

# Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

## **Response to the Discussion Paper and Terms of Reference Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA)**

### **Introduction**

The ATEA response consists of three parts in order to address the key questions outlined in the Review's Terms of Reference, namely:

Part A: Focus on Initial Teacher Education

Part B: Focus on Becoming a Teacher and the Profession of Teaching

Part C: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the first two parts, we construct an overview of the ideas and evidence that underpins our response organised in sections dealing with:

- affirmations regarding current successful practices related to teacher preparation and development.
- key concerns that have been expressed by ATEA members and are evident in the literature in relation to the terms of reference of this review.

Following this review of affirmations and concerns, we provide in Part C, a set of recommendations around the key themes identified in Parts A and B. These provide avenues that could be considered by the government in moving forward and are linked to the Terms of Reference. In conclusion, we then outline a number of ways that ATEA could assist the Minister in achieving his aspirations to build a quality teaching force in Australia.

## **PART A: Focus on Initial Teacher Education**

### **Affirmations**

1. Multiple models of ITE programs are currently accredited and celebrated across Australia, many of which are evidence based; context responsive; and facilitate diverse entry points, differentiated pathways, and produce a range of graduates who cater for the diversity of schools and students across the nation. See for example a range of case studies of contemporary models in the set of case studies based on practices from around Australia in Jones and Ryan (2014).
2. There is an array of successful school/university partnerships across jurisdictions that celebrate shared visions that are professionally rigorous, evidence based, and challenge the traditional binaries of theory practice through holistic professional preparation programs for preservice teachers and practising professionals. See for example, Hobbs, Campbell & Jones (2018); Hudson & Hudson (2011)

This is an aspect of practice we believe can be further strengthened, by adopting some of the recommendations we present below.

3. Plentiful evidence is readily available through consortiums that the introduction of the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) has addressed issues of public confidence and accountability through a final capstone assessment task that is designed, implemented, moderated, and reviewed across multiple university sites. (See for e.g., Keamy, Clinton, & Tan, 2021).
4. The National Workforce Data Project is currently monitoring work force needs nationally and across systems and should provide recommendations for addressing these needs on its conclusion.
5. There is a rich research data base that demonstrates that ITE programs are very strongly embedded in evidence. This should and will continue, and will be ratified at the point of accreditation and reaccreditation through local jurisdictions.
6. ITE completion rates in most institutions range between 64% for undergraduate programs and 36% for postgraduate programs (AITSL 2019 ITE Report), however, the accuracy of this data is contestable as the attrition rate does not take into account students who move flexibly across university programs, and in and out of higher education over a number of years. The attrition rates of ITE students is highest and healthiest in the beginning phases of programs where students realise they prefer a different career pathway or university staff identify students who may not be suitable for progression into the profession.
7. We acknowledge that the recommendations of the TEMAG report (Craven et al., 2014) are well underway and, in the main, have enhanced the quality of teacher preparation in a number of ways, including those outlined in this section.

### **Concerns**

1. Firstly, as a short but important note, despite the significance of the TEMAG report in contributing to recent improvements in ITE, there is insufficient availability and analysis of long-term data, collected across providers, to be able to make concluding generalisations. Indeed, there has been insufficient time to achieve a full rollout of recommendations from TEMAG, and it is disappointing that this was not forthcoming prior to a further review.
2. Despite rich and varied evidence of a range of successful partnership models in ITE, there is a seeming lack of support for workplace learning, professional experience, or “the prac” by way of funding and support from government and the profession. There is no doubt that school-university partnership work is at the heart of successful ITE programs. However, current models,

on their own, are fraught with issues such as binary thinking regarding theoretical and practical aspects of teacher formation, when in fact universities and schools are both significant in providing different but complementary experiences (Loughran & Hamilton, 2016).

3. There is an over-reliance on supervised, assessed practicum to provide a full practical experience and understanding of the profession in ITE structures. This is extremely limiting because practicum:
  - is often completed in isolation from university peers and teacher educators, thus pre-service teachers (PSTs) uncritically adopt the prevailing culture and pedagogies of the school/classroom teacher, whether good or bad
  - often occurs after a block of university course work, without peers/expert facilitators making it difficult for discipline-based activities to be embedded in authentic settings; and theory-linked reflection and discussion within a community of practice essential for processing experiences and understanding how, why, and when to act (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Loughran, 2014).
  - provides limited exposure to the full range of curriculum areas especially in areas such as Science, STEM, and Performing Arts, or where specialist teachers take the class (e.g PE/Art)
  - undermines the importance for PSTs to engage in experimentation with their own practice “in situations in which judgement and assessment are minimised in order to encourage risk taking so that strong personal learning might be experienced” (Loughran, 2016)
  - focuses on the learning of PSTs rather than students, which is contrary to findings that the most effective forms of partnerships occur when they focus on the learning of children rather than that of PSTs (Kruger et al., 2009).

In addition, assessed supervision of practicum requires significant time and effort from classroom teachers. The lack of support for more meaningful, extended experiences in schools, that reduce pressure on classroom teachers under current prevailing practicum models, limits the capacity for ITE providers to sustain quality models of learning to teach in the field.

4. The nature of teaching has always been embedded in a moral purpose with a focus on developing the human potential of all students through professional engagement and community capacity building, knowledge production, and the facilitation of attitudes, dispositions and capabilities that reflect the core values of this diverse nation, citizenship and preparation for an uncertain future. In recent times, regulation and commodification of education has reshaped the teaching community away from its professional status towards a bureaucratised conglomerate, dictated to by powerful non educational experts whose purposes are at odds with the core moral purpose of education. Such directives are strongly aligned with schooling outcomes and international competitiveness.
5. The overemphasis on regulation and prolonged and expensive processes of accreditation through multiple authorities leads to the detriment of academic integrity, professional autonomy and an opportunity for teacher education to be authentically shaped by the profession. Whilst accreditation standards are accepted and welcomed as a given, the process of accreditation urgently requires review (e.g., see Bourke, 2019). Moreover, the necessity to regulate teacher preparation in school settings reduces the complexity of co-generative models of teacher preparation throughout the phases of teacher preparation (including preservice teaching, induction, and transition into professional teacher status). Further, the abundance of regulation stifles innovative and flexible models of co-generative development of early career teachers, forcing a fall-back position that perpetuates traditional reductionist models of “practice teaching” that are no longer fitting for contemporary and future programs. Multiple government funded

programs speak to the importance of co-generative models that should be underpinning approaches to future practice (see for e.g., Hobbs et al., 2015).

6. Diversity appears in the discussion paper of the current review in conflicting ways: on one hand calling for means to address the need for diverse teachers and contexts to be recruited into the profession; and on the other, undermined by a preoccupation with pre-tertiary entry requirements such as ATAR and LANTITE. Moreover, previous recommendations from government reports and other research addressing diversity appear to have been forgotten or ignored (see for example, MATSITI report, Johnson, Cherednichenko, & Rose, 2016; Rowan et al., 2021).
7. The QITE discussion paper makes reference to a number of exemplar models of current ITE practice. We wish to note that many of these (e.g., Teach for Australia) are based on small, expensive, boutique-type programs that are not scalable to the levels required to produce the number of new teachers the profession requires now and into the future.
8. There is a crisis in staffing of ITE programs with the increasing sessionalisation of the profession. This impacts programs and student outcomes as staff are not available outside of teaching times to work on collaborative review and improvements of course design and delivery, and not available to invest in the substantial time and work required to build and maintain relationships that underpin successful partnership work; such as thorough provision of professional learning or potential supervision of Masters and doctoral candidates for those engaged in action-research activities in schools. Moreover, PhD qualified individuals cost more to employ in a sessional capacity, and hence are often overlooked in sessional recruitment.

## **PART B Focus on becoming a teacher and the profession of teaching**

### **Affirmations**

1. In becoming a teacher, it is to be celebrated that there are multiple entry points into undergraduate and postgraduate preparation programs.  
These include secondary school leaving rankings (ATAR, IB Scores or equivalent for mature age students/international students), sub bachelor program/s or undergraduate program completion or partial completion which are often supplemented with one or many of the following:
  - (i) relevant prior experience including where possible an academic transcript;
  - (ii) non-academic selection test, profiling or written submission;
  - (iii) an interview;
  - (iv) a literacy and numeracy test; and
  - (v) a language competency test.

While there is great diversity across institutions this comprehensive approach to entry into ITE programs is highly valued by students and potentially offers the work force a diverse range of graduate teachers

2. It is also to be celebrated that there are multiple pathways to complete a teacher preparation program responding to the diverse needs of both potential graduates and the future needs of the workforce. It also invites different providers to specialise in offering programs where their expertise is found. The programs include single undergraduate degrees (e.g., Bachelor Education, Bachelor of Early Childhood Education), double or companion degrees (e.g., Bachelor of Education/Bachelor of Science), postgraduate programs (e.g., Master of Teaching). The timing, cost, location, modes of delivery and length of the study periods vary and give students a great deal of choice as to when and how they access a program. This is particularly important for mature age students, career change students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and international students. A number of higher education providers that do not uphold university status are also enabled to provide bespoke courses for their unique clientele e.g., faith-based providers. This flexibility in program offering augurs well for promoting diversity at all points of engagement, but at the same time is regulated by the national accreditation standards ensuring rigour, high quality programs and relevance to work force needs.
3. There are a number of members of the teaching profession dedicated to supporting the profession's future who invest significant time and effort in supporting preservice teachers and school-based elements of ITE. It is commendable how much time and energy these individuals dedicate to this work, particularly given it is often done as an add on to their already full and busy lives in school and classroom work.

### **Concerns**

1. The greatest concerns for the profession of teaching are twofold and interrelated: attraction and retention. Gore et al.'s (2015) work has demonstrated that many school leavers aspire to enter the vocation of teaching due to commendable moral purposes and a commitment to enhancing the lives of young people. Three factors influence the decision to apply for entry into teaching – the advice of those around them, selection criteria, and career opportunity. This work provides evidence to support the following concerns

- a. School leavers who desire to become a teacher need to be mentored and supported as early as Year 10 so as not to be dissuaded of their career aspirations by cynic within the media, families, and even the profession itself
  - b. The current approach to selecting school leavers into teaching based on national school ranking is fraught with misconception and should cease immediately. The predictive power of prior academic achievement is not clear when it comes to teaching and most unreliable as a selection tool (Goss & Sonnemann, 2019 in Gore, 2021).
  - c. The inclusion of the “best school” leavers is difficult to define and can be dismissive of a broad range of suitable applicants including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. We are concerned that unless a more strategic and well-advised approach unfolds, nothing much will change, (See for example Goss & Sonnemann, 2019), and yet this is a process that can be easily reimagined for the desired outcome.
2. Why are teachers leaving the profession? Unlike our Singaporean and European colleagues, there is a limited career trajectory within the profession of teaching. This is not just about remuneration. Career opportunities for teachers to remain in the classroom and seek promotion flat line early, within 7-10 years. There are far greater opportunities overseas for Australian teachers to make a career out of teaching and gain respect as a valued professional. Whilst in this nation, there is plentiful evidence of rich preparation programs, the teaching profession nationally is not structured to offer career promotions, nor ongoing professional learning, and there are few opportunities to become a lead or master teacher status based on merit. Remuneration for a classroom teacher reaches its peak in 7-10 years, albeit a strong starting salary. This suggests that a teacher of thirty or forty years old reaches their salary ceiling after the first ten years of teaching. Further if mid-career candidates wish to transition into a teaching career based on sound moral reasoning, the drop in salary that they might experience or the lack of career trajectory within the profession may act as a disincentive.
3. The transition away from vocation and professional integrity has left teachers demoralised, conflicted with the demands of a testing culture, accountability and the crowded curriculum. There is a narrow and instrumentalist view of what counts as evidence and quality teaching is being reduced to limited measurable student outcomes, ignoring more holistic outcomes for students and teachers. Researchers contend that individual student needs have been sidelined by the systematic dominance of high-stakes test data (Ewing, 2012; Polesel et al., 2012). This focus has sometimes resulted in high-stakes testing being viewed as the “de facto curriculum” (Hardy & Boyle, 2011, p. 220), thereby reflecting a reductionist view of education which narrows the curriculum as the basis of learning and restricts creativity (Au & Gourd, 2013; Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012; Comber, 2012; Cormack & Comber, 2013; Ewing, 2012; Noddings, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). Teachers have become disgruntled with this scenario and there is a subsequent impact on new graduates (and some established teachers) that undermines the moral imperative driving their desire to enter and stay in the profession (Walker, 2018). Their work to develop the potential of their students through a rich and meaningful education has been reduced to technocratic demands that are no longer aligned to their professional standing as teachers. Ultimately, these reductionist approaches contribute to teacher stress, disillusionment, and demoralization that escalates the attrition we are currently witnessing.
4. Researchers note that teachers often feel pressured by high-stakes testing programs to favour lecture-based pedagogies and more formulaic teaching styles, and to exclude activities reflecting high-quality pedagogy (Au & Gourd, 2013; Comber, 2012; Cormack & Comber,

2013). These test-driven teaching methods (Klenowski, 2011; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Lobascher, 2011; Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013) can lead to teachers perceiving themselves as becoming progressively deskilled (Ewing, 2012). This is a problem because teachers can feel undervalued and may question their own professionalism. When teachers perceive their teaching practice as lacking in quality, and their delivery as being compromised, their self-esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy can be diminished (Garvis & Lemon, 2013; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2009b). This situation can produce conflict between what is happening in the classroom and what the teacher believes should be happening. This type of inner conflict contributes to a short 'shelf-life' for teachers and perceptions of a career that is unappealing to others.

5. Graduates are moving into other professions in pursuit of career promotions and mid-career changers are difficult to attract for the reasons outlined above. Further, as teachers become more demoralised in terms of the nature of their core work, they will look to other fields for employment.
6. There is a lack of structure within the profession and in workload models to enable mentors, lead teachers, and master teachers to work with universities in teacher preparation as core business rather than as an (optional) add-on to their classroom responsibilities. Indeed, this is key to the success of models cited in the discussion paper such as Singapore and Finland.

## **Part C Recommendations and Conclusions**

The following recommendations draw together the affirmations and concerns explored above. They are organised under key themes: Partnerships; and Attraction and Retention, which link to the Terms of Reference for the QITE Review. This is followed by a set of conclusions that outline ways in which ATEA could work with the Minister in achieving effective teacher education to prepare a high-quality Australian teaching profession.

### **Theme 1: Partnerships**

There are a wide range of tangible benefits associated with school-university partnerships for those involved, including:

- in-service teachers employing research-informed practices and reflecting on their teaching;
- school students engaging in high-quality learning;
- academics and researchers being connected to the classroom reality;
- pre-service teachers gaining valuable and structured experience in school settings, and connecting theory with practice.

There is widespread and long-term evidence that harnessing the important aspects of university and school-based learning means coursework and practical experience must be closely entwined (Bentley-Williams et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2012, 2014; Elsdon-Clifton & Jordan, 2016; Green, Tindall-Ford, & Eady, 2020a; Jones et al., 2016; Kosnick & Beck, 2009; Loughran & Hamilton, 2016; McLean Davies et al., 2017; Zeichner et al., 2015).

The benefits of embedded partnership work can have a cyclical effect leading to the improvement of the profession as a whole. Funding necessarily needs to follow these innovations, not only at the pilot stage, but in a manner that enables sustainability of successful outcomes for the teaching profession. Thus, the evidence base provides the impetus for increasing focus and funding on strengthening partnership practice in more systematic ways; as core business. Hence the following recommendations are made in relation to partnerships:

### ***Recommendation 1: Partnerships***

**1A.** Based on new funding models for ITE and the teacher profession, make partnerships and mentoring a part of core business. This would:

- Provide avenues for ITE providers and school leaders to work collaboratively to build and sustain authentic, co generative partnerships across teacher education and teaching professions that serve the needs of the context-specific communities and the profession in educationally sound ways
- enable professional learning provisions for teachers and an introduction of mandatory upgrading of qualifications, micro-credentialed learning and authentic professional development requirements to enhance the knowledge and capacities of teachers for teaching rather than to meet regulatory requirements. (This is ably modelled in other professions such as the finance industry, nursing and engineering. Gore (2021) also exemplifies a successful model).

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part A Q5; Part B Q6, Q7, Q9, Q10*

**1B.** Restructure systems to enable pre-service teachers to work in a part-time capacity in and with schools and teachers in learning support-based roles leading up to the *additional* more traditional supervised and assessed practicum component. This two-pronged approach to school-based experience provides a mutually beneficial endeavour that:

- supports classroom teachers with additional, informed, classroom support without the time commitment and pressure of supervising and assessing PST requirements
- provides PSTs with a more un-pressured experience to a wider range of school and classroom practices across the school year that are authentic and make concomitant coursework more relevant and meaningful
- enables a focus on children's learning rather than PST requirements, which better supports both PST and children's learning in the long run
- short fulltime supervised and assessed practicum weeks aligned with the current model would be supported as PSTs would have had an opportunity to build a relationship with children and understand the school structures in the part time classroom work leading up to the prac experience, and support, in particular, their completion of the TPA in their final year
- enables ITE providers to develop rich, authentic, reflective and experiential-based connections in university-based coursework; this addresses research-informed calls for more entwined approaches to ITE learning experiences and could strengthen discipline-specific (e.g., Science/Mathematics/STEM) as well as general education outcomes.

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part A Q3, Q4; Part B Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9*

**1C.** Identify a new workforce of professionals who have the capacity to work across both domains of learning, higher education, and school education, – boundary crossing professionals - and who are recognised for their expertise and status (See Clifton & Jordan, 2019; Zeichner, 2021)

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part B Q6, Q8, Q10*

### **Theme 2 Attraction/Retention**

The current multiple-entry points into ITE programs, and the diversity of program offerings should be celebrated and strengthened. However, until the profession is viewed with more respect and favour in the wider community, attraction to the profession will remain an issue. Limited career trajectory is one issue contributing to this, as are issues with workload structure for teachers to adequately support pre-service teachers in school-based components for their ITE. The profession itself needs to be restructured to address such issues.

The second key issue that needs to be tackled in order to address attraction and retention is concerned with the demoralization of teachers upon entry into the profession. The subsumption of holistic learning by testing regimes and associated technocratic demands are not meeting teachers' moralistic or professional needs (Au & Gourd, 2013; Comber, 2012; Cormack & Comber, 2013; Ewing, 2012b; Walker, 2018).

Finally, the preoccupation with entry into ITE based on high pre-tertiary ranking scores detracts from the attraction of a wide range of potentially suitable candidates and is an unreliable selection tool (Goss & Sonnemann, 2019 in Gore, 2021). Moreover, this approach undermines any desire to diversify the teaching workforce.

### ***Recommendation 2: Attraction and Retention***

**2A.** As a matter of urgency, government should work with employers and unions to restructure the profession of teaching to introduce a professional career trajectory that will incentivise people to join and stay in the profession. The model adopted by the Singaporean government is an apt and proven model. This should:

- focus on provision of meaningful career trajectories within the profession that would retain commitment to the profession and better attract career change candidates.
- Enable specialised roles, potentially around mentoring, and/or boundary crossers (e.g., see Clifton, 2019; Zeichner, 2021) that work to better support preservice teachers and teachers in the practical components of ITE.

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part A Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5; Part B Q9*

**2B.** Cease the increasing regulation of teaching and the investment in standardised testing in the wake of what this has achieved given national standards are in decline. Call on organisations, such as ATEA, to provide research-based evidence to the profession as partners committed to excellence in education for all children and students in keeping with the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) that calls on the broader society, (teachers) and governments to work towards providing every child with the best life that they can achieve. This would:

- Increase teaching time and focus on holistic learning for children that better meets their diverse needs and, thus, restore the moral imperative that attracts and drives teachers' vocational and professional work
- Enable additional and alternative forms of evidence on which to base evaluation of learning outcomes and teacher and teaching quality

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part A Q1, Q3, Q5; Part B Q6*

**2C.** Reduce the focus on pre-tertiary entry requirements and standardised performance testing and strengthen other entry pathways into the profession. Consideration of recommendations from previous reports to government should inform this (e.g., MATSITI report, Johnson et al, 2016). This would:

- encourage a more diverse pool of candidates that would better recognise and reflect the diversity of contexts in which teachers need to work to meet growing national demand.
- recognise the value-adding potential of ITE to shape quality teachers for the profession (particularly if recommendations concerned with the Partnerships theme above are observed)
- attract a larger number of potential candidates to meet the growing demand for teachers both nationally and internationally.

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part A Q1, Q2, Q5; Part B Q6, Q7*

**2D.** Address the increasing sessionalisation of the ITE profession by providing increased funding for supply of high-quality academic staffing. This would help to ensure sufficient staff are employed in out of teaching times to conduct non-teaching aspects of ITE work that supports ITE program design, implementation, and evaluation. This would enhance support for ITE candidates by:

- increasing cohesive program preparation, implementation and evidence-based evaluation to ensure a higher quality, supported experience of ITE for its candidates
- supporting investment in the building of relationships and partnerships with schools and community stakeholders that subsequently enrich ITE programs
- enable increased engagement in the profession to work in collaborative professional learning programs with schools and teachers
- increase ITE staff to market the profession and programs to attract candidates.

*Terms of Reference Addressed: Part A Q1, Q3; Part B Q6, Q7, Q10.*

## **Conclusion**

ATEA can contribute to the enhancement of the teaching profession through a number of avenues. These include:

1. Ongoing provision of evidence through the following activities:
  - a. Q1 journal - Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education
  - b. Annual book with Springer and soon to be released book series
  - c. Annual conference for teachers and teacher educators to share evidence-informed practice and initiatives
  - d. Awards for excellence – (e.g., teacher educator of the year award)
  - e. Grants and support for early career researchers
  - f. Professional development for teachers and teacher educators

We see opportunities to explore more ways to translate our research work into formats that contribute to evidence-informed practice in schools and university teacher education. We also see that ATEA could have a role to work on behalf of the federal government, with states and territories to explore ways for meaningful engagement between schools and university teacher education that go beyond professional experience. ATEA would be keen to explore with the federal government support for this research translation work to be undertaken and accessible to teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators. Specifically, the members of ATEA are keen to work with the federal government to explore ways to:

- a. diversify the teacher education student population to align more closely with the diversity of the student population in schools.
- b. examine new and different ways to diversify the population of our teaching workforce.
- c. explore why teachers who complete teacher education programs do not enter or leave teaching after 5 years.
- d. generate a national forum to explore how teachers, principals and schools can support ITE students during their program of study.

This response to the QITE Review Discussion paper and Terms of Reference addresses key themes of partnerships and attraction and retention of teachers. It considers the evidence-base that identifies core, systemic issues that currently detract from the profession's esteem and effectiveness in meeting growing national demand for quality teaching. We propose the above recommendations as a collective of initiatives that would best work together to enhance the already good work that teacher education and schools do to support the future of the profession. Policy and structural change are needed to better support that work.

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