

Professor Mark Scott
Chair, Teacher Education Expert Panel
Vice-Chancellor
University of Sydney

via: [Department of Education online submission portal](#)

21 April 2023

Dear Mark,

Re: Consultation on Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

University of Canberra welcomes consultation run by the Teacher Education Expert Panel and is keen to participate. We note this work builds upon that of the earlier Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) Review, and the Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable.

We refer to the discussion paper and information on your website and are pleased to provide a submission to the panel.

The University of Canberra is well placed to comment on Initial Teacher Education.

The University provides teacher training and has a partnership with the ACT Education Directorate to deliver the Affiliated Schools Program. The aims of this program are to build teacher capability and a skilled future teacher workforce, equipped to meet the needs and aspirations of ACT public school students into the future.

We place 1,250 students for professional experience in ACT and Capital Region Schools each year, including early childhood, primary and secondary schools across the government, catholic and independent sectors.

Attached is our submission prepared by Professor Barney Dalgarno, Executive Dean of our Faculty of Education.

Yours sincerely,



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Teacher Education Expert Panel

Response to Discussion Paper

April 2023

Reform Area 1. Strengthening ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom-ready graduates

1.a. Comments on the four proposed groups of teaching practices:

Brain and learning

This is an important area that is already well covered in our ITE program. The description of the core content of this area could be bolstered by an increased focus on recent findings from neuroscience research to complement the strong focus on educational psychology. We note that the suggested reference on the brain is dated 2002; this is problematic given the progress in neuroscience and understandings of the brain and learning over the past 20 years.

Effective practices

We are supportive of the notion that students need to develop the ability to implement the general pedagogies most supported by evidence as well as pedagogies found to work effectively within specific content areas; to this end we have recently developed a subject called 'Foundations of Pedagogy' that maintains this focus. An increased focus on inclusive pedagogies (as distinct from differentiated programming) would strengthen this area, as would a focus on the ability to undertake data-informed programming and lesson planning.

Classroom management

We are comfortable with the focus of this section of the discussion paper and acknowledge that this has been an area in which many graduates across Australia have felt insufficiently prepared by ITE programs. It is also an area that we are looking to refresh in our own program through co-teaching between academic staff and acknowledged experts from our partner schools. The panel could consider, however, renaming this section 'positive learning environments', to better reflect contemporary perspectives acknowledging that the capabilities needed go beyond management of student behaviours.

Enabling factors

The areas listed are all important, though we are concerned about the labelling and grouping of disparate aspects in this section. In particular, we consider that graduates' ability to draw upon Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, being and doing (including knowledge of the impact of First Nations history and the ability to engage positively with First Nations students and their families and communities) warrants a section in its own right. There is an element of deficit thinking in relation to First Nations people in the way that this section is currently organised.

The section on diverse learners could also be improved with more explicit statements about the importance of understanding and catering for the learning needs of neurodiverse students, as well as an awareness of the role of positive partnerships with the families of students with special needs and with specialist support teams.

1.b. General comments:

It is important that student teachers develop an understanding of the importance of evidence-based practice, but they must also understand that there is lot that we do not know about the brain and learning, and that this understanding carries implications for teaching practice. For instance, graduates will need to remain open to, and keep abreast of, new findings so that they can continue to reflect upon and evolve their practice in light of new evidence. Conversely, there is a danger in highly proscriptive programs of ITE to perpetuate a belief in 'the evidence' as immutable. The result of this belief is a teacher with a brittle professional identity threatened by change. Being aware of resources such as those provided by AERO and other state-based and international syntheses of evidence is one example of the need to remain open to new developments, but pre-service and in-service teachers also need to develop capabilities in reading research literature and forming their own views, especially in areas characterised by contestation.

We acknowledge that there is no intention that the proposed 'core content' represents a complete statement of all components of ITE programs; nevertheless, a failure to acknowledge contestation or complexity in teaching and learning could lead to a de-prioritisation of certain important areas within ITE programs. The most significant omission is a section on the social context of education, the social conditions around educational disadvantage, and the broader nature of social and cultural diversity. This foundational knowledge is critical to students' development of capabilities in catering for diverse students, engaging positively with families and school communities and in developing their own professional identities as teachers.

1.c. Comments about implementation:

There is a question about whether, or in what ways, accreditation standards and processes should be refined to ensure that these core content areas are well-covered in ITE programs. The level of detail within this core content, as articulated in the discussion document, does not lend itself to inclusion directly within the standards. It may be that a restatement of the core content at the granularity appropriate for a standards document may be little different to the standards as they currently exist. Clearly, as the panel have pointed out, the professional standards already encompass all of the areas within the proposed core content.

This challenge in expressing the standards at an appropriately high level, whilst signalling that certain content and practices are recommended in implementing the standards, is not an entirely new problem. The approach that TEQSA have taken in overseeing the Higher Education Standards Framework could be worth considering as a model. Rather than creating increasingly granular and prescriptive standards, TEQSA have kept the standards at an appropriately high level, but have also developed a series of guidance notes for providers and review panels which elaborate upon the standards. For example TEQSA guidance notes elaborate upon expectations with regard to things like academic scholarship, academic integrity, governance, technology enhanced learning (see <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/guidance-notes#current-guidance%20notes>).

We suggest that the inclusion of the recommended core content within a guidance note, rather than trying to integrate core content into the AITSL standards, would have a number of advantages. The guidance notes could be (and would need to be) updated regularly as new evidence emerges, and there are very good arguments for changing the standards themselves less regularly. Accreditation processes could then require providers to cross-reference the core content guidance note within their accreditation documentation, making clear where in their programs each aspect of the core content is to be found, but to do this in the context of demonstrating that the higher-level standards are met. Inevitably, state jurisdictions will continue

to set additional content requirements aligned with their own priorities, and state TRAs could then require the cross referencing of these additional documents in the same way.

Because of the importance of the core content not remaining frozen in time, but rather being reviewed and refreshed as new evidence emerges, we would recommend the establishment of a reference group responsible for revising the core content every 1-2 years. Such a reference group could have members drawn from teachers, school leaders, AITSL, TRAs, educational researchers and, of course, from AERO.

1.d. Discussion prompt from paper:

There is an opportunity to ensure all teachers learn in ITE the evidence-based practices which improve student learning. In addition, there is an opportunity for graduate teachers to be assessed on these practices as part of their final year assessment (known as the Teaching Performance Assessment) so that they develop and practice their skills in these areas.

To what extent would this strengthen ITE to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates?

Consistent with our comments above, we do not believe that it makes sense to assess all of the capabilities encompassed by the proposed core content directly within the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA). To do so would result in a highly granular 'checkbox' approach to classroom readiness which runs counter to the deeply reflective practices encouraged by the current focus. However, students could be encouraged to draw upon the core content in their TPA responses in a way that illustrates how they have made effective use of the capabilities in their practice.

Reform Area 2. Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

2.a. Comments on the four proposed sets of quality measures:

Selection

We are supportive of the broad goal to ensure that the distribution of students studying ITE is more broadly representative of the socio-economic and cultural distribution of Australian society. However, by incentivising universities to focus on very specific subsets of this distribution, there is a real risk of perverse outcomes through strategies that focus on these measures rather than on the broader goal of socially-inclusive admission criteria.

We note also that, as outlined in our submission for the Australian Universities Accord consultation, the University of Canberra sees the need for a comprehensive review of higher education student support. This should ascertain the true costs of fully participating in higher education and opportunity for students from various socio-economic backgrounds. We aim to be a university of choice for underrepresented groups, we provide a wide range of support services for such students and offer a range of admissions pathways. However, we see improving access and outcomes for those from disadvantaged backgrounds as a complex issue. We suggest that simply incentivising Universities to admit more students from certain groups or offering dedicated CSP places for these students will not be sufficient to shift the dial. More student support is needed, and this is a national responsibility. Factors affecting a person's likelihood of attending university begin at a young age. Economic, socio-cultural and wellbeing determinants beyond the control of the university may impact on student enrolment decision making as well as on their progression and completion.

We agree that it would be valuable to attract more academically-strong students into teacher education degrees, though it is important to acknowledge that the proportion of students being admitted to ITE programs (and, in fact, all university programs) via ATAR is constantly decreasing - they represent one of the smallest minorities in our commencing cohort of undergraduate students. Importantly, when a highly capable student is admitted through another pathway (e.g. early entry

based on year 11 results or the principal's recommendation) their ATAR is not included within data on the ATAR distribution of the program. Consequently, neither the proportion of students with high ATARs nor the average ATAR accurately reflect the academic calibre of commencing students.

With regard to measures of socioeconomic disadvantage, we would like to also raise an issue most specific to Canberra. The metric currently used by the Department of Education in relation to low SES, the Australian Bureau of Statistics SA1 indicator, is not suitable as an indicator of disadvantage in the ACT. The ACT is largely composed of areas classified as high and medium socio-economic status. This reflects social policy and suburban planning, with public housing embedded across all areas of Canberra. This issue is compounded for the University of Canberra, with the Department using a student's permanent address. We know that many students provide an ACT 'permanent' address after moving to Canberra to attend university.

While there are no low SES areas in Canberra, other measures suggest that our cohorts include significant numbers of socially disadvantaged students. For example, more than a third of UC's students are 'first in family' to attend university, one in five domestic undergraduate students are from regional areas, our proportion of students with a disability is higher than the sector average and our proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is substantially greater than the proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in the ACT. Consistent with the recommendation within our submission for Australian Universities Accord consultation, we would urge the use of alternative or additional measures of low SES.

Retention

The QITE review recommended (Recommendation 11) that programs include placements early in the first year so that the suitability or lack of suitability of a student to teaching becomes clear as early as possible. Consistent with this recommendation, University of Canberra's ITE program includes a placement in the first semester of all courses. It is likely that this results in increased attrition in the first year, due to students realising early that teaching is not for them, at least in comparison to programs where the first placement does not occur until the second year. Using first year retention as an indicator of quality runs counter to this important recommendation from the QITE review and could drive providers in the opposite direction.

We also note that many students move between ITE programs, for example moving from a generic Primary Education program to one with a curriculum specialisation or vice versa, or moving between specialist Secondary Education programs. It is important that any measure of retention or attrition provides an accurate picture of the proportion of students lost entirely to ITE.

Classroom readiness

We would recommend that this indicator be renamed to 'profession readiness'. The role of a graduate teacher is a very broad professional role which includes curriculum planning work undertaken in collaboration with other teachers, engagement with families and school communities, extra-curricular engagement with students, as well as classroom teaching. We note also that the proposed Graduate Outcome Survey items to be used asks graduates whether their degree prepared them for their job as a whole, and not specifically about their preparation for classroom teaching.

Other providers may suggest that employer satisfaction based on the national Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS) be used as a measure of classroom readiness. This may appear attractive, though we suggest a note of caution. The use of the ESS as a measure of professional readiness is problematic due to the very low response rates to these surveys and the methodology used to collect responses (employees are only contacted if student respondents to the Graduate Outcomes Survey decide to include the contact information for their supervisor). In 2022 there were 3,452 responses to the ESS from a population of 104,473 graduating students (3.3%). At the University of Canberra there were 46 ESS survey responses in 2022 across all of our programs, and, based on the proportion of ITE students within our graduating cohort, we could assume that less than 5

of these would have been from employers of ITE students. Clearly sample sizes like this are far too small to allow ESS to be a reliable indicator when used at the discipline level within a single university.

Transition

We are comfortable with the use of employment rates as one measure of the success of programs, although we do acknowledge that employment rates will inevitably differ across locational contexts due to differing levels of demand for teachers in different locations and will vary over time due to changes in employer demand.

General comment

Although none of the proposed aspects of quality focus directly on the quality of the program and its delivery, and some aspects are outside of the control of Universities, we accept the panel's arguments that these aspects are outcomes one might expect from quality programs over time. With this proviso in place, we agree conceptually with the four aspects of quality proposed to be measured, though we are not confident that reliable measures exist at this stage and we are concerned that the effects of program quality on some measures will be significantly lagged. We suggest that, if a reliable measure closely related to the aspect of quality is not available for one or more of these areas, it does not make sense to use an unreliable one only peripherally-related and significantly lagged. To do so will drive perverse behaviours towards increasing the measures without increasing quality.

2.b. Discussion prompt from paper:

There is an opportunity to strengthen the focus on improving performance in ITE by setting standardised performance measures for higher education providers and reporting publicly against them. There is also an opportunity to strengthen the link between performance and funding through the provision of financial incentives to encourage higher education providers to strive for excellence.

To what extent would these opportunities provide a strengthened focus on improving the performance of ITE programs?

We are encouraged that "the Panel does not consider [enrolment caps] to be a feasible option as it would limit the number of places and could limit teacher supply, worsening the national shortage of teachers".

With regard to the notion of performance-based funding for ITE in general, we re-iterate our comments in our submission for the Australian Universities Accord consultation. We argued for the discontinuation of the Performance-based Funding policy that was introduced from 2020 but never fully implemented, and for consideration of an alternative approach to performance and accountability reporting, not attached to base funding. We note that across the sector there are calls for university performance to be managed through Mission-based Compacts. We would suggest that performance-based funding has not been able to be successfully implemented across the whole sector and so it is hard to see how it could work for ITE.

We are somewhat sceptical, however, about the extent to which making aggregated and de-contextualised 'performance data' publicly available will incentivise improvements in ITE as the Panel hopes it will. As with NAPLAN, we think it is equally likely to frustrate or alienate ITE providers and encourage them to regard each other as competitors more than colleagues in the service of a valuable profession they are all trying to make a contribution to.

Nevertheless, if public reporting of performance against certain measures is introduced, we agree with the panel's comments that reporting separately on each measure would be preferable. A single measure of quality derived from all of the measures would be highly problematic. Prospective students need information to help them judge which programs to enrol in based on the aspects of the program that matter to them. A single measure of quality based on measures that might not be important to some students would not be helpful. We are concerned about the notion of using an improvement approach to reporting

because it may disadvantage providers who are already strong in an area and where the measures of performance make it difficult to demonstrate further measurable improvement.

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

3.a. General thoughts:

We agree with the panel in their identification of five key aspects of the quality of practical experience within ITE programs. Although we could never claim perfection, we consider the practical experience aspects of our programs to be an area of strength for us and believe that we could robustly demonstrate the quality of these five aspects already. For example, our programs include significant innovations in the way we integrate theory with practice through our in-school-based clinical model; we draw upon very strong school partnerships with government, catholic and independent schools (most notably through our Affiliated Schools program); and we have a strong professional development program for in-school mentors.

3.b. Discussion prompt from paper:

There is an opportunity to improve the quality of practical experience in teaching through:

- *developing more comprehensive system level agreements between school systems and higher education providers to improve the coordination and quality of placements*
- *developing national guidelines for high-quality practical experience*
- *supporting particular schools to specialise in delivering high quality placements who can share their expertise, and*
- *providing targeted support for ITE students with competing commitments, additional needs or studying in areas of workforce need to complete their placements.*
- *enabling mid-career entrants to enter the classroom sooner as part of their degree*
- *developing evidence and provide guidance on the features of effective programs to attract mid-career entrants, and*
- *improving the flexibility of available postgraduate ITE programs to support mid-career entrants in managing competing commitments.*

To what extent would these opportunities improve the quality of practical experience?

We believe that our existing agreements between the University of Canberra and the school systems and independent schools within the ACT and wider Capital Region are serving us well; we don't believe that more comprehensive agreements are needed.

We would be comfortable with the development of national guidelines for practical experience within ITE programs. Consistent with our earlier comments in the first section regarding the use of 'guidance notes' which complement the accreditation standards, we would suggest that these guidelines would make a valuable guidance note.

Through the ACT Affiliated Schools Program, we have developed strong relationships with 25 Affiliated Schools in the ACT and these schools host the majority of our in-school clinics and a greater share of block professional experience placements. However, the number of students we need to place means that we cannot confine student professional placements to this group of schools. Similarly, through our strong partnership with the NSW Department of Education, we are part of the Hub

School initiative, though our focus within this initiative is to provide a platform for strong placement arrangements across schools within the Queanbeyan district rather than focussing on a very small number of schools. The reality is that, in order to provide sufficient placements for all ITE students, we need all schools within the region to participate in our professional experience programs and so our strategies to ensure quality cannot be too narrowly focussed.

We would like to propose more systematic processes for identifying and supporting the scaling up of high-quality and innovative school partnership practices with clear links to quality work-integrated student learning.

We also believe that the quality of professional experience could be improved by direct funding to universities for the costs associated with providing student placements in schools. We note also that the reduction in base funding for ITE programs through Job Ready Graduates has impacted on funds available for all aspects of ITE programs including funds available to support high quality school placements. We note the panel's comments that Commonwealth funding rates for ITE are out of scope, but nevertheless would like to suggest that returning to the previous funding levels would be consistent with the high priority the government is placing on addressing the teacher workforce shortage and the quality of teacher education.

Reform Area 4. Improving postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

4.a. General thoughts:

We agree with the panel's comments suggesting that reducing the length of postgraduate programs would be a retrograde step; we also believe that doing so would make it impossible to meet existing standards, let alone the improvements in quality proposed under Reform Area 1. We agree, however, that mid-career entrants need to be encouraged by reducing the time between commencing their degrees and obtaining paid employment as a teacher and by increasing flexibility in the delivery of programs.

4.b. Discussion prompt from paper:

There is an opportunity to attract mid-career entrants into ITE by:

- *enabling mid-career entrants to enter the classroom sooner as part of their degree*
- *developing evidence and provide guidance on the features of effective programs to attract mid-career entrants, and*
- *improving the flexibility of available postgraduate ITE programs to support mid-career entrants in managing competing commitments.*

To what extent would these opportunities improve postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants?

We are supportive of an increased volume of learning as a strategy to accelerate programs, for example by extending the length of the academic year, or utilising additional teaching sessions beyond the traditional two semester models. We can see value in increasing the volume of learning in the first year of our own postgraduate program and providing flexible study options in the second year to allow fulltime employment under ACT Teacher Quality Institute Permit to Teach arrangements. We are excited about the idea of revising our programs to capitalise on work-integrated learning opportunities in the second year of the program that such an approach would facilitate. We can also see significant benefit in part-time employment of postgraduate ITE students during their first year as Learning Support Assistants, and we have had conversations with our partner school systems towards enabling these opportunities more systematically.

To help us and other providers in developing innovative programs targeted at mid-career entrants that combine early employment with work integrated learning, we are supportive of the recommendation within the National Teacher Workforce Shortage Action Plan to broaden opportunities within the High Achieving Teachers program. Specifically, we

would urge the broadening of the program from its current focus on programs provided by ACU and La Trobe to allow funding of emergent programs developed in partnership between providers and school systems in other jurisdictions.

We are supportive of a continuation of arrangements allowing final-year ITE students to be employed as teachers, but we also believe that many jurisdictions have implemented such arrangements without the checks and balances needed to mitigate the risk to teaching quality and retention of early-career teachers. We would like to suggest that the ACT Permit to Teach model could provide a scaffold for other jurisdictions or for a nationally-consistent approach.

University of Canberra

The University is incorporated under the University of Canberra Act 1989 of the Australian Capital Territory.

We are committed to serving the people of Canberra and the region through professional education and applied research.

University of Canberra is ranked among top universities globally by both Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings and appears in the 2020 THE rankings as one of the top 300 universities in the world and one of the top 20 young universities under the age of 50 years.

The University has released *Connected*, a decadal strategy that sets out the long-term ambitions and objectives for our university. It has at its core explicit commitment to our staff and students, to our place in Canberra and the region, and to the Ngunnawal people.

Our ambition for the coming 10 years is to be a global leader in driving equality of opportunity. A commitment that ensures we are the most accessible university in Australia; building an international identity for University of Canberra that celebrates, and is built upon, the importance of our place, one of national and international decision making. We proudly embrace our role as the university of the nation's capital.

The University of Canberra has had long-standing excellence in both teaching and mission-oriented problem-solving research and continues to be influential in a range of areas including health and wellbeing, nursing, education, information technology, communications, architecture and design, sport, and science.