

Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)

Submission – Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

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A thriving public school system is essential to nation building. The continuous provision of high quality, motivated beginning teachers is, of course, central to this. Australian Government schools cater for the majority of students including those students who experience disadvantage. At a time when the myriad of socioeconomic and related health impacts on children are being discovered, and uncovered, the Australian government has an opportunity to lead and support their communities by setting and maintaining funding levels that facilitate a thriving public education system filled with excited children at the heart of families proud to send their children to government schools.

Equity of educational outcomes

Universal access to education does not currently translate to a nationally consistent minimum standard of education provision for all students. The national goal that all students achieve their potential requires a powerful funding response that closes the gaps that exist in the universal, yet imbalanced education provision that prevails today. There is also evidence from across the nation, that the proportion of students with higher and more complex learning and social needs is growing in government secondary schools compared to other sectors.

In a country where the government has a public, moral and human rights obligation to every child, any funding model must have social justice and equity as a foundation. Our current system is high quality but low equity.

This disparity in income distribution is acknowledged internationally (OECD reports) as an indicator of student performance on any measure - that is, that students from families with higher income are more likely to achieve at higher levels than students whose families' incomes are lower. Low income is not a guarantee of low levels of achievement, but the data comparisons are compelling and deeply concerning.

The emergence of the COVID-19 virus and the ensuing pandemic have caused the significant inequities in the Australian education system to be magnified. The required alternative

education modes provided by schools and consequential effect on modes of 'traditional learning' have caused very significant challenges to students, their families and educators alike. The notion of the development of ability of the student has been pushed further to the background – dictated by access to IT devices, access to connectivity and appropriate parental/carer supervision etc.

A recent study of 2500 teachers found that teachers in low ICSEA schools were three (3) times more likely to say that access to internet and technology were a major concern for teachers, high ICSEA schools were three (3) times more likely to feel confident in their ability to communicate with students and parents, low ICSEA schools were three (3) times more likely to have teachers with under five (5) years teaching. COVID-19 and the rapid shift of most Australian students to a period of home learning has exacerbated and exposed existing inequities in the Australian education system. Any modification to ITE needs to consider these points.

As a Nation, for what purpose do we provide education for young Australians?

It is the position of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association that the Federal Government has an obligation to ensure that high quality public secondary education is provided to every young person no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances. The provision of high quality, motivated teachers is clearly linked to this endeavour.

Education in our Nation is a democratic and human right. In contemporary Australia, the provision of education also comes with an expectation of a minimum standard that ranks highly when international comparisons are made. Australia has slipped in this area in recent years. For more than a decade funding models for school education have not targeted school performance and need, but relied on a distribution of resources that did not best nurture the future prospects of the young in Australian communities - Australia's future.

The adolescent years are **high stakes years** as they are significant predictors for life success and wellbeing. It is during these years that exposure to adult and community problems have the potential to change the lives of young people. The opportunity to fund and support the needs of each adolescent is essential. The inclusive priorities of our national secondary school system should be the centerpiece of a fair and productive school-funding model. Further, there must be recognition that the core purpose of all secondary schools is education and that funding and additional resources (which teachers are a part of) should be targeted to ensure that all secondary schools can focus on the key work of teaching and learning.

Only government can ensure that there is a quality secondary schooling option for everyone and only government, working with the profession, can require achievement benchmarks that reflect the quality of that schooling. Transparent, consistent and equitable funding of national secondary education will be the measure by which the young people of this nation, their parents, teachers and principals will judge the commitment of governments to the education of all Australians.

Australia's challenge is to redress disadvantage through investment in government education, where the greatest challenges demonstrably lie. The review of Funding for Schooling Final Report (2011) provided more than sufficient evidence to suggest that Australian education was not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. The Report outlines the findings by a highly credentialed independent review body. This was the most comprehensive review undertaken and it has not been fully implemented.

A non-political approach to Education:

It would be reasonable to assert that our educational leaders are best placed to make strategic decisions about the educational future of schools and systems but it appears unfortunately, that many decisions concerning education are made for political reasons and not necessarily sound educational reasons.

Something as important as education should not be dependent upon political funding or election cycles. It is time for agreement from all political parties around education to secure the future for our students. Education needs our political leaders and our education leaders to commit to a long term (10 year plus) plan and a structure for regular review. The further challenge then is to commit to its sustainability by ensuring adequate funding (of ITE around our Nation). Finland made a conscious decision in the recent past to adopt a non-political approach to education; making universal decisions about key factors that would not change with election outcomes. Australia **MUST** take this path if we are to achieve the outcomes desired by all Australians.

There is general agreement from all sides of politics on the aims for education and goals for our students. There is much common ground but we get tangled up in political cycles and trying to solve the same problems in different ways.

We have to get commitment from all parties to State initiatives and transparent long term planning and funding which will enable the systematic achievement of common goals. The education of our children is too important to let politics get in the way.

Quality Initial Teacher Education - ASPA's initial thoughts....

1. Graduate teachers should exit their initial teacher education as:
 - Learners for life
 - Effective communicators
 - Collaborative practitioners
 - Interested in young people and their learning
 - Interested in young people and their emotional, personal, social and vocational development
 - Literate (including the full range of literacies; e.g., critical, information, media, ICT)
 - Numerate
 - Resilient people (including the ability to respond to change).
2. Graduate teachers should exit with the following skills -
 - Expertise in task and learning design
 - Expertise in assessment literacy (i.e., assessment - of learning, for learning, as learning)
 - Expertise in blended learning and ICT as tools for learning.
3. The interpersonal qualities needed by teachers suggest there may be a better ITE selection process than a strict adherence to an ATAR score. Perhaps a portfolio entry or a blended process that has a combination of ATAR, Interview, Diagnostic Vocational Aptitude Testing and Portfolio. There are successful models of selection from national and international institutions that could be explored and used to design a selection process that is appropriate without being too onerous.

4. Teacher courses would be able to better develop these skills and characteristics if undergraduates spent more time in schools and that this time was deployed more strategically.
5. Currency of practice and knowledge of contemporary work in schools is vital for Teacher Educators. Strengthened partnerships that would see ITE academics working in close collaboration with schools and spending time in schools would provide meaningful opportunities to ensure lecturers have a current understanding of schools and an appreciation of what constitutes as teaching practice in a dynamic and rapidly changing workplace.
6. With regards to teacher training, ASPA believes it is imperative that practicums become more aligned to the rhythm of schools (and the key moments such as end of term reporting, parent-teacher interviews, school T&D days etc.) than to their alignment within tertiary academic programs. The more undergraduates feel the rhythm of schooling and the demands of the hundreds of daily/weekly interactions they must have, the better prepared they will be for the rigours of our profession.
7. One of the strategies that has worked in the past, and could work again, is Teacher Education institutions forming a partnership with a local school, to enable active participation in that school's workplace in-between the formal practicums. This could have the added benefit of supporting the lecturers in Teacher Education institutions have a purposeful relationship with a working school, to ensure an up-to-date and contextual understanding of 21st C schooling. This would require investment from the Government and a recognition of the additional workload being undertaken by mentor teachers and tertiary partnership coordinators.

Following is ASPA's response to the Terms of Reference

PART A - Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession	ASPA response
1. How can we further encourage high-performing and highly motivated school leavers to enter ITE and choose teaching as a career?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising the status of the profession - school leavers need to see that the teaching profession is an attractive option. Since the TEMAG review, teachers have far less autonomy in their work and, year-after-year, are blamed for NAPLAN, PISA and TIMSS results. Other professions – medicine, law, engineering, nursing etc. – do not have to endure the same levels of political interference or media backlash. • A concerted campaign to minimise the quantum of teachers in our schools on contract/temporary engagement – i.e. staff our schools with permanent staff. Community confidence in our schools is clearly linked to this aspect.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved pay and working conditions. An increase in salary is not sufficient – working conditions are critical in attracting and retaining people to the profession. Current working conditions in schools (particularly those serving disadvantaged communities) are stressful, onerous and cause many well-intentioned graduates to either vacate the government sector for better paid teaching in the non-government sector, to go to government schools in more advantaged communities, or to leave the sector entirely. • Improved induction, mentoring, and coaching of graduates would be a way of encouraging people to join the profession. For example, Finland boasts a strong peer group mentoring program. There is considerable evidence that these kinds of supportive structures can make a considerable difference to student teachers as they transition into and adjust to their profession.
2. What changes to admissions and degree requirements, including recognition of prior experience, would better attract and support suitable mid- and late-career professionals from other fields transition into the profession and become quality teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITE selection criteria – must change. The two most important factors for an undergraduate's success (beyond a capacity to perform well academically) are interpersonal skills and collaborative skills. Assessing these capacities at admission would give a good indication of the applicant's readiness and suitability for a teaching degree. A 'portfolio' approach should be considered • The post graduate Diploma in Education, now at two years in duration has seen a significant decrease in the number of people undertaking this course. This post graduate course must be one year in length and designed to be a rich and focused ITE option.
3. How can we increase ITE completion rates so that quality ITE students graduate and pursue careers as quality teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most important factors for an undergraduate's success (beyond a capacity to perform well academically) are interpersonal skills and collaborative skills. Assessing these capacities at admission would give a good indication of the applicant's readiness and suitability for a teaching degree. The notion of a portfolio based entry should be considered.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AERO to conduct research into this area (the notion of a portfolio) and compare to international studies. This could be undertaken in collaboration with Australian educational researchers such as members of the Australian Association for Research in Education, to ensure a cross-section of perspectives and expertise. • Students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds will typically leave before completion if they are not provided with extra supports, financial, emotional, academic. The most successful ITE programs such as the ATP (Accelerated Teaching Training Program run at Charles Sturt University in the 2000s to attract workers from the trades into Technology and Applied Studies) drew on an innovative problem-solving approach to the course, careful screening interviews for selection and a dedicated team of staff (academic and professional) who worked closely with the externally based students to support their learning. Graduate completions were high and overall, the screening of candidates assisted the quality of selection, but this requires funding and support in terms of personnel and scholarships for people who are making a difficult decision to leave their current job to pursue teaching.
4. What more can be done to address issues with workforce supply in some subject areas (particularly maths) and schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who are good at Mathematics tend to be attracted to other professions – e.g., engineering, architecture, medicine, science etc. Competing with these professions is problematic so an alternative approach could be to encourage ITE students who are good thinkers and good communicators, to focus on a Maths teaching career. Teachers with a passion for their subjects will motivate students and take them along with them into a field of that type post school.
5. How can we attract a more diverse cohort into ITE so that teachers better mirror the diversity in school students and society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments should enable First Nations People access to ITE courses. The provision of support programs for First Nations People (e.g. RATEP in Queensland) will support First Nations

	<p>People return to their country to teach and lead their community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased diversity of the profession, including school leaders, as well as of ITE academics will ensure students can see themselves represented within the profession, as mentioned within the Discussion Paper. Improving schooling experiences for young people from diverse or marginalised backgrounds would also lead to more diverse potential teachers being interested in careers in schools where they see that they could belong.
PART B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers	
6. What more can we do to ensure that ITE curriculum is evidence-based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significant issue here is what we can do to ensure that ITE curriculum is contemporary and futures-focused. That is, how can we ensure that ITE graduates are well-versed in contemporary grammar of schooling practices – i.e., curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. The more informed ITE programs are by highly effective contemporary teaching and learning practices the better our teaching graduates will be.. ITE programs are closely regulated and this can, at times, run the risk of narrowing the curriculum. A deep understanding of the importance and place of public schooling, as well as the communities that public schools serve and the complex nature of societies, must be preserved within the ITE curriculum.
7. What more can ITE providers and employers do to ensure ITE students are getting the practical experience they need before they start their teaching careers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significant issue here is what we can do to ensure that ITE curriculum is contemporary and futures-focused. That is, how can we ensure that ITE graduates are well-versed in contemporary grammar of schooling practices – i.e., curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment? The more informed ITE programs are by highly effective contemporary teaching and learning practices the better off we will be. Beyond the practicum concept, what would be advantageous is for each ITE provider to have a partnership with at least one “laboratory school” where a

	<p>symbiotic relationship informs the contemporary practice of both the school and the ITE provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the scheduling of Prac placements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ do these occur early and regularly in the ITE course ➤ is this same across all jurisdictions
8. How can Teaching Performance Assessment arrangements be strengthened to ensure graduate teachers are well-prepared for the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASPA acknowledges the work done by ITE providers and have been impressed by what is being asked of practicum students. • It is critical that teacher supervisors in schools have more time (and training) to better support under-graduates – reflection, debriefing, planning etc.
9. How can leading teachers, principals and schools play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is critical that teacher supervisors in schools have more time (and training) to better support under-graduates – reflection, debriefing, planning etc. • We advocate for greater flexibility and support for school leadership roles to enable greater attention to mentoring and support for ITE students and early career teachers. This might include cluster-based mentoring programs, and shared roles focused on the development of pre-service and early career teachers across multiple schools, creating effective communities of practice.

<p>10. Can ITE providers play a stronger role in ongoing professional development and support of teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are currently good examples of MOUs where the relationship between the school and the ITE provider is so strong that highly effective professional development is provided for teachers as quid pro quo for the high-quality mentoring support given to ITE students. This professional association can be expanded to cover an ITE provider and several schools – as schools all have an independent strategic agenda.
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Adam Smith - Education Analyst and Commentator in An Open Letter to Students in Australian Schools 15 / 11 / 2012 <http://sheilas.org.au/2012/11/an-open-letter-to-students-in-australian-schools> said:

"To the 3,541,809 students in 9435 schools in Australia, I wish I could promise that no matter where you live, no matter which school you go to, you will receive an education that equips and inspires you for the rest of your life. I wish I could promise that no matter how you learn or where you learn, your education will give you the skills you need to succeed. I wish I could promise that at the end of thirteen years of schooling, you will be confident and ready to embark on a combination of work and further learning that will give you the chance to live the life you want to live.

Sadly, I can't promise any of this. Sadly, despite the many billions of dollars spent on school education in Australia, too many of you are missing out on the type of education you deserve".

While the conversation continues about the funding model for education and the provision of high quality, motivated teachers, the gap between those for whom demography determines destiny, and those for whom there is real choice, continues to widen.

ASPA represents some 4500 Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department in Secondary, P-10 and P-12 schools across Australia. We are dedicated to the moral purpose that universal access can serve – an education provision that enables all students to achieve their potential.

Thank you for the opportunity for ASPA to contribute to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review.