



Submission to the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment on Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) Review

I found a couple of the points contradictory. In one instance the government is wanting to improve recruiting and training in evidence-based practice, but in the next comment wanting to fast track mid-career professionals with switching to teaching. It's in those sorts of approaches where people don't get the time to learn, practice and refine pedagogy, or their understanding of children and how they learn and what they need. You end up with people great at content, but not great at how to teach it in engaging and effective ways to diverse students. It's also how things like inclusive education practices get left off the agenda in order to speed things up.

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July 2021

Acknowledgement:

Family Advocacy would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this report has been written, reviewed and produced, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Introduction

Family Advocacy is a NSW disability advocacy organisation, formed 30 years ago by families, to protect the rights and interests of a person with developmental disability¹ throughout their life, and this is achieved with the support and advocacy of the family. As such, we work closely with students with developmental disability and their families to ensure they receive an inclusive education.

Whilst we acknowledge that we are not educators, our comments and recommendations are premised on three decades of experience working with families in the education system in New South Wales, collaborating with the NSW Department of Education, and our widespread knowledge of international research, particularly in the field of inclusive education.

In addition, Family Advocacy also has extensive experience in systemic advocacy, informing government regarding legislation and policy and as such have provided many submissions spanning over decades in the education setting. For example, the 2017 Review to Achieve Excellence in Australian Schools, and the 2018 NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Curriculum Review, the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education. More recently, we provided expert evidence at the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability hearing on “Barriers to accessing a safe, quality and inclusive school education and life course impacts”.

On this basis, we provide feedback to you from a perspective of the impact of the current initial teacher education on the lives of students with disability, versus what the impact could be if the right considerations were in place for ITE. Certainly, from our experience working alongside the person with disability and their family member, we have observed that when genuine inclusion occurs in curricula, physical and social activities, one of the main factors has been where the teacher has had the **will** to include (confidence) and the **skill** (competence) to make reasonable adjustments for that child. As such, quality initial teacher training that builds confidence and competence is vital.

Create an inclusive education system

Over the course of the last few years, the Royal Commission into the Abuse, Neglect, Violence and Exploitation of People with Disability has heard evidence regarding the poor education and employment outcomes for people with disability in Australia. We invite the Australian government to recognise there is a strong nexus between segregated education settings and poor employment outcomes. A 2018 comprehensive review of research by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, concluded that attending a special school setting is correlated with poor academic and vocational qualifications, employment in sheltered workshops, financial dependence, fewer opportunities to live independently, and poor social networks after graduation.² There is no evidence base to support segregated education in any form, including in special schools, units or classrooms.

¹ Developmental disability is a disability that occurs in the developmental period of a person’s life (in the period from conception to adulthood) and includes but is not limited to: autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and any combination of physical, intellectual or sensory disability.

² European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, *Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion: Literature Review*, 2018, p 14.

Conversely, decades of evidence³ shows the benefits of inclusive education, including:

- better academic and vocational outcomes than their peers in non-inclusive settings
- greater social interaction, resulting in more opportunities to establish and maintain friendships
- increased independent communication and speech and language development, in turn supporting greater inclusion and active participation
- a sense of belonging and a self-concept of being a giver of help (not just a receiver of help)
- access to a broader range of play and learning activities, which can stimulate physical development and enhance children's experiences
- Inclusive education also benefits students without disability, teachers and educators, and the wider community.

Broadly speaking, Australia's poor inclusive education record, by continuing to support segregated education, severely limits the possibilities for students with disability, threatens Australia's human capital development and undercuts future economic development. If we are to achieve an inclusive society, where people with disability are given the opportunity to participate economically and in the community, the Australian government and the State/Territory governments must get serious about ensuring inclusive education becomes a reality in Australia and phase out segregated education settings. We must remember that today's student peers are tomorrow's employers.

To this end, the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education has already developed a 10 year plan and we strongly **recommend the adoption and implementation of**, [*Driving change: A Roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia*](#) to help realise equitable education outcomes for students with disability and prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of students with disability. The 10 year plan is underpinned by six pillars that are drawn from the evidence base and embed the rights of students as outlined in the UNCRPD:

1. Ensure inclusive education
2. Phase out segregated schools
3. Improve educational outcomes
4. Stop gatekeeping and other discrimination
5. Eliminate restrictive practice
6. Prevent suspensions and expulsions.

The Roadmap has two key sections: the outcomes that need to occur, stepped out over the next 10 years, and the key levers for change needed to realise these outcomes.

³ K, Cologon, Department of Educational Studies, For Children and Young People with Disability Australia [Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation report](#)

Reform Teacher Standards

Significant steps have been taken in recent years towards a consistent national approach to education. The resulting National Curriculum, Graduate Teacher Standards, and the National Quality Framework (and Standards) provide a strong basis from which to continue to build a national approach to inclusive education. However, presently the Teacher Standards (at all levels) can be achieved in whichever way that tertiary institutions see fit. To adequately support the development of inclusive teachers (and to meet the requirements of the United Nations), it is essential that all teacher graduates have passed required *at least one* dedicated course on inclusive education, teaching to diversity and Universal Design for Learning. Currently many teacher education courses only provide electives, partial focus on inclusive education (within units focusing on other aspects of education), or focus on 'special education', not inclusion.

Relevant Questions from the QITE Discussion Paper

How could more high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds be encouraged to consider a career in teaching?

Formalise a commitment to recruitment of people with disability. Ensure ITE is accessible. Commit to greater accessibility within schools.

Should more be done to identify suitability for a career in teaching earlier in the degree or before entry to ITE? What might this look like?

More placement opportunities with observation moving through to full day teaching. All universities do this differently so the process is full of inconsistencies. ITE students ought to be mandated for general classrooms working with students with disability to build capacity.

Have you experienced teacher shortages? Has it been in a particular subject area or region?

Often, inclusion specialists and supporting teachers (not teacher's aides) rationed across schools and limited in their ability to appropriately meet the needs of teachers and therefore students. Also, so called 'specialist educators' that are assigned to only segregate environments lose the potential of providing teaching practices and resources useful for general education classes as well.

Should something be done to match the supply of teachers from ITE providers with the demands of jurisdictions and sectors? What would this look like?

There is the need to avoid any conflicts of interest that would be created between demand and supply that might risk quality. Any commitments need to forward-plan for inclusive education models, not the current dual track segregated model seen across all jurisdictions in Australia. However, it makes sense to have ITE placed where it is most needed, but done without compromising the quality of learning that they will be exposed to.

Are there examples of incentives that have successfully worked to attract quality teachers in areas of shortage? How could these be rolled out more broadly?

Previously, there were pay incentives as well as permanency granted. The current overuse of casual teachers never getting their permanent placement is very problematic.

Are the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) fit for purpose in identifying the key skills and knowledge pre-service teachers need to be ready for the classroom? Do the Teacher Standards adequately reflect the role of teachers in supporting pre-service and graduate teachers? See: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards> for more information.

Need to compare to [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#), including the 2020 Review report.

Are ITE programs preparing graduates for teaching diverse student cohorts, including through cultural competency and inclusive education?

No, and we reference findings in 2020 Review report of [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#), [Children and Young People with Disability Australia \(CYDA\) Education surveys](#). The key findings from CYDA's 2019 National Education Survey were consistent with the previous three surveys, showing that students with disability are routinely excluded in their education. Many students experience 'gatekeeping' and are segregated from 'mainstream' schools and classrooms, not attending school full-time, refused enrolment and excluded from school activities. Suspensions and expulsions are also familiar practices, showing the lack of understanding and support for students with disability. While most students receive some specific support at school because of their disability or learning difference, there are many families who are out-of-pocket for supports and equipment to enable their child to participate. Many students do not have a personalised individual education plan in place.

Research evidence overwhelmingly supports inclusive education⁴. As well as positive outcomes for social justice and a sense of community and belonging, there are benefits for learning outcomes and for the social, behavioural and physical development of children and young people who do and do not experience disability.

The findings from CYDA's 2019 National Education Survey show it is time for transformational change in our education system to ensure the inclusion of students with disability.

Do the current professional experience arrangements support the preparation of ITE students for the classroom and school environment? How could these be improved?

The practical experience of ITE students ought to equip them for the diverse class, which is the practical reality when they start teaching in a school. Professional experience could be improved by providing all experience within general education classes ensuring the ITE student receives an experience of disability and other diversity to understand how this looks in regular mainstream schools. Even those students studying special education should have experience in the general classroom not just in segregated settings, which is what tends to happen at the moment. Moving away from the dual system of a teacher becoming 'special ed' or regular track which then leaves them unprepared for the diversity that is typical and will continue in our mainstream schools. To do otherwise would set them up to fail.

Do the current course accreditation arrangements support ITE students being taught evidence-based high-impact teaching strategies? How could this be improved?

Need to reference evidence-based research such as:

- [The Centre for Inclusive Education](#) (C4IE),
- [Dr Kate De Bruin](#) – Senior Lecturer, Educational Psychology & Inclusive Education, and Co-convenor Inclusive Education Special Interest Group, Australian Association of Education Research (AARE)
- [Loren Swancutt](#), Educator, founder of School Inclusion and expert in inclusive education
- [Evidence for Learning](#) – 100% independent, enable and support evidence-informed practice across Australian schools and classrooms.
- [Purple Orange's – Inclusive School Communities project](#)

⁴ Jackson, R (2008). Inclusion or segregation for children with an intellectual impairment: What does the research say? Queensland Parents for People with a Disability; Cologon, K (2019), Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation. Report written by Dr Kathy Cologon, Macquarie University for Children and Young People with disability Australia (CYDA).

How can ITE providers best support teachers in their ongoing professional learning?

Using practices as mentioned above. Bring Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into all approaches as it removes barriers and improves student outcomes. For an explanation, see the [UDL planning tool](#) from the NSW Department of Education's website.

Greater collaboration, mentoring and co-teaching and could be significantly improved. We have observed there to be a defensive culture in schools where the mentoring is less than optimal. Greater collaboration between teachers is critical for their improved learning and development for good teaching practices. This can be evidenced through the research of John Hattie and factors to student achievement⁵. One particular finding of interest in Hattie's ranking is that "collective teacher efficacy" rates as a high contributing factor to have the "potential to considerably accelerate student achievement". A teacher's sense of efficacy is important because teachers need to feel competent and confident in their ability to teach and reach all students. Collective teacher efficacy is when a team of educators believe they have the ability to make a difference.

Schools need to find measurement protocols to identify where they could improve teacher collaboration as well as have strong reflective practice.

Standardised reporting and assessment provides limited direction for teachers to understand how the student is learning, where the student is progressing and where there is a need for greater support. Standardising has the impact of 'teaching to the middle'. ITE providers could provide training on individual goal setting and approaches to setting assessments that will enable helpful direction for the teachers on an individual student basis. This will not only take a lot of pressure off the teacher, it will provide them with forward direction and an enhanced understanding of the student.

⁵ <https://visible-learning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/VLPLUS-252-Influences-Hattie-ranking-DEC-2017.pdf>.