Delivering high-quality practicum placements

1 Context

Practicum placements enable ITE students to apply and practice their learning while they prepare themselves for the classroom. Practicum design and delivery varies significantly across jurisdictions, ITE providers and schools. This leads to a spectrum of ITE student experiences across hundreds of ITE programs. Inconsistent practicum quality may negatively impact ITE student development and their retention in teaching.

Recent consultations and reviews have sought to improve the consistency of practicum placements:

- The **National Teacher Workforce Action Plan** and accompanying roundtables highlighted the importance of targeted support for first year ITE students. Early experiences of high-quality practicum are key to encouraging ITE students to become teachers.
- The **Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE)** review stressed that ITE students should develop strong relationships with mentor teachers and broader school communities during practicum placements. This may require thoughtful provider innovation, stronger school support mechanisms and greater ITE student immersion in practicum contexts.
- The **Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG)** review recommended strengthening standards for minimum practicum requirements and improving the provider-school partnership approach. A more recent implementation review found that TEMAG recommendations have been implemented inconsistently across providers and jurisdictions over the last decade, largely due to high variation in ITE delivery contexts, resource constraints and competing reform priorities.

2 Scope and Approach

This paper focuses on improving the quality of practicum placements in ITE by exploring the following key questions:

- What are the characteristics of high-quality practicum placements?
- What are the key challenges in delivering high-quality practicum consistently across ITE?
- What are the system opportunities to address these key challenges, and how can these opportunities build on previous and existing reforms?

Analysis in this paper is informed by:

- Stakeholder consultation with ITE providers, education departments, teacher regulatory authorities and peak sector organisations.
- A review of existing academic and grey literature on practicum.

3 Emerging findings

3.1 Characteristics of high-quality practicum placements

More broadly, there is no clear evidence that a single model of practicum will deliver consistent, high-quality placements across all contexts. However, evidence and stakeholder feedback suggest that there are several broad characteristics of high-quality placements.

3.1.1 Well-timed, longer in duration, earlier in programs and more frequent

Having ITE students undertake practicum early, at different points in the school year, for longer periods at a time, and more frequently allows ITE students to better relate pedagogy to practice and understand the responsibilities of teaching. Research does not prescribe specific timing, however generally best practice is seen as:

- **Beginning early in the course.** An earlier practicum means ITE students can better contextualise their learning and determine whether they are committed to their teacher career. Most major ITE providers schedule their first placement in Semester 1 of first year (e.g., University of Melbourne in week three of the course).
- **Longer in duration (collectively and individually).** The longer an ITE student is placed in a school, the greater their connection to mentors, school students and the community. Current placement length varies across providers (e.g., from 5 to 45-day blocks), with some moving to extended final placements (e.g., 10 weeks). Longer placements can involve a trade-off with diversity of experience.
- **More frequent.** ITE students benefit from regularly practicing what they learn from their courses. This could look like more placements in total (e.g., Charles Sturt University runs nine undergraduate practicum placements) or continuous school immersion (e.g., regularly each week, as in the Alpha Crucis Hub School model and Edith Cowan University's Scholar in Residence program).
- **Throughout the school year.** A variety of placement timings exposes ITE students to a broader range of teacher duties (such as term planning, substantive teaching and report writing). Currently, placements tend to be scheduled to fit into ITE course schedules and school availability, so may repetitively occur at similar times (e.g., end of term where assessments can crowd out genuine teaching opportunities).

Case study: University of Notre Dame, Western Australia – Bachelor of Education

The University of Notre Dame Australia offers a total of 160 days for practicum days, double the minimum requirement. Placements tend to be longer ~10 week blocks. This allows ITE students to better immerse themselves in the school community and experience the full school term cycle. Longer placements also allow for greater mentor reflection and feedback, which both enhance ITE students' capabilities and enthusiasm to continue teaching.

3.1.2 Properly sequenced, aligned to ITE course content and focused on practical skills

Practicum placements should also be well-structured, which means:

- **Properly sequenced** – practicum design should incrementally empower ITE students to apply and practice their learning in a way that allows for scaffolded skill development. For example, ITE students may benefit from being given greater levels of direct guidance for discrete topics during the initial placement, followed by more independent, generalised responsibilities in later practicum placements. This may increase ITE students' feelings of 'classroom readiness'.
- **Focused on practical skills –** practicum design should focus on more practical skills that must be learned and practiced in a classroom setting, such as behavioural management and teaching diverse learners.
- **Aligned to ITE course content –** practicum design should align directly to different aspects of ITE course content.

To better link theory and practice, a well-designed practicum will typically include time and opportunities for:

- **Lesson planning –** to allow for the additional time ITE students need to prepare, to improve their confidence.
- **Performance reflection –** to allow for self-reflection and deliberate, incremental performance improvement.
- **Mentor feedback –** to benefit from detailed and personalised observations, and suggestions for actions.
- **Peer collaboration –** to benefit from others' experiences, to improve skills and likelihood of course completion.

Case study: Deakin University – Bachelor of Education (Primary)

Deakin University has designed a model of practicum which integrates and reflects coursework and develops ITE student skills incrementally. The focus of placements includes: social contexts of education, classroom management, inclusive education, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment and the university-to-work transition. Other providers with a similar approach include the Australian Catholic University, University of New England and University of Wollongong.

3.1.3 Overseen by capable and well-equipped teacher mentors

Teacher mentors are crucial to ensuring high-quality practicum experiences for ITE students. A capable mentor is an experienced teacher who is adequately trained in supervision and willing to invest time and energy into the role. They typically have at least five years' classroom experience, during which they have amassed many useful insights to share with their mentees.

Mentor teachers should ideally undertake training to ensure they:

- develop their skills in observing, supervising and sharing experiences as a mentor;
- have a current understanding of best practice teaching models delivered by the provider;
- can sufficiently self-critique their professional practice and to assist ITE students to self-reflect; and
- understand 'Australian Professional Standards' and effectively judge ITE students' performance against these.

Mentor teachers who willingly take on the role, instead of being allocated, also enable better ITE practicum experiences.

Case study: AITSL's Supervising Preservice Teacher program

AITSL has developed an interactive and self-directed online professional learning program aimed at enhancing mentor teachers' knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively supervise ITE students. Content includes effective partnerships, practice analysis, making judgements, unpacking the Graduate-level Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA).

Case study: Victorian Effective Mentoring Program

The Effective Mentoring Program is delivered in partnership between the Victorian Department of Education and Victorian Institute of Teaching. It is designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of experienced teachers, and to upskill them to mentor graduate teachers to achieve full registration. While the model is not specifically focused on mentoring preservice teachers, the program is useful for supporting mentoring relationships with preservice and early career teachers.

3.1.4 Delivered in high-quality, collaborative teaching environments with capacity for placements

Schools are more likely to deliver high-quality practicum experiences and adequate student learning opportunities for ITE students if they have enough capacity. These schools have minimal staff turnover, well-resourced administration, a culture of collaboration and focus on teaching excellence. The school teaching community may be involved in a 'school hub' network, enabling schools to share innovative practices.

Mentor teachers benefit from being allotted enough time to mentor ITE students around their classroom duties. Ideally, ITE students are not only used as an 'extra pair of hands' or placed in an unsupportive environment with excessive responsibility.

Case study: NSW Hub School Program
The NSW Hub School Program includes specific initiatives to support involved schools to be high-quality, collaborative teaching environments and to host high-quality practicum placements. These initiatives include:

- *Professional Experience Coordinators dedicated to assisting school to develop their internal procedures and practices to deliver high-quality practicum placements;*

- *Professional learning for school staff to provider better mentoring and feedback;*

- *Sharing resources between schools to support placements (e.g., documents and templates for providing feedback, teaching materials, induction folders and induction and orientation session plans); and*

- *Linkages between schools and ITE providers, and to promote interschool collaboration.*

Case study: ACT Affiliated Schools Program

The ACT Affiliated Schools Program is a collaborative partnership between the University of Canberra, 26 selected ACT public schools and the ACT Government. It is built on a research-based, shared vision for innovation focusing on developing quality ITE education. The program is a reciprocal model between providers and schools and incorporates:

- *school based ITE student education clinics;*
- *ITE practicum, including academics and teachers working together to provide best practice practicum;*
- *university-facilitated professional learning for teachers;*
- *research driven school and system improvement;*
- *school-based research projects to meet school and system needs; and*
- *teacher and leader scholarships.*

This program was designed and developed using the Mutual Affiliation for Sustained Transformation (MAST) model. The MAST model seeks to use lessons learned through studies such as school-university partnerships and work-integrated learning. This example models effective provider-school partnership and may possibly be suitable to scale to other jurisdictions.

3.1.5 Supported by effective provider-school partnerships

An effective, collaborative provider-school partnership bridges the gap between pedagogy and practice to produce high-quality practicum experiences. These partnerships are characterised by:

- comprehensive roles and responsibilities for all parties, including school and university staff;
- cohesion between current ITE teaching theory and mentor teachers' classroom practice;
- feedback loops for communication and collaboration between providers and schools; and
- mechanisms for tracking ITE students' progress towards the Graduate Standards.

Previous ITE reforms have emphasised the importance of provider-school partnerships, however their effectiveness in supporting high-quality practicum depends on their practical implementation. A well-implemented partnership empowers schools to collaborate with providers in facilitating ITE student development.

Examples of provider-school collaboration may include:

- involving teachers in the development of partnerships;
- taking school feedback and implementing program improvement;
- involving schools in the selection process of ITE students;
- regular university staff liaison visits to support both school staff and ITE students; and
- innovative delivery of ITE student learning (such as clinical delivery models).

Case study: Teaching Schools Hub Program, UK

Teaching Schools Hubs are school-led centres of excellence for teacher and leadership development. High-performing schools are invited to participate in the program, based on their performance. The program seeks to support teachers throughout their career and forms part of the recruitment and retention strategy to raise teacher quality and effectiveness. Schools play a significant role in:

- *school-based initial teaching training;*
- *services for early career teachers and promotion; and*
- *delivery of high-quality evidence-based professional development.*

3.1.6 Community engagement and embedded practices, to support transition towards post-ITE teaching

ITE students who are integrated into the school community benefit from the increased degree of wrap-around support and community connection. Opportunities for ITE students to engage with students and parents outside of class improves their knowledge of diverse school contexts and ways to accommodate them through different teaching styles. Investing in ITE student interactions with the school community enrichens their engagement with mentor teachers and broadens their future professional network, enhancing their employment prospects.

Activities that allow ITE students to integrate into the community may include:

- involvement in sports carnivals and other extra-curricular events;
- attendance at parent-teacher nights or family social events;
- participation in teacher networking events; and
- employment as a paraprofessional alongside practicum and during their degree.

Case study: Internship model at Edith Cowan University, WA

Edith Cowan University offer additional professional experience in their ITE programs through their Scholar in Residence and Assistant Teacher Program. As scholars in residence, ITE students first spend 2-3 days a week immersed in their placement school environment. Final year ITE students can complete the 8-week Assistant Teacher Program extended practicum internship. The model gradually increases ITE students' classroom time, aiding their transition to teaching.

Case study: Alphacrucis Hub Model, NSW

Alphacrucis ITE students spend more time inside schools during their course to improve their classroom readiness. ITE students are paid as paraprofessionals for 1-2 two days per week in a partner school, with the aim of working within that

school full-time once they graduate. ITE students observe classrooms and teaching, and receive mentorship and guidance. The current attrition rate for the Alphacrucis Hub Model is very low – around 5%[1].

3.2 Key challenges for high-quality practicum delivery

Despite reform efforts since the TEMAG review, key challenges persist in delivering consistently high-quality practicum placements.

3.2.1 Unclear expectations for the design and delivery of practicum placements

Practicum placements must meet the minimum accreditation requirements in Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)'s *Accreditation Standards and Procedures* – at least 80 days for undergraduate and 60 days for postgraduate programs. Placements must also be supervised and assessed, undertaken over a 'substantial and sustained period', and delivered mostly in Australian and recognised school settings.

The application of these standards is assessed by the relevant teacher regulatory authority (TRA) in each jurisdiction. The QITE review found that there is limited transparent moderation to give confidence that TRAs are assessing ITE programs against these standards in a consistent way. This allows for varied interpretations of the standards relating to practicum, which in turn may result in varied delivery by providers. There are no national guidelines the application of the standards. While some jurisdictions have put mechanisms in place to clarify expectations for practicum design and delivery, such as Victoria, these are not universal.

For example, the standards require placements to be 'as diverse as practicable'. Providers and TRAs could interpret 'diverse' as:

- **differing student cohorts** – diverse locations, cultural backgrounds or socio-economic status;
- **varied stages of the school calendar** – initial term planning, end of year student assessment;
- **different practicum tasks** – observing or teaching under supervision; and
- **different student year levels** – junior or senior school.

However, keeping the standards relatively open-ended ensures schools and providers have the flexibility they need to accommodate a wide range of school and student circumstances. For example, ITE students in the NT are based in 'badged/demonstration' schools while also being required to engage in community-based projects to improve their understanding of local communities. Practicum funding is allocated to a weekly professional development program driven by the needs of 10-12 ITE students. This delivery flexibility helps to empower regional actors to organise practicum according to unique community needs, including those of highly transient and hard-to-reach populations.

Flexibility may produce additional administrative burden for schools required to manage variable provider requirements. For example, a growing number of Tasmanian ITE students are seeking interstate qualifications online beyond the sole

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[1] Alphacrucis University College, date unspecified, *Created for Education: Course Guide*, "Interview with Deputy Vice President Development – David Hastie", p.20.

option of the University of Tasmania. Many Tasmanian schools are tasked with delivering local practicum experiences for a range of ITE students and interstate provider requirements (and paperwork), creating confusion and inefficiencies.

3.2.2 Limited teacher mentor capacity, capability, and incentives to mentor ITE students

Many teachers feel they do not have enough time to mentor ITE students beyond their existing teaching demands. This may result in the supply of willing and available mentor teachers not meeting demand, reducing overall placement availability.

Even if teachers do have the capacity, they may lack the capability to effectively mentor PSTs and deliver a high-quality practicum experience. Current processes for selecting mentors are typically ad-hoc and unstructured. Poorly planned selection can lead to high variation in a school's mentor cohort in terms of experience, capability and investment in the role. Mentors may also be unaware of – or lack access to – professional development opportunities that would improve their capability. For example, one survey saw 55 percent of respondents reporting that their mentor teachers had not completed related professional learning the previous year.[2] Further, an evaluation of AITSL's Supervising Preservice Teachers program demonstrated that while the program was effective, many teachers were unaware of its benefits.

There is also minimal professional recognition and resource support for mentors. For example, mentoring ITE students no longer contributes towards professional learning for teacher re-accreditation. Teachers may receive some additional renumeration in acknowledgement of their efforts, but this is often not accompanied by a reduction in normal teaching workload. At the same time, stakeholder expressed concerns that 'top up' renumeration may perversely divert focus from high-quality mentoring to reimbursement, or explicitly position mentoring as 'additional' rather than core teaching business.

3.2.3 Ineffective formal provider-school partnerships

In most jurisdictions, practicum coordination processes are decentralised and reliant on individual providers (or even ITE students themselves). This is often the case even when there are provider-school agreements in place, particularly where these agreements are not appropriately designed or implemented.

This can result in inconsistent, inefficient, ad-hoc ITE student to school matching process, which may be evidenced by

- competition between providers to obtain practicum placements;
- difficulty matching ITE students with an appropriate school for their subject specialisation and skill level;
- rushed placement arrangements and minimal time for ITE student preparation.

Once an ITE student is placed in a school, the partnerships themselves may be ineffective, which may involve:

- lacking communication channels between provider and school;

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[2] Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, NSW DET, 'Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Professional Experience evaluation report', July 2018.

- mismatched expectations regarding responsibilities;
- differences between provider theory and school teaching practice; and
- decontextualised delivery of provider theory without adequate preparation for the realities of a classroom.

Current partnerships may not always be mutually beneficial. For instance, there may be a greater incentive for providers to ensure ITE students meet the Graduate-level teacher standards rather than have a positive experience. By contrast, schools are not obligated to host students and may have limited capacity to accommodate high-quality practicum placements.

3.3 Compounding factors

3.3.1 Teacher workforce pressures

There is currently a national teacher shortage. Many believe that teacher workloads have increased over time, especially in the administrative domain. These challenges compound the scarcity of potential mentors and may create some reluctance on the part of remaining experienced teachers to go 'above and beyond' their existing workload. School administrators report being similarly stretched due to understaffing, and may either be incentivised to deprioritise hosting ITE students altogether or else perversely incentivised to bring them in to 'plug' staffing gaps.

3.3.2 Regional, rural and remote (RRR) contexts

There are acute and specific challenges to delivering high-quality practicum placements in RRR contexts. RRR generally have less capacity to host ITE students, and may also have capability issues resulting from – for example – lack of access to professional learning opportunities.

The unique and significant role RRR schools play in community life means that ITE students need to be not only be 'classroom-ready' but 'community-ready' to be set up for success. This is particularly important for placements in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and many ITE students may lack cultural competency. However, ITE students already from RRR areas may face challenges being placed in schools in their community because of their existing connections potentially creating a conflict of interest. For example, stakeholders report how current teaching aides may be unable to complete placements in their schools located within remote communities.

RRR placements may also be less attractive for ITE students relocating from metro / interstate origins due to:

- **Financial challenges** – e.g., transport, accommodation, extended time off work
- **Personal challenges** – e.g., social isolation, reduced university support and access to essential services

While there are many initiatives and financial incentives to encourage and support ITE students to complete RRR placements, these challenges may still prove insurmountable (e.g., for those with families or caring responsibilities).

ITE students are more likely to consider teaching in RRR schools after they graduate if they have a high-quality practicum in these contexts. However, the existing barriers make achieving this challenging for many ITE students.

Case study: La Trobe Nexus Practice Advisors

The employment-based La Trobe University Nexus program seeks to prepare teachers transitioning from other industries for employment in regional, rural, remote and low socio-economic schools across Victoria. ITE students are provided with additional opportunities for professional development and mentoring. Practice Advisors work to bridge the gap between provider and school, and ensure high-quality practicum experiences, by:

- *making five visits to the school during the ITE student's three-week practicum placement;*
- *working with the school and ITE students to ensure placements reflect ITE course content and the Graduate Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; and*
- *measuring the ITE student impact in the classroom.*

While this predominantly caters to a mid-career demographic, lessons can be learned from its prioritisation of practical measures to ensure a high-quality practicum component of the program.

Stakeholder consultation questions:

- Do you agree with this characterisation of the key challenges? Are there other challenges we haven't identified?
- What challenges have current reform efforts failed to adequately address? Why?

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4 System opportunities to support consistent, high-quality practicum placements

There are several key system opportunities to support consistent, high-quality practicum placements across all jurisdictions, providers and schools.

4.1 Embedding standardised frameworks, guidance and resources

Providing system-level, standardised materials for practicum could improve the capacity and capability of jurisdictions, providers and schools to design and deliver placements both:

- **Effectively** – creating awareness and understanding of best-practice and the growing evidence base on high-quality practicum.
- **Efficiently** – enabling system actors to leverage existing materials and avoid 'reinventing the wheel', while also reducing workforce pressures on teachers.

AITSL already provides some standardised materials, such as best-practice case studies, high-level guidance on practicum roles and responsibilities and high-level guidance on provider-school partnerships. Jurisdiction-based materials are ad hoc and inconsistent. There is an opportunity to more systematically embed nationally-consistent standardised frameworks, guidance and resources across jurisdictions, including:

- National guidelines on key design features to supplement the accreditation standards, including length, timing, frequency, structure and sequencing, roles and responsibilities of different parties, intensity, feedback mechanisms, and alignment with ITE course content.
- Templates incorporating these key design features.
- Checklists for providers and schools to complete collaboratively before putting a practicum model into practice, aligned with the characteristics of high-quality practicum placements outlined in the previous section.
- A framework for best-practice supervision and mentorship that includes standards and templates for mentor teachers.

Embedding standardised materials may also involve:

- Better promoting and implementing existing materials at the federal level, such as AITSL's case studies, which may benefit from supplementary advice on how to translate these best-practice examples into delivery in different contexts.
- Scaling up existing and successful materials from the jurisdiction level. For example, states including Queensland, NSW and the NT have developed resources to support teacher mentors.

There is an opportunity to standardise professional learning resources to ensure that mentor teachers have the capability to mentor ITE students effectively. This could include:

- **Course-based professional learning** – standardising the design of various mentor teacher courses provided by local ITE providers to align with national guidelines, and expanding access to AITSL's 'Supervising Preservice Teachers' program.
- **Communities of practice** – supporting standardised communities of mentor teachers at the education region or jurisdiction level, to facilitate shared learning and peer-to-peer collaboration and mentoring.
- **Coaching** – standardising coaching through Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in schools or retired, high-quality teachers who have extensive experience in supervising practicum placements.

Case study: National Standards for school-based initial teacher training mentors, United Kingdom

The National Standards for school-based ITE mentors were created to promote the importance of the mentor teacher role and to create a better understanding of effective mentoring characteristics. Areas of the standards include:

- ***Personal qualities*** *– establishing trusting relationships, modelling best practice, empathising with the challenges ITE students face;*
- ***Teaching*** *– developing ITE students teaching practice, setting high expectations to meet student need;*

- **Professionalism** – inducting ITE students into norms and values; and
- **Self-development, and working in partnership** – developing own professional knowledge, skills and understanding.

4.2 Delivering consistency and modelling best-practice in demonstration schools

'Demonstration schools' are high-performing schools that specialise in providing consistent, high-quality ITE student practicum placements. They can provide students with a different range of experiences, including exposure to diverse learners and rural, regional and remote contexts. They also model high-quality practicum for other schools across the system, and provide a clear, consistent representation of what may be expected of providers, mentor teachers and ITE students. While there are limited examples of demonstration school models, these are not consistently available nation-wide.

There is an opportunity to support a more system-level approach to demonstration schools across jurisdictions. This would enable jurisdictions to better standardise practicum design and ensure consistent delivery. Schools would have an incentive to participate in a system-level approach due to the benefits associated with becoming a 'demonstration school'. These may include developing their teacher pipeline, accessing professional learning and influencing ITE content design. Jurisdictions can maintain a high standard of practicum by regulating school participation.

Case study: NT Teaching Schools program

Charles Darwin University (CDU) and the NT Department of Education and Training (DET) have developed a Teaching Schools agreement where students can undertake professional experience in designated partnership schools. The model highlights the increased efficiency benefits of a well-run partnership agreement, and has been responsible for a 46% increase (from 423 to 923) in ITE student placements between 2020 and 2021.[3]

These partnerships facilitate:

- *a close working relationship between CDU and partnership schools, which sees select schools embed the practicum student rotation annually;*
- *resources for mentors, including guides for planning and assessment of placements and templates for observation/reflection;*
- *an ongoing conversation and mutual support between CDU and DET; and*
- *ongoing professional learning for mentor teachers and 'Professional Learning Leaders' in schools.*

4.3 Streamlined practicum matching and coordination processes

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[3] Charles Darwin University, 'CDU's major investment to boost number of school teachers', 9 December 2021.

Current practicum matching coordination processes are often ad hoc and inconsistent across providers and jurisdictions. Streamlining these processes could offer benefits on two levels:

- **Macro level** – more effectively and efficiently matching the supply of placements with the demand for placements, to ensure that every ITE student can access a practicum placement at the right time.
- **Micro level** – more effectively and efficiently matching ITE students to placements specific to their needs in the context of their specific ITE program, including alignment with core units and exposure to practical capability areas (for example, a student who needs exposure to a specific learner cohort or school setting).

Streamlining matching and coordination processes may have other benefits, such as:

- More effectively negotiating placements across jurisdictional boundaries in a regional and remote context.
- Enabling government agencies to contribute to wrap-around support for practicum placements, such as access to accommodation or health services in remote areas.

Case study: The NSW Hub School Program

The NSW Hub School program is a system-level framework which comprises of partnerships between 26 ITE providers and 45 schools that are grouped into 20 'Hubs'. The 'Hubs' work together to deliver a networked and mutually beneficial approach to delivering practicum across system actors via effective provider-school partnerships. The program includes initiatives targeting:

- ***mentor teachers*** *– professional learning in mentoring skills;*
- ***ITE students*** *– improved supervising models, communities of practice, support sessions, professional learning, resources, immersion in the school community and modified ITE course delivery;*
- ***partner schools*** *- funding, sharing resources and professional learning with other schools and communication with other schools and ITE providers;*
- ***implementation of the program*** *– in-school Professional Experience Coordinators, dedicated staff, and evaluation programs, scheduling changes to accommodate needs of schools; and*
- ***input into ITE courses –*** *covering practical strategies, identifying gaps in ITE course content.*

This model aims to resolve challenges such as:

- *difficulty in finding appropriate practicum placments for ITE students;*
- *integration between ITE course content and practicum*
- *variance in the quality of practicum placements across schools; and*
- *the high administration cost and relationship maintenance.*

A 2018 NSW Department of Education evaluation of the Hub School program identified benefits for all parties including students, mentor teachers, partner schools and ITE providers.

Victorian provider collaborative agreements

The Victorian Department of Education and ITE providers have established a framework for strategic collaboration to improve ITE student practicum. They have agreed to benchmark practices and processes that apply to practicum placements in all Victorian government schools. These practices and processes are designed to make it easier for schools to host practicum to increase Victorian Government schools' capacity to support practicum placements. This framework includes a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DET and ITE Providers. The initiatives outlined in the MOU aim to:

- *streamline the processes associated with practicum (e.g., setting practicum booking windows to support predictability in provider communication with schools, supporting planning, creating standard assessment templates);*
- *support improvement in quality of practicum experiences (e.g., setting roles and responsibilities to provide level of support required for preservice teachers);*
- *increase the quantity of practicum opportunities across the system;*
- *deliver a more sustainable workforce supply across Victoria (e.g. providing a list of priority subject and geographic areas to align practicum placements with forecast demand); and*
- *inform school improvement programs and innovation in ITE.*

These same parties have also signed an information sharing agreement with the Victorian Institute of Teaching which will enable better use of current ITE data and streamlining of future data collection and sharing across the system to improve the delivery of ITE.

4.4   Testing, supporting and sharing innovative delivery models in regional, remote and rural contexts

There is an opportunity to take a system-level approach to testing, supporting sharing innovative delivery models that help to address the challenges of practicum delivery in regional, remote and rural contexts.

These models could encapsulate, for example:

- **Virtual delivery** – delivering appropriate aspects of practicum virtually, which may include more basic activities such as observation.
- **Rapid placements** – shorter, more intense placements that give ITE students exposure to regional, remote and rural contexts while mitigating the barriers they may face in accessing those placements.
- **Roaming supervisors** – engaging supervising teachers who 'roam' across regional, rural and remote contexts with groups of ITE students in acknowledgement that schools in those areas may not have the capacity and capability to support high-quality placements.
- **Cultural competency support** – delivering practicum in a more culturally competent and safe way where, for example, placements involve interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and other stakeholders.

These models could be evaluated for their potential to scale or transfer to other areas, noting they may present some challenges in particular contexts. For example, an evaluation may examine the trade-off between the accessibility of virtual placements to interstate or metro students with potentially their increased feelings of disconnectedness with the local school community. Learning these lessons may reveal opportunities for scaling certain models to other areas.

There is a broader system opportunity to build and disseminate best practice information, and to promote successful models that have been proven to make a difference. This could look like an 'innovation library', communications materials profiling innovative pilot approaches, awards to celebrate innovation, among other activities.

Case study: Virtual practicum, University of New England, NSW

The University of New England offers a 10-day virtual practicum. This focuses on how to liaise with stakeholders to develop skills in quality feedback, reflective practice and the Graduate Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. This online practicum placement is focused on observation of classroom footage and is designed to encourage students to notice what to observe when teaching in school classrooms. While this practicum is not focused on RRR practicum, it is an example of a model which could be to deliver professional experience in RRR contexts.

Case study: Partnering for Remote Education Experience Project (PREEpard), Victorian Department of Education and Monash University

This project's approach to ITE students practicum placements in remote contexts was underpinned by strong school, community and ITE provider relationships. The project provided high-level recruitment, preparation, resources, support and guidance to ITE students completing their practicum placements in RRR context. Researchers developed curriculum and professional experience resources for ITE providers to use to prepare ITE students for placements in schools and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, including:

- *A literature review providing background information;*
- *A set of protocols and principles to guide remote placement experience;*
- *An Indigenous Curriculum unit outline for use in ITE programs that focussed on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education; and*
- *A capstone module divided into pre-, mid-, and post-practicum learning, practice and reflection, to guide and strengthen practicum experiences.*

Stakeholder consultation questions:

- Which of these opportunities should the sector prioritise? Why?
- What are the risks associated with these opportunities?
- Are there other opportunities we haven't identified?

5 Key considerations

Cost and regulation are two key considerations that may influence system opportunities to improve the delivery of consistent, high-quality practicum placements across different jurisdictions and providers.

5.1 Costs associated with delivering high-quality practicum placements

Practicum placements are a relatively expensive component of an ITE program. ITE providers estimate that the cost of delivering placements has increased over time, due to higher expectations for quality and the costs associated with bespoke matching and coordination processes (a provider, for example, may employ multiple officers who are responsible for these processes).

The current level of funding may not be adequate to cover the costs of delivering high-quality placements in every context. Current funding arrangements see funding for practicum bundled into broader base funding for providers, which make choices about how much of this funding they allocate towards practicum placements in practice. Some providers may pass on all – or even more – than this funding towards their placements, whereas others may use some funding for other components of their ITE program.

Funding also plays a role in system-level incentivisation of practicum supervision, to ensure participation by high-quality teachers who are motivated to mentor the next generation of teachers. This may occur:

- **Directly** – providing some renumeration in recognition of their time; or
- **Indirectly** – by covering the cost of time release or workload reductions (including for non-teaching duties, such as administrative tasks).

5.2 Fit-for-purpose regulation of ITE and the teaching profession

Regulatory approaches can support or hinder the delivery of high-quality practicum placements. However, these approaches need to strike the right balance between prescribing boundaries for best-practice and providing flexibility to accommodate different contexts.

For example:

- **Jurisdiction-level agreements** between government, employers and ITE providers can provide a high-level framework for the design and delivery of practicum placements in each jurisdiction.
- The **ITE accreditation standards** prescribe a minimum number of practicum days but are largely ambiguous on other aspects of practicum.

- The **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers** do not currently specify expectations that teachers at the Proficient level will supervise and mentor ITE students, despite teachers at this level accounting for a vast majority of the teacher workforce. Accepting mentor hours as a contribution towards ongoing professional learning requirements, for example, may encourage greater uptake of mentor roles.

However, more regulation has the potential to stifle innovation or lead to adverse and unforeseen impacts on how requirements are satisfied. For example, mandating links between course content and practicum placements may not be possible in schools without appropriate capacity to support those learning goals. Any further regulation to standardise delivery would face similar implementation challenges to those in the past, due to high variation in school contexts and resources.