

29 April 2023

### **Submission to Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper March-April 2023**

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper.

The Discussion Paper constitutes an important step to understanding the current landscape of teacher education in Australia, building on previous reviews and taking action to recruit and retain the best teachers for our schools.

The submission is focused on **Reform Area 4: ‘Improve post-graduate ITE for mid-career entrants’**.

Contribution to the submission is informed by my research expertise in the area of mid-career entrants and research work been done in this space, including the publication of a [book](#).<sup>1</sup> I am one of the handful of education researchers in Australia to have conducted a systematic research program on mid-career or career change teachers.

Currently, I am conducting research for the NSW Department of Education to examine strategies and mechanisms to attract and retain career change teachers from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) industry backgrounds in NSW schools. Initial findings from the research can be found [here](#).

#### **Background**

An important focus of any teacher recruitment and retention policy should be about bringing diversity and experience to the classroom. As the world seeks to move beyond the crisis of COVID-19, flexibility, adaptability and agility are often discussed and are considered to be essential skills that better prepare learners of today to face an uncertain and evolving future. With present day classrooms being increasingly diverse, we need educators from different backgrounds, contexts and experiences who recognise the importance of ‘future preparedness’ in learning and education contexts. One such group of educators are career change entrants who tend to possess diverse skills and career and life experiences.<sup>1</sup> Career changers from different backgrounds have the potential to make unique and significant contributions to student learning and engagement in and beyond school. They can play a significant role in lifting the status of teachers and the teaching profession in the eyes of society.<sup>2</sup>

#### **What we know about career changers’ entering teaching**

Career changers are likely to have a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motives for entering the profession. Research shows that because of their skill set and experiences and having made a conscious and purposeful decision to enter teaching, they are highly committed, keener to share their passion and pass their real-world experience and expertise to students.<sup>2</sup> Apart from content expertise and practical knowledge that are highly relevant to student teaching, qualities such as maturity, wisdom, resilience, flexibility, responsiveness to change and other skills gathered through years of life

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experience can also be attributed to career changers. My research further indicates that career changers are keen for recognition and acknowledgement of their career and life experience.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion paper has identified key barriers for career changers, including financial considerations at various stages of their career transition, including during their studies, practical experience and after graduation. The reality is many decide to enter the profession at a considerably lower pay base than what they were earning in their previous work. The culture shock of becoming a student again and then working in a very different environment as compared to their previous careers is not uncommon among career changers.<sup>3</sup>

We do not have enough data or information about this cohort. Part of the reason is because career changers enter teaching through various pathways, for instance, through under-graduate, post-graduate, employment-based or accelerated pathways. This makes it difficult to track, locate and determine their exact numbers. Career changers are also defined and interpreted in several ways depending on their age, background, field of study, work experience, and life experience, to name a few.<sup>3</sup>

### **What can be done to attract career changers to the teaching profession**

The discussion paper has proposed good solutions and opportunities that can be pursued to help attract more career change entrants.

I have identified recommendations that can be actioned by teacher education providers. These recommendations have been drawn from my research work.<sup>1,2,4</sup>

**Teacher education or course providers:** Take steps to make the transition for career changers easier and smoother by:

- Utilising suitable and uniform selection criteria to identify career changers and track their work, life and other experiences, for example, through personal statements and interviews.
- Offering flexible options for career changers to complete their teacher education course.
  - ✓ Hybrid options for course attendance wherever possible.
- Providing monetary and other assistance to attract and retain career changers'
  - ✓ Financial compensation for loss of income, particularly during professional experience placement
  - ✓ Incentives can be in the form of scholarships, especially to attract those from specialist backgrounds such as STEM.
- Providing opportunities for career change pre-service teachers to contribute meaningfully in course delivery, lesson content, and theory-practice application where relevant.
- Adapting or tailoring courses or content for career changers, taking into account their prior knowledge.
- Identifying career changers' unique needs while recognising career changers experiences and expertise where appropriate in their journey as a teacher education student.
- Communicating and sharing key aspects of teachers' role and what it involves to better prepare and manage expectations of prospective career change teachers.

**In addition to the above recommendations, certain key principles also need to be considered.**

- **Partnership** plays a key role in attracting career changers to teaching. A systematic way whereby all education stakeholders (Government, policy makers, education providers, principals and teachers) work together to come up with sustainable solutions must exist. For example, education departments and recruitment bodies must take steps to simplify processes and adopt flexible systems around applications and recruitment.
- A **consistent and uniform definition** of career changers need to be framed across the sector
- **Gathering data and evidence** on accurate numbers of career change student teachers and teachers in schools is an important step in the process of attracting and retaining them.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to write a submission.

Your sincerely,

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#### References

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