

Submission to the Review of Teacher Education

Robert Lewis, B.Ed. Grad.(Newc.U.) Dip.TESOL (UTS) M.A.Applied Linguistics (Syd.U.)

Email: [REDACTED]

Brief Bio

I am a teacher (and parent), a writer and researcher with over 40 years in schools, higher education and VET, as well as AusAID in Vietnam and Indonesia, plus 8 years teaching primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Presently I am residing in rural NSW.

Background paper

Published in the Australian University Review, retrieved from:
<https://www.nteu.org.au/article/ATARs%2C-Zombie-ideas---Sir-Robert-Menzies-%28AUR-63-01%29-22705>

Terms of Reference

This commentary (and background paper) highlight the limits of the Terms of Reference. Reforms to Teacher Education alone will not affect significant changes in long term declining educational outcomes for primary and secondary Australian school children, as captured in PISA, NAPLAN, TIMMS and numerous other studies because these trends are due to a confluence of factors, including:

- long term and unequal funding of private and public sector schools,
- low entry standards vis a vis Australian Tertiary Admissions Rankings (ATARs) into Teacher Education degree programs,
- low standards and poor design/delivery of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs,
- failure to efficiently and comprehensively regulate the ITE sector, to ensure maintenance of uniformly high standards,
- lack of adequate practice teaching, especially in relation to online modes of delivery,
- inadequate support and mentoring for new graduates,
- lack of effective professional development in schools,
- staffing shortages, especially in Maths and Science,
- regressive conditions for teaching/learning (large class sizes, excessive workloads and compliance regimes)
- lack of uniformity across the national system and intra-state/territory – notably the gap between urban elite schools and rural, regional and remote schools,
- excessive political interference and retrograde reforms, such as the devolution of school management in NSW in 2012, the now defunct *Local Schools – Local Decisions* reforms; and in 2012 the deregulation of higher education sector, with the formation of domestic market in degrees, both ideologically motivated, typically on the recommendation of American consultancy firms, like Boston Consulting,
- the ‘rationalisation’ and dismantling of effective Teacher Education programs, in particular through the amalgamations of the 1980s and 1990s, and
- due to the abject failure of the national, state and territory governments to uniformly ban mobile phones across primary and all secondary schools, to minimise the deleterious impact of social media on secondary school students (causing digital distractions, toxic school environments, significantly contributing to teenage mental health issues, as well as increased youth suicide.

Hence, the Terms of Reference for this review are way too narrow to capture the forces at work that mitigate against declining educational attainment by school students across Australia's national school system.

Recommended

A more comprehensive review is necessary to investigate and develop a comprehensive national plan that will put Australia's segregated unequal and failing school system back on track. This would entail the following reforms:

1. the reinstatement of the original Gonski needs-based school funding arrangements, and audits of over-funded elite private schools to claw back excess funding;
2. a strategic four-year plan that will improve design/delivery of ITE programs, and guarantee the supply of quality teaching graduates across RRR schools, to close the ever-widening gap, and ensure greater uniformity in quality teaching and learning opportunities for all Australian children;
3. public access to national data bases, and proper data collection around entry requirements (compulsory ATAR reporting), staffing of schools and teacher attrition, to inform coordinated national, state and territory government planning and management of schools, and to identify and redress inconsistencies in teacher supply to schools, and ensure high standards of ITE degree programs;
4. the use of such data to target disadvantaged schools most in need, and prioritise these schools by paying higher salaries to attract teachers with expertise to RRR areas;
5. for ITE degree programs, ATAR entry requirements should be set at ATAR >80, and the LANTITE should only be used as an entrance test for candidates who are borderline ATAR 70+, showing the requisite literacy/numeracy skill-set, aptitude and passion for teaching as a vocation;
6. accreditation of selected ITE providers that provide rigorous programs, to ensure quality teacher education that more effectively prepares teachers for our schools;
7. funding of RRR universities to deliver quality ITE programs, including building of new institutes for remote areas, staffed with quality educators;
8. development of incentives schemes to prioritise disadvantaged RRR and attract quality teachers to fill staffing shortages and improve learning outcomes;
9. proper consultation with local communities, with school principals required to survey (using digital and analogue modes) all parents of students, as well as students themselves (anonymously) to identify issues and make improvements to delivery of education to local students;
10. the proper funding and state/territory coordination of school teachers professional development, delivered by 'best-practice' local teachers, as well as quality teacher educators, who have the expertise to share and help raise standards among all local teachers working in schools;
11. funding to enable teachers to pursue post-graduate studies for professional development, such as bonded scholarship programs;
12. a decisive move away from 'one-size-fits-all' degrees to dedicated 4-year secondary or primary teacher education degrees;
13. development of uniform quality teacher education degree programs, that ensure all teachers study in depth such relevant subjects as Ethnomethodology, research methods, Sociology of education, Neuroscience and Learning Theory, Psychology and Child development, accelerated Literacy Development, Genre-based pedagogy, effective Testing and Assessment (diagnostic, formative and

- summative), language across the curriculum and school-based Syllabus Design, curriculum development and programming of learning cycles, extended subject-specific content for specialist teachers, and so on and so forth;
14. during final two years of ITE degrees, mandatory six-weeks of practice teaching for all undergraduates of ITE programs;
 15. school principals need to be held accountable to local communities and their teaching staff, and where found wanting need to be removed and replaced by more visionary and qualified persons; and finally,
 16. the quarantining of the national education system, including ITE providers and schools, from any further or ongoing political interference. At present, many states and territories are in breach of their legislative commitment to enable all Australian students to reach their full potential, and finally.

This is definitely not an exhaustive list, but it would be a starting point for discussion.

Response to Terms of Reference Questions

In response to the narrowly focused questions outlined in the Terms of Reference, I offer the following recommendations.

q. How to attract high-quality candidates?

- Raise the status of teachers by setting higher standards of entry, training and professional practice (which presupposes improvements in conditions for teaching and learning in many schools),
- Improve conditions for teaching, by reducing class-sizes and contact hours to provide teachers with more (accountable) preparation time,
- Increase salaries, on an incremental scale, based on teacher's qualifications and expertise, measured in terms of students' learning outcomes (on a range of objective measures and tests,
- By setting high ATAR entry requirements, teaching will also come to be seen as a high status profession,
- Post-graduate qualified teachers should attract higher salaries on an incremental scale, to reflect increased expertise,
- Remove impediments to public perceptions of schooling in crisis, by redressing and removing those impediments, such as by banning mobile phones from all schools (except where/when strategic to learning programs, amounting to no more than 10% of school time), thus ensuring digital distractions do not impinge on engagement of students in learning programs,
- Acknowledge and reward 'more able' and improved teacher performance, and engage those teachers in in-house, district and regional professional development for underperforming schools,
- Extend existing or new scholarship programs to attract high ATAR candidates to teacher education.

q. What factors influence course selection of high-performing school students to ITE?

- Perceived status of teachers must be redressed through improvements to working conditions and salaries
- Incentives to attract quality teachers to RRR areas will eventually generate greater uniformity across the national school system, and should open up the greater ease for

transfers across schools, and that geographical mobility should assist in attracting high-performing students.

- A return to a new points system that mandates new teachers placement for a minimum of 2 years in selected 'best practice' schools, thus ensuring new teachers experience quality professional in-service and induction into the vocation, before transferring to disadvantaged schools, also promoting greater uniformity, and lifting standards across schools, making the vocation more attractive.

q. What features of the current ITE system may prevent high-quality and mid- to late-career professionals transitioning to teaching? Etc. 2-year Masters degrees.

- At present, the 'politics of schooling', even district schooling, mitigate against mid- and late-career teaching professionals moving back into the system.
- In many RRR areas recruitment prefers new graduates with limited experience and expertise over more senior and experienced teachers
- The low status of teaching as a profession, and low salaries relative to other white-collar professions, mitigate against late career teachers transitioning into teaching.
- Redress staffing shortages, especially in Maths, Science and STEM, to replace teachers who are present are required to teach outside their subject-areas and fields of expertise.

A national school system in crisis is an unattractive option for mid/late career professionals transitioning to teaching.

q. How could more high quality candidates from diverse backgrounds be encouraged to pursue a career in teaching?

- Upgrade the status, salaries and working conditions of teachers in schools.
- Raise standards of entry to ITE degree programs.
- Close the gap, so that recruitment of teachers across the school system is not seen to be about post codes, and a competitive marketplace.
- Expand the range of specialist schools, such as Performing Arts, IT, Music, Sports and STEM schools, as well as tap into local community languages.
- Defund elite private schools to redress past discriminatory funding practices, and equalise opportunity, so that RRR schools become a more attractive option for experienced teachers.
- Diversity in schooling should not be about social class, or ethnicity, but about providing choice for teachers, and students, through establishing uniformity in standards, but differences in terms of school specialisation, as aforementioned.

q. How to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples...?

Properly fund and establish ITE provider institutions closer to where these populations are, and staff them with a mix of expert teacher educators, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander educators and teachers. At first these institutions may be small, then expanded to deliver professional development and support to local schools. These ITE institutes should attract scholarship students, higher paid academic teaching and research staff, such that they become prestigious centres attractive to locals and other educators. It is important they facilitate two-way exchanges in local culture and modern scientific research and methods.

q. What evidence is there that .. non-academic characteristics has impacted on admissions, progress, completion and retention of ITE students?

Non-academic characteristics may have negatively impacted, but there is limited evidence that this impact is either positive or negative. The latter is more likely as psychometric based recruitment does not guarantee candidates have the requisite literacy or numeracy skills to participate in higher education. Indeed, the targeting and recruitment of low-ATAR candidates to ITE degree programs since 2012 is deemed to be counterproductive, as per the Productivity Commission report of 2019, titled: *The Domestic Market in Degrees: A Mixed Report Card*.

Final Comment

Ultimately, for educational outcomes across Australia's school system to improve national standards need to be raised and consolidated, in terms of requirements of entry to teacher education degrees and design/deliver of programs. Once high quality ITE programs are more uniform across the sector, more able graduates can progress into a school system that is properly funded, where conditions for teaching and learning are improved; and once mobile phones are banned from all secondary schools – which will be at least initially a difficult transition for many schools and require astute school leadership, parent education, coordination with feeder primary schools, and commitment from principals – we will begin to see improvement in educational outcomes. However, politics needs to be removed from the equation, so the national interest must prevail, and schooling must be quarantined from partisan politics. The best way forward in this regard is to move toward a Charter of Human Rights, and legislation that guarantees the national, state/territory governments manage schools within a framework and funding arrangements that are fixed and progressive, and initially policy settings must favour disadvantaged schools to redress past discrimination: i.e. affirmative action for majority public schools and marginalised private schools in RRR areas. Geoffrey Robertson has published a number of books that point to this direction. Such a Charter should enshrine in law a public commitment to comprehensive education and equality of opportunity for all Australian children, thus ensuring that schooling and teacher education are no longer subject to the vicissitudes and ideologically motivated reforms and chaos of political interference.

I would be pleased to discuss my submission and issues pertaining to the review, if I can be of further assistance.

Robert Lewis
18.7.2021