20 04 2023

Teacher Expert Education Panel
Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Re: Response to the Teacher Expert Education Panel Report

Swinburne University of Technology (SUT) is pleased to provide a submission in response to the recently released Teacher Expert Education Panel report.

SUT delivers Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses both on-campus and online. Our quality-driven online learning division, Swinburne Online has delivered undergraduate and postgraduate ITE courses to students across Australia since 2013, with over 3300 graduates. As one of the largest providers of online ITE, we have become a leader in fostering a diverse pipeline of teachers, those who are both predominantly 'non-traditional' and mature-aged.

Our offering of both on campus and online education degrees give students the skills and experience they need to become a teacher and lead our classrooms of the future. The combination of practical experience via on-the-job placements and flexible, online or face to face theoretical study, enables our students to implement innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

SUT are supportive of the four areas of reform identified and are pleased that strengthening ITE programs to attract diverse cohorts, increasing success factors, improving the quality of practical experience, and a desire to redesign postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants have been elevated due to the work by the panel to date.

1. Strengthening ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready Graduates
We agree that evidence-based practices focused on learning, effective practices, classroom management strategies and a foundational understanding of culture, in particular First Nations peoples will have a positive impact on student learning.
It is within this context, that we support a standardised national approach measured via a Teaching Performance Assessment as a way to enhance long-term benefits.

2. Strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE programs
SUT supports using a holistic range of indicators to measure student success outcomes including selection, retention, classroom readiness and transition to employment outcomes.
Both the Government and SUT have a long held view that increasing the diversity of teaching candidates will have a positive impact for both school communities and student outcomes, and we believe increasing participation of students from First Nations, regional and remote locations, and low socio-economic backgrounds, high ATAR students, and STEM students will assist this.
We are pleased that the panel recognises that ITE students from a more diverse cohort are often at greater risk of attrition and require higher levels of support.
For example, our online Education courses were established to reach students previously under-serviced by traditional study models:

- We support a mature-aged cohort, with 34.1%of students in their 30s and 24.3%over the age of 40 (17-19yr's makes up less than 0.5% of the student cohort across our partnerships).

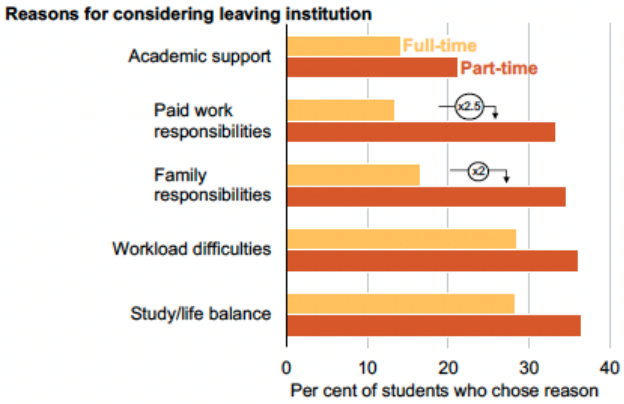
- 78.4%of students are women, many of whom are mid-career, returning to study during or after raising children.
- 19.8%of students live in regional areas, and 15.3 per cent are from a low socio-economic background.
- 1.62%of students identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Importantly, our figures from 2022 reveal that we enrolled 142 initial teacher education students who identify as indigenous (i.e., 1.9% of the cohort).

Many of our online students choose us because online education gives them the flexibility to study around their existing commitments without needing to be on campus. Our students are working, often struggling to pay for childcare, and live too far away to commit to campus life. Most of our students (80%) study part-time (1 – 2 units per term). Almost all students have a non-ATAR basis of entry i.e., 60% have VET qualifications and 35% have previous Higher Education studies.

As a recent Grattan institute report on university completion found, being part-time is a significant factor affecting completion, rather than mode of study or institutional capability. The report found there are several reasons for this:

- According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, part-time students are more likely to be employed and to work longer hours than full-time students, (median weekly working time is less than 10 hours for full-time students; for part-time students it is 30-to-39 hours). The Government's Student Experience Survey shows that part-time students disproportionately identify paid work as a reason they consider discontinuing (See Figure 3.6 below).
- Adding to their time commitments, part-time students are also much more likely than full-time students to have young children. Among students aged 25-44, nearly 40 per cent of part-time students have a youngest child aged under 15, compared to about 25 per cent of full-time students. Among students considering leaving university, part-time students are twice as likely as full-time students to nominate family responsibilities as their reason (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Part-time students are much more likely to cite work and family responsibilities as reasons for considering leaving



When looking at expected completion timelines for 'non-traditional' mature-aged students, it is crucial to consider their part-time study load. For example, mature-age, part-time students tend to graduate within nine years of their initial start date, rather than the six-year completion timeline often seen with 'traditional' students studying a four-year Bachelor of Education.

We propose broadening the thresholds that are used for different student cohorts, so that providers that look to serve diverse cohorts are not unfairly penalised. For example, in the UK, it is valuable to note that the Office for Students (OFS) recently introduced numerical thresholds for continuation, completion and graduate outcomes for providers, and that different thresholds have been set for courses depending on their mode and level of study.

These measures consider the differences in outcomes for students who study full- and part-time, and those undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The diversity of the mature online cohort is inherently valuable as older learners enter the classroom with both educational and life experience and often higher levels of classroom readiness skills.

Feedback from our placement schools indicate that our graduates have a positive impact as they enter the profession. They tend to have good digital skills, diverse life experiences, and maturity. In addition, those in regional/rural areas can study and work where they live, providing a critical pipeline of potential graduates for regional schools.

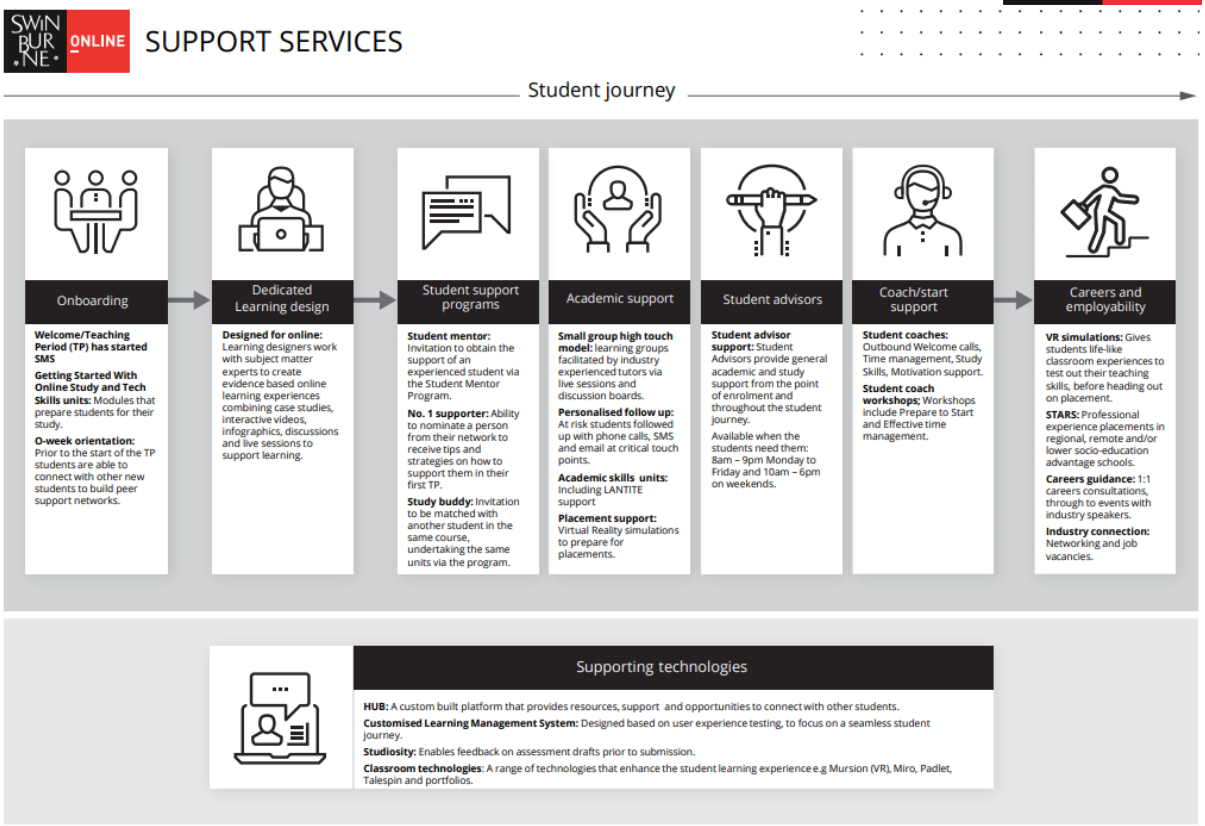
Recommendation:
SUT recommends that government policy must reflect an understanding that diverse student cohorts require different retention thresholds and benchmarks including:

- Measuring student completion across nine-year completion timeframes for part time students.
- Retention thresholds that account for risk factors of diverse student cohorts whilst encouraging continuous improvement by providers.

3. Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching
We are supportive of developing national guidelines for high quality placement experiences, greater support and training for mentor teachers and elevating examples of best practice from participating schools.

Non-traditional students often have competing family and work commitments and we have observed first-hand the logistical challenges that placements can bring. We endorse additional support measures for these students.

4. Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants
SUT is also supportive of policies and measures designed to deliver increased support for mid-career ITE entrants. The flexibility of our online programs and the support delivered through them (*see attached chart below response for reference*), provide critical features to allow our students to study while balancing competing commitments.



Thank you for taking the time to consider our response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel as we work together as a collective of Government, Higher Education providers, Regulators and the broader education industry sector to deliver better outcomes for ITE.

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

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Vice-Chancellor and President
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Ms Denice Pitt
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OES