

21 April 2023

Dear Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP),

RE: Queensland Council of Deans of Education (QCDE) Response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) Discussion Paper

The Queensland Council of Deans of Education (QCDE) is the state affiliate of the [Australian Council of Deans of Education](#) for Queensland. The purpose of the QCDE “is to promote the continued development of education programs and research, including pre-service and in-service teacher education programs” (QCDE Constitution, p.1). The QCDE have reviewed the TEEP and offer constructive comments and recommendations across the four proposed reform areas.

Reform Area 1: Strengthen ITE programs to deliver effective, classroom ready graduates

The QCDE maintain that initial teacher education (ITE) is evidence and research-based. All Australian teacher education providers are required to evidence their programs, and document this in their ‘Stage 1’ and ‘Stage 2’ accreditation submissions. In addition, all teacher education providers are also required to report annually to their respective regulatory authority (e.g. QCT, NESA). The QCDE underscores this point as the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) review presented a desktop analysis, not drawing upon the extensive body of evidence contained in University accreditation submissions and annual reporting. Had the QITE and TEEP reviewed accreditation submissions, it would have been clear that not only are Australian teacher education programs evidence and research-based, but they also actively engage in a process of documented ongoing improvement. This ensures that Australian teacher education programs are research-led, and exceptional in their ability to engage with ongoing development and innovative approaches to teacher education. It is also important to note that a teacher education program draws upon a broad diversity of evidence across a range of attributes and annual reporting provides a focus for engaging with evidence and data to inform ongoing improvements. To these ends, it is disappointing that the QITE and TEEP groups did not identify the comprehensiveness of the process. This context illustrates for the QCED the importance of more public understanding of the rigorous process of Stage 1 and 2 accreditation and annual reporting that illustrate a focus on the ongoing improvement agenda tailored to the context of each higher education provider.

Recommendation 1: To lift both government and public perception of evidence and research-based Australian teacher education, the QCDE recommends that the rigorous process of Stage 1 and Stage 2 accreditation and annual reporting is effectively communicated to the Australian public and policy makers. This is incumbent on regulatory authorities and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

The TEEP further recommended ‘core content’. The AITSL (2018) ‘Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) (Graduate)’ provide a solid foundation for core initial teacher education content to be established based on contemporary theory and practice. We do not recommend a narrowing of the APST to a ‘core’. Further, the TEEP proposed core is limited

to views of cognitive science that align with controlled trials rather than contemporary classroom contexts. There is evidence of poor alignment with the APST (Graduate) for example in 'classroom management' and its mapping against AITSL standards 1.4 (*Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*) and 2.4 (*Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian*). The QCDE is concerned that APST 1.4 and 2.4 have been aligned to classroom management implicating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are 'to be managed' (in a classroom sense) and that this is somehow associated with reconciliation. This example supports the TEEP proposition that higher education providers are best positioned to use their expertise and knowledge of their student community and sector partners to design quality ITE programs delivering on and mapping against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Graduate).

The proposed TEEP core content is highly selective in terms of an evidence-based approach preferencing neurological psychology. The problem with such an approach is that the human brain is not homogenous. There are ecological, sociological, cultural, and personal dimensions to learning that the TEEP core content (*the brain and learning*) fail to consider (Colliver & Fler, 2016; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020; Ritchie & Phillips, 2023; Sahlberg, 2021; Taylor, 2013). While a knowledge-base of the brain and learning is important and is typically an existing component of teacher education programs, the application in practice is part of teacher judgement that is not well established in research findings. Notwithstanding, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Graduate) do make such considerations through standards 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3.

In addition, the evidence presented in support of effective pedagogical tools, classroom management and enabling factors for learning is narrow, selective (in terms of evidence), and quite dated with respect to contemporary evidence-based research in education (Hickey-Moody & Horn, 2022; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2023; Selwyn, 2016) and teacher education (Allen et al., 2020; Baran et al., 2019; de Groot et al., 2023; Ell et al., 2019; Hauerwas et al., 2023; Howell & Sawers, 2019; Richmond et al., 2019; White, 2019). Of note, explicit instruction is one of many evidence-based pedagogies and certainly not representative of all evidence-based pedagogies. There is a need to promote the professional nature of the work of teachers and the importance of pre-service teachers developing a toolkit of pedagogical strategies supported by critical reflexivity to create inclusive learning environments that are based on the value of teacher judgement.

The TEEP positions teacher education and indeed education as a 'science' or 'absolute', removed from the lives of children and young people. Young people identify "Covid-19, the environment and equity and discrimination" as the most important issues of their lives (Carlisle et al., 2019; Tiller et al., 2021). The QCDE remind the TEEP of the Australian Youth Policy Framework (Australian Government, 2021) and the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration; specifically, "identifying barriers... and empower[ing] learners to overcome barriers" (Goal 1, p.5) and inspiring all young Australians to become "confident and creative individuals... and active and informed members of the community" (Goal 2) (Education Council, 2019, p. 6).

Further, the Expert Panel discussion report is noticeable with its lack of mention and discussion on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). QCDE draws attention to the preparation of and need for specialist early childhood teachers able to teach in both prior to school ECEC settings and the early years of school (e.g., Foundation to Year 3). There is strong evidence to support the benefits of early childhood pedagogical practices to support quality initial teacher education (Dockett & Perry, 2020).

Recommendation 2: We agree that higher education providers are best positioned to use their expertise and knowledge of their student community and sector partners to design quality ITE programs. We reject any move to expand upon the APST and proposed core content, to specify dosage and/or to introduce a (more) prescriptive national ITE curriculum. If required, high-level mapping could be used to illustrate how the proposed TEEP core content is already addressed by institutions in the accreditation program standards.

Reform Area 2: Strengthen the link between performance and funding of initial teacher education

Reform Area 2 is founded on the contention that performance-based funding is effective. There is no research evidence to suggest that performance-funding will strengthen initial teacher education (Coaldrake & Stedman, 2016) and the recent Productivity Commission (2023) report advised against it. The ramifications outweigh any perceived gain as outlined by the QCDE:

- The adverse impact for regional/remote universities is likely to be significant, noting that regional universities supply nearly ¼ (23%) of all graduate teachers to regional/remote Australia (QITE Discussion Paper, p.8). Research evidence suggests that regional/remote students elect to study teacher education at their local regional/remote university and continue to reside in the regions (Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper, 2023). In that regard, the QCDE are concerned that performance-based funding is likely to deplete regional ITE programs and therefore worsen teacher shortages in regional Australia;
- There is very little movement of Australian on-campus university students across the sector. Specifically, on-campus students tend to study at a local university. It is only online cohorts where there is some mobility. In that regard, any measure of diversity is deeply flawed, and performance-based measures are unlikely to increase diversity;
- Completion rates, as currently conceived by the TEEP, are problematic. It appears that the measure of 6 years part-time is the desirable completion time for a part-time student (for a 4 year full-time equivalent degree). However, this does not take account of part-time pre-service teacher education students tending to take 8-9 years to complete. Such students often have caring, work and/or cultural commitments and are not able to study full-time. They also 'chose' not to study full-time, ensuring that their parental responsibilities remain paramount. In this regard, the TEEP must consider measures which accurately represent the breadth of what the community (at large) can reasonably achieve;
- Reform area 2 does not acknowledge alternative pathways into a teacher education

- programs (e.g., vocational pathways). In that regard, how could any performance-based measure account for and support such alternate pathways?
- Using the QILT and GOS data is highly problematic. The proposed measures are measures of inputs/outputs and are not quality measures. Importantly student satisfaction data is not a measure of teacher education effectiveness rather it is a measure of 'learner fulfilment'. While learner fulfillment is important, it does measure teacher education effectiveness;
 - The Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) "is a tool used to assess the practical skills and knowledge of pre-service teachers" (AITSL, standard 1.2). It is not designed to measure teacher education program effectiveness, and, in that sense, it is inappropriate to be applied as a performance-based funding metric. In Queensland, TPAs already play a central role in all Stage 2 re-accreditation, particularly in relation to the performance of the preservice teachers; and,
 - Higher education institutions (HEIs) do not have access to 'sustainability of employment' data sets that would enable providers to report against this proposed indicator. Moreover, data from employers that capture the proportion of graduates employed but also teaching out of field is critical to understanding the sustainability of their employment.

Recommendation 3: There is no evidence that performance-based funding works. Higher education institutions should be equitably supported in providing high quality teacher education and nuanced programs. The QCDE recommend that transition funding be reframed as continuous improvement teacher education funding allocated to teacher education providers to strengthen their programs.

Reform Area 3: Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

Professional experience lies at the heart of all initial teacher education programs. It is important to clarify here that professional experience does indeed take place in schools as designated placement periods, but it is also incorporated across all teacher education coursework subjects/units. School-based teacher education models are common in QCDE universities where teacher educators, teachers, and young people work alongside one another in teaching/learning any number of key learning areas (Cutter-Mackenzie & Fulton, 2014). Furthermore, QCDE universities readily practice micro and clinical teaching in coursework units where pre-service teachers are engaging in a teacher-feedback process in preparation for their designated placement periods.

Teacher education courses, professional experience and teaching performance assessments in particular require significant academic and administrative costs that are beyond the typical costs of higher education coursework. This is not addressed in the TEEP discussion paper. Professional experience is already very expensive for teacher education providers and schools, and in fact is the most expensive component of any teacher education program. Importantly, funding has not kept pace with the real cost of providing high quality professional experience or work integrated learning, for HEIs and for schools. Costs for teacher placement payments are indexed and subject to renegotiation that require year on year increases in the costs of initial teacher education placements. Specialised programs such as 'Beyond the

Range’ are outstanding examples where pre-service teachers undertake their placements in regional and remote areas with the financial support to undertake placements away from their home base. However, such programs require funding support and further work is needed to support a more representative group of teachers into the profession. Further attention is also required for funding placements in metropolitan as well as rural and remote contexts.

Recommendation 4: To continue to support existing professional experience programs and initiate new programs such as Beyond the Range, substantial funding is needed to support ITE students to engage in professional experience placements. The QCDE recommend that professional experience funding be bolstered to support universities and schools in providing high quality work integrated learning.

TEEP calls for ‘capable’ mentors. The QCDE ask whether we currently have sufficient research evidence to explain the term capable mentor. We also contend that a mentor needs to be more than merely capable. Rather they must have a broad range of personal and professional skills to engage in evidence-based teacher mentor professional learning (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). At present the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) offered mentor training is taken up well, but it is critical that mentor teachers engage in such professional learning in mentoring. In addition, mentor teachers should be regularly recognised and awarded. Many Faculties of Education have such mentor awards (nominated by pre-service teachers). Such awards should also be state/territory and nationally focused and therein celebrating and uplifting the profession.

Recommendation 5: The QCDE recommend that universities in consultation with Teacher Regulatory Authorities (TRAs) co-design and implement evidence-based teacher mentor professional learning programs. It is also important that mentor teachers could participate in ongoing professional development, e.g., micro-credentials. Such initiatives could also form part of HALT applications.

Recent publications from Australian initial teacher education providers indicate that collaboration within and across universities has afforded providers the opportunity to reflect on programs offerings, and has enhanced initial teacher education quality (Buchanan et al., 2020; Spina et al., 2022). In that respect, university consortiums and collaborations are highly encouraged, which support continual teacher education improvement that is evidence-based and longitudinal.

Recommendation 6: The QCDE support a collaborative approach to piloting and evaluating different approaches to HEI school partnerships. Such a focus could be prioritised for the transition funding as described in recommendation 3.

Recommendation 7: The QCDE strongly support the development of a teacher education ARC special initiative funding scheme to support longitudinal and collaborative research in teacher education. Aligning with the ARC ensures that such a funding program is rigorous and competitively peer reviewed at the highest standard.

Reform Area 4: Improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

Many University teacher education providers already offer fast-tracked or accelerated Master of Teacher (MTeach) programs. Such programs are as short as 15 months. While some students elect an accelerated pathway, anecdotal evidence suggests that many prefer a non-accelerated program (including those from background representatives of the population). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that a differentiated pipeline of pre-service teachers is required if we are to identify a teacher workforce that is representative of the Australian population. The underlying issue is the volume of learning or cognitive load, alongside maintaining quality initial teacher education. Further, programs such as 'Turn to Teaching' and 'Trade to Teach' appear to be having positive uptake, however research is needed to determine their effectiveness in supporting quality teacher education and a willingness to consider how these programs might ensure that they are representative of the Australian population.

Recommendation 8: At present there is a lack of evidence on accelerated and employment-based initial teacher education programs. Given the Australian teacher shortage, the QCDE support the short-term utilisation of accelerated and employment-based programs, however it is critical that such programs are researched, and an appropriate evidence framework be formulated. It is important that MTeach programs offer flexibility as accelerated and employment-based programs are not appropriate for all pre-service teachers.

The QCDE appreciate the opportunity to offer comment on the TEEP discussion paper. We trust that our comments will be considered in any reforms accepted.

Kind regards,

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