noted above that there is a clear imperative to broaden the provisions for a range of post school options. In a report to the Queensland Studies Authority, *Broadening Post School Options through Curriculum Engagement*, Atweh, Singh, Taylor, and Knight (2006) investigated the influences shaping Queensland year 11 and 12 students' post school aspirations and their sources of information about post school options and pathways. In particular, the study focused on the relationship between students' post school plans and curriculum provisions, school organisation, and scaffolded learning. The aim of the research study was to provide detailed, up-to-date information about these issues across a broad range

of Queensland schools and student/staff cohorts. In addition, the study also investigated how social, cultural and economic factors might impact on students' subject choices and post school aspiration. Among the findings and recommendations, the authors suggested that:

- Schools and school authorities should continue to examine their policies and practices to avoid locking students into study options and pathways;

- Schools should continue to be sensitive to the emotional needs of their students as they make informed choices during secondary schooling and provide required scaffolding to assist them in their decision making;

- Educational authorities should provide additional support/resources for schools from non metropolitan and lower socioeconomic areas in terms of scaffolding student experiences/opportunities in relation to post school options;

- Larger employer groups and universities should be aware of the need to extend their information networks and recruitments to schools that have less access to such information;

- Schools should be encouraged to be more flexible in their timetable to allow more diverse groups of students to balance their work commitments and their studies;

- Further research is needed to investigate post school options that students select and for schools to provide support programs that challenge students towards increased awareness of the effect of social factors/attributes such as gender, ethnicity, and geographic location on their choices;

- Specialised support that Indigenous students receive should be extended to target issues related to post school options in addition to academic support and social support to finish school;

- Programs that target mainstream students with respect to their post school options should also consider the needs of Indigenous students and not delegate all their support to specialised programs and personnel.

3.0   Equity Policy Implications

From research undertaken by Singh and Taylor (2007) which examined recent equity policy for schools through an analysis of the language of 'inclusion' and 'educational risk' in key policy documents associated with a major reform of public education in Queensland, they have noted that globalism has increased, rather than reduced social inequity. They also reported that, at the same time, good quality accessible education can play a crucial role in challenging the inequalities produced by global informationalism. While they found that, in Queensland, equity is still on the agenda, policy tends to reflect radically new neo-liberal economic ways. For example, the focus is individualistic whereby each individual needs to be tracked because they are potentially 'at-risk' of 'school failure'. Identification of 'at risk' students has been devolved to the level of the school and district, and intervention strategies have to be devised at the local level. Stories of success are then to be shared/networked with other schools. Singh and Taylor's analysis suggest that while 'target group equity' strategies were limited in terms of addressing issues of social exclusion and inequity, the new deal on equity, a market-individualistic approach is an inadequate alternative.

Within this policy context, Singh and Taylor noted that there was a discursive shift away from the language of 'social justice' and 'target groups', towards 'inclusion' and 'students at educational risk'. However, there were differing views among the bureaucrats who were interviewed about the meaning of the terms. In addition, while some were concerned that the focus on 'students at educational risk' suggested individual deficit notions, others suggested that the term was intended to focus attention on system and school failure. Singh and Taylor argued that although a 'target group' approach to equity was a limited means of addressing

social disadvantage in the new millennium, a market-individualistic approach was an inadequate alternative.

3.1 Summary

In sum, we support the need for quality teachers and teaching because we know this can make a difference. To achieve this goal, however, we also know that it is important to consider the range of factors which shape the context of teaching and learning in contemporary Australian schools. It is these factors as well as the individual capacities of teachers, and the quality of their preparation and professional development that stand as important considerations for government policy, accountability measures, funding regimes and appraisals of teaching and teachers.

We recommend that the Committee notes that:

- considerations of the quality of teaching and teachers needs to be informed by factors such as readiness of students, the engagement of the school community, the resources and capacities of the school, as well as the attributes of individual teachers;

- an acknowledgement that measures of teaching and teacher quality include consideration of the range of contextual factors that either support or inhibit the teachers and schools achieving their intentions for high-quality educational experiences;

- in order to capture and maintain the interest of high-quality Australian teachers and to secure long and productive teaching careers, that there has to be commensurate conditions, support and engagement to assist that ongoing development and secure the retention of quality teachers;

- teachers' postgraduate education that engages, extends and improves that practice be acknowledged and rewarded as a form of effective professional development;

- the formation of literacy and numeracy competence be both an area of specialisation, and explicitly embedded in curriculum;

- clearly defined literacy and numeracy standards need to be developed to inform efforts at building an evidential base for monitoring progress over time;

- academic standards require reconceptualisation to enable the affordances of new and emerging information and communication technologies to be capitalised upon;

- considerations for effective post-school pathways include the effective use and recognition of students' experiences outside of the school and that these experiences be actively engaged within schooling;

- measures of quality schooling include engagement with the school's local community, including local employers, and that resourcing be appropriately aligned to this goal; and

- a reconsideration of equity and social justice policies is required, because policy documents representing a shift from 'equity' and 'social justice' to 'inclusion' and 'students at educational risk' has tended to result in an individualistic-market approach which is an ineffective approach to equity.