

Dear Ms Lisa Paul and members of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review,

I am writing to you because of my concern about the poor state of preparation of teachers to understand and respond to the educational needs of gifted learners. I am a retired academic in gifted education and early childhood education. In the university in which I worked, there is currently no course dedicated to this topic; a popular elective course for students training to become primary and secondary school teachers was abandoned several years ago, and the single lecture on this topic in a 4-year degree for early childhood education students has also ceased.

This is not a new concern for me or for the gifted education field in Australia. Two Senate Inquiries into gifted education, in 1988 and 2001, highlighted the importance of initial teacher education and professional learning in gifted education for teachers in Australian schools. And yet, it is still rare for teachers to have a compulsory unit in gifted education during their university courses. The current trend is to provide students with courses in Inclusive Education, which has some merit, given that most gifted children are educated in mainstream classes for most (or all) of their schooling. However, without a specific, sustained focus on the ways in which gifted children learn differently, there are serious limits to the quality and depth of trainee teachers' understanding, skill level and confidence to ensure an appropriate education for these children.

A more comprehensive course of appropriate depth enables teachers to understand what giftedness is, to disregard the many myths about gifted children (and their parents), to reliably recognise giftedness in their classes and to implement evidence-based strategies for curriculum differentiation. It is not fair to teachers - or to the gifted children they teach - to expect them to learn on the run (or worse still, fail to respond), especially when it is more than likely that their mentors or school leaders will also lack adequate evidence-based knowledge and skills in gifted education.

My particular area of expertise is early childhood education, in the years before school. The National Quality Standard for regulating early education and care services recognises giftedness as an additional need that requires "specific considerations or adaptations". Teachers will only know what is required by gifted children if they have had sufficient preparation during their initial teacher education. I know from providing professional learning courses to practising early childhood teachers that their university courses have been silent (or almost) in this regard. They have been hungry for knowledge.

I urge the Review panel to make compulsory a unit of study in gifted education in all initial teaching programs across Australia, including those in early childhood education.

Yours sincerely,

Kerry Hodge, PhD