

Teacher Education Expert Panel
Discussion Paper - Executive Summary

Introduction

Teachers have the most powerful influence on student learning outside of the home, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a profession, teachers dedicate their lives and careers to help their students excel, including in challenging environments.

On 12 August 2022, Australia's Education Ministers met with teachers, principals and other education experts to discuss the teacher shortage in Australia. One of the key issues raised at the Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable was the need to improve initial teacher education (ITE). By better preparing teachers for the classroom from day one with the skills they need to improve student learning, all new teachers can start with a strong foundation.

The Teacher Education Expert Panel (the Panel) has been established to provide advice on key issues raised at the Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable and in the preceding Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (released in February 2022). The Panel will provide advice on four reform areas:

1. strengthen ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates
2. strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE programs
3. improve the quality of practical experience in teaching
4. improve postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants

The Panel has a unique opportunity to improve ITE, support our teacher workforce and help students excel. By ensuring graduate teachers learn and apply the teaching practices that work best and recognising highly effective ITE programs, graduate teachers will be better prepared for the classroom. Improving ITE to attract new teachers with considerable professional and life experience will also contribute to the quality of our teacher workforce.

Governments, higher education providers, regulators and the broader education sector all have a role to play in improving ITE. The Panel is seeking feedback and discussion on how we achieve this.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the key findings of the Panel's work to date, opportunities for delivering on the reform areas, and questions for discussion to inform the Panel's advice. The Panel has also prepared an accompanying detailed Discussion Paper which provides the rationale for and evidence to support the Panel's findings.

1. Strengthening ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates

ITE program content should be evidence based and set graduate teachers up well to handle the classroom environment. The Panel has identified the key teaching practices every teacher should learn in ITE to be prepared for the classroom and best support students. This would equip graduate teachers with a strong understanding of what works best to improve student learning based on the best evidence. This content covers:

- **Brain and learning:** Knowing how students learn to provide teachers with a foundational understanding of why specific teaching practices work. This includes understanding how students process new information, how they retain that information and how they apply that knowledge to new situations.
- **Effective practices:** Knowing the classroom practices that have the highest impact on improving student learning, including:
 - breaking down what students need to learn and then demonstrating each step so that students understand what is expected of them
 - assessing where students are in their learning and providing them with timely feedback to correct misunderstandings and build their knowledge, and
 - literacy and numeracy teaching strategies.

- **Classroom management:** Knowing how to set up classroom environments so students can spend the most amount of time learning, including:
 - establishing clear and well-defined rules and routines to create safe and supportive environments
 - setting high expectations, building positive relationships with students and engaging students in their learning, and
 - role-modelling expected behaviour, rehearsing responses and providing feedback to students which focuses on expected behaviour, rather than undesired behaviours.
- **Enabling factors:** Having a foundational understanding of First Nations peoples, their cultures and perspectives, cultural responsiveness, family engagement and diverse learners to ensure teaching is being delivered in appropriate ways that are responsive to student need.

Discussion

There is an opportunity to ensure all teachers learn in ITE the evidence-based practices which improve student learning. In addition, there is an opportunity for graduate teachers to be assessed on these practices as part of their final year assessment (known as the Teaching Performance Assessment) so that they develop and practice their skills in these areas.

To what extent would this strengthen ITE to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates?

2. Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

A publicly available quality measure for ITE programs would drive performance of higher education providers and help ITE students make informed choices. The Panel has been asked for advice on assessing the quality of ITE programs and how quality should be linked to funding.

The Panel proposes that high-performing ITE programs are those which: **select** diverse, high-quality candidates in areas of workforce need; support and **retain** their ITE students to graduate as a teacher; prepare ITE students to be **ready for the classroom**; and support graduate teachers to **transition** effectively into the teaching profession.

The performance of ITE programs should be assessed on these four categories using a set of standardised measures. Performance against the measures should be publicly available, to recognise highly effective ITE programs, create a culture of continuous improvement and inform student choice.

The Panel proposes that reliable and relevant data are used to assess performance across these four categories:

- **Selection:** Data on the participation of diverse and high-quality candidates in areas of workforce need (i.e. First Nations students, students from regional and remote locations and low socio-economic backgrounds, school leavers with a high Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank and students enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math subjects).
- **Retention:** Data on the proportion of students who leave their course.
- **Classroom readiness:** Data on students' perceived preparedness for entering the teaching profession and their satisfaction with the quality of their course.
- **Transition:** Data on the employment outcomes of recent graduates and early career teachers, including employment in areas of workforce need.

The Panel has considered potential options for linking these performance measures to funding to encourage continuous improvement in ITE.

Under the current higher education funding arrangements, higher education providers receive a funding amount to offer places for different courses. The Australian Government does not allocate places to specific courses such as ITE. This would require 'designating' ITE places (similar to medical

places), which set caps on the number of enrolments for each ITE program. The Panel does not consider this to be a feasible option as it would limit the number of places and could limit teacher supply, worsening the national shortage of teachers.

The Panel has identified three potential options for linking performance of ITE programs to funding, which seek to encourage providers to strive for excellence:

- **Public transparency and accountability:** Publicly reporting on the performance measures would increase accountability for ITE program performance and provide students with information to inform their choice of higher education provider. The Australian Government could require a commitment from providers to improve their performance as part of its agreements with each higher education provider (called mission-based compacts).
- **Transition funding:** Transition funding could help lift the performance of ITE programs delivered nationally by ensuring all providers are supported to improve.
- **Excellence pool for high-performing ITE programs:** High-performing higher education providers could be rewarded with additional funding to support improved quality and additional enrolments in ITE.

Discussion

There is an opportunity to strengthen the focus on improving performance in ITE by setting standardised performance measures for higher education providers and reporting publicly against them. There is also an opportunity to strengthen the link between performance and funding through the provision of financial incentives to encourage higher education providers to strive for excellence.

To what extent would these opportunities provide a strengthened focus on improving the performance of ITE programs?

3. Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

Practical experience placements play a critical role in providing ITE students with the opportunity to apply their learning and practise their skills in classroom settings. The Panel is looking at how to improve the quality of practical experience with regard to best practice models used in education and other disciplines.

There is limited evidence on the best models for practical experience in teaching and no singular view on how to best approach delivery. Through a review of available literature, case studies and stakeholder consultation, features of high-quality practical experience include:

- that the theory taught in ITE is integrated with practical experience
- they are facilitated by strong provider-school partnerships
- they are well-structured and well-timed
- they are delivered in high-quality, collaborative schools with capacity for placements, and
- ITE students are overseen by capable teacher mentors.

However, despite previous reform efforts, key challenges persist in delivering consistently high-quality practical experience. These include:

- partnerships between providers and schools do not always support high quality placements
- the quality of practical experience, including the structure and timing of placements, varies across ITE programs
- teachers feel they have limited time for mentoring and selecting mentors can be ad-hoc
- placements can be more challenging to deliver in certain contexts, for example in regional, rural and remote areas, and
- undertaking practical experience placements for extended time periods can be difficult for ITE students with competing commitments and additional needs.

Discussion

There is an opportunity to improve the quality of practical experience in teaching through:

- developing more comprehensive system level agreements between school systems and higher education providers to improve the coordination and quality of placements
- developing national guidelines for high-quality practical experience
- supporting particular schools to specialise in delivering high quality placements who can share their expertise, and
- providing targeted support for ITE students with competing commitments, additional needs or studying in areas of workforce need to complete their placements.

To what extent would these opportunities improve the quality of practical experience?

4. Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

People making a career change to teaching can bring considerable professional and life experience to the teacher workforce. The Panel has been asked to provide advice on improving postgraduate ITE to attract mid-career entrants.

Increasing the number of mid-career entrants into teaching can help to address teacher shortages and improve diversity in the teaching profession. However, there are a number of barriers to attracting mid-career entrants into teaching. Mid-career entrants generally have greater personal and financial responsibilities and as such, the loss of income during study, the length of an ITE program and competing commitments such as family and work can be significant barriers to making the switch to teaching.

Existing pathways that target mid-career entrants seek to address these barriers by:

- condensing the program to reduce time out of the workforce and loss of income
- offering paid employment as an education professional during the program (addresses loss of income while studying)
- offering flexibility such as providing opportunities to study part-time and online, and
- providing incentives to make the switch to teaching more attractive, including financial incentives such as scholarships, guarantees of employment and additional coaching/support.

However, governments and higher education providers face barriers to developing and delivering pathways targeting mid-career changers. This includes a limited evidence-base for designing mid-career programs, the need to meet regulatory requirements, high costs of delivery and challenges in developing condensed programs.

Discussion

There is an opportunity to attracting mid-career entrants into ITE by:

- enabling mid-career entrants to enter the classroom sooner as part of their degree
- developing evidence and provide guidance on the features of effective programs to attract mid-career entrants, and
- improving the flexibility of available postgraduate ITE programs to support mid-career entrants in managing competing commitments.

To what extent would these opportunities improve postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants?