



April 2023

The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the *Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) Discussion Paper*. Responses to the discussion questions are provided below.

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

- ***Evidence-based teaching practices:*** *Are there other evidence-based practices which should be prioritised in ITE programs?*

UniSQ is supportive of inclusion in ITE programs of the four types of core content identified by the panel as areas to prioritise, and is supportive of amending accreditation standards and procedures to ensure ITE graduates are equipped to employ relevant evidence-based practices in these areas. Care needs to be taken, however, in identifying additional material for inclusion in ITE curricula, particularly if that were to happen parallel with initiatives to reduce the length of graduate entry ITE programs.

The four identified areas are currently well embedded within many ITE programs, including UniSQ's programs. Space needs to be maintained within core content, however, to allow ITE providers to be responsive to their local context, including state-level initiatives. UniSQ, for example, provides a significant focus on working in regional and remote areas, given the connection to our immediate communities. Highlighting these four areas, which are already heavily embedded within our ITE programs, should not be at the cost of other important core elements of preparing teachers for regional and remote employment. For example, working toward an evidence-base around social determinants of learning (i.e. reflecting the strong evidence base underpinning our awareness of social determinants of health) also provides opportunities for future strengthening of curricula for ITE graduates to practice successfully in a range of socio-economic environments.

We suggest that there is wide scope for strengthening and evaluating ITE programs through existing evidence-bases and within the current processes of accreditation. The Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) could also be amended to ensure that students are able to apply the core content knowledge in practice.

- ***Amending Accreditation Standards and Procedures:*** *How should the Accreditation Standards and Procedures best be amended to ensure all ITE students learn and can confidently use these practices? Should the Accreditation Standards and Procedures be amended to require TPAs to assess these practices?*

UniSQ is supportive of amending accreditation standards to ensure all ITE graduates can confidently use these practices, and this could be tracked at Stage 2 of the accreditation process and through annual reporting.

Including an assessment of each of these practices as part of the current TPA could be challenging, however, considering extent of the current TPA undertaken in the final year placement. Increasing the scope of the TPA also carries a risk that students will be more focussed on the assessment than the task at hand, which is to demonstrate their classroom readiness. Accreditation standards and procedures currently require evidence-based practices to be considered within the variety of contexts of professional experiences so are spread across the program.

If the decision is made to amend accreditation standards as proposed, it should be left to the Teacher Regulatory Authorities to determine how they evaluate the success of adoption of these practices in ITE curricula. TRAs are experienced in evaluating how evidence-based practices are embedded in ITE curricula.

- ***Curriculum specific content:*** *What steps should be taken to ensure curriculum-specific ITE content embeds the evidence-based-practices?*

UniSQ believes that the four core components should continue to be embedded across the program, with a clear focus in the first or foundation year. They should then recur iteratively, as appropriate to the student stage and professional experience focus, given that professional experience provides students with an opportunity to apply and demonstrate their learning. This could be monitored through current accreditation processes.

- ***Ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices:*** *What changes to the authorising environment are required to ensure consistent application of the Accreditation Standards and Procedures and implementation of core content in ITE programs?*

Strengthening of the tripartite arrangement between Federal and State Governments, ITE program accrediting bodies and ITE providers is key to ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices. UniSQ encourages streamlining of the ITE regulatory environment, and encourages a strategy that enhances harmonisation between the TRAs. Any changes to the authorising environment should result in simpler, not more complex, regulatory processes for ITE programs and for registration of ITE graduates.

UniSQ accepts that a move to a national accreditation system would be a major long-term reform, and notes the Discussion Paper's reference to the '*legislative complexity of establishing a national regulatory body, as all TRAs have been established through legislation in their respective jurisdictions*'. While we accept that AHPRA is underpinned by legislation, this is not the only model for a single national approach to accreditation. For example, registration of veterinary graduates is governed by state-based legislation. However, the states (and New Zealand) have collaborated to establish the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC). AVBC is an incorporated association whose voting members are the state and territory Veterinary Boards of Australia and the Veterinary Council of New Zealand. The states (and New Zealand) confer on AVBC responsibility for accreditation of Australian and New Zealand veterinary programs. This allows a single accreditation system for all veterinary programs in Australia and New Zealand, while retaining input from the states and territories, and has also facilitated alignment of Australia's veterinary program accreditation processes with key international jurisdictions (USA, Canada, UK, Europe and South Africa). There is no Commonwealth legislation underpinning AVBC. We believe there are numerous pathways to a national approach to ITE program accreditation, and this remains an important goal to pursue.



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

- **ITE performance measures:** *Are there additional indicators that should be considered? To what extent should the performance measures form the core part of the evidence requirements in provider's Plans for Demonstrating Impact required in the Accreditation Standards and Procedures?*

It is important to note that the history of higher education policy in Australia over recent decades is littered with examples of performance-based funding initiatives that have been implemented to address perceived needs or crises in higher education. A general observation is that these tend to have a limited life span, and often limited impact. In our view, a more sustainable solution to improving ITE program performance lies in focussing effort on ensuring ITE accreditation processes address identified gaps, improving accreditation processes, and moving to a single approach to ITE accreditation. Every higher education provider **MUST** meet ITE accreditation requirements, whether performance funding is available or not. While performance-based funding is newsworthy, more sustained and meaningful change may be achieved by improving (including through investment) ITE accreditation processes.

The reform suggests that funding of ITE programs should be connected to selection, retention, classroom readiness, and transition data. While the reform area aims to promote inclusion of under-represented cohorts (First Nations, regional and remote areas, low SES) through selection data, it also aligns funding with retention, which is known to be lower in these cohorts. This may adversely affect universities that prioritise these cohorts, together with the communities they serve. The suggested reform may push universities to refine selection processes and focus on enrolling only those students who belong to known “high completion” cohorts while limiting the selection of those cohorts traditionally under-represented. This will impact regional and remote communities and could also lead to a less diverse teacher workforce, with fewer and fewer school students able to ‘see themselves’ in their schools. There is already a workforce issue in relation to diversity, and such reforms could lead to this becoming even more entrenched.

While retention of students in ITE programs is of concern, it is too simplistic to see this as a result simply of program quality. There are a number of factors at play, particularly for rural and remote students who may be mature-aged, or with family or carer responsibilities that impact on progression through programs. For example, in order to meet the requirement for diversity in placements, rural and remote students often have to leave their home town to undertake their placements, resulting in an increase in costs and a loss of income if they have to forgo any part-time work, arrange for someone else to care for children, etc. In addition, some students recognise after doing a placement that teaching is not the career for them, self-selecting out of teaching and into another degree/professional pathway. This is a positive for the profession, and results in students who graduate being fully committed to the profession, and likely to remain in the profession.

The selection of ITE performance measures, and the standards against which they are compared, thus needs to be finely tuned, so that we do not see a simple, and blunt use of one set of metrics. This aspect of the reform agenda has the potential to reduce diversity, already sorely lacking in the profession. In other words, ITE performance measures (or the way the performance measures are evaluated) may need to vary between institutions and reflect the mission and ambition of each institution's ITE programs.

Universities in Australia undertook a considerable amount of work to implement the recommendations of the TEMAG *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers Report* (2014). A positive outcome of the TEMAG Report is the standardised performance benchmarks that have now been set for all ITE programs across Australia. This allows for an assurance of quality in teacher education programs, while at the same time allowing universities to offer programs that are fit for the region and the workforce needs of their local areas. Again, given the still relatively short timeframe since implementation, data on the success or otherwise of these benchmarks is only now beginning to emerge. Further analysis of the impact of these reforms would provide further information about whether they have achieved their objectives.



- **Public reporting:** *Should the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection be the basis for reporting and publicising the performance measures? Are there other approaches for reporting the performance measures?*

The need to examine teacher workforce shortages is a national imperative. The current processes of accreditation mean that there is recognition of the quality of teacher education programs and teachers, and this is publicly available. The workforce data is more related to in-service issues rather than those associated with pre-service teacher education. The measurement of success of university ITE programs is already gathered through the Stage 2 accreditation process which relies on a five-year evaluation and reform process. These submissions are endorsed by a panel of experts including authority representatives, academics, teachers and interstate representatives. This rigorous process has seen exponential improvement since its introduction in 2016.

- **Public transparency:** *If made publicly available, are these performance measures sufficient to drive quality improvement to ITE?*

UniSQ is not aware of any evidence that making performance measures public is likely to lead to improvements in performance. If performance measure are appropriately crafted, they will be tailored to individual ITE program's missions and objectives and publishing the data without this context is unlikely to be helpful. They could however be an important component of a mission-based agreement underpinning performance funding at provider level.

- **Transition funding to support performance improvement:** *How could transition funding be used to set higher education providers on a path to improving the quality of their programs?*

Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE programs may diminish diversity of student profiles and negatively impact the diversity of the teaching profession, particularly in relation to equity groups. In contrast, a shift to transition funding based on a mission-based agreement at provider level provides scope to address a range of challenges in ITE education through different agreements with different ITE providers across Australia, and would also enable the funding to support strategies to address region-specific challenges.

- **Excellence pool for higher quality programs:** *How could a system of reward funding be best designed to support high performing ITE programs and encourage them to increase their enrolments? Are there any risks to such an approach and if so, how should they be addressed?*

The education profession needs diversity in its teaching profile, and to be better represent society through the workforce. Developing funding arrangements for cohorts of students that experience financial hardship would be a welcomed improvement. Being able to offer opportunities and aid the elimination of financial limitations would aid preservice teachers who often leave work for long periods of time to complete professional experiences.



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

- **System level agreements:** *Would establishing more comprehensive system level agreements between school sectors/systems and higher education providers address challenges in the school matching process and deliver more effective placements? How could these agreements complement current localised arrangements?*

In essence, professional experiences are the core of initial teacher education programs. Queensland has professional experience agreements in place with all education systems in the state that ensure a cohesive connection between schools and universities. These agreements are essential for regional universities where preservice teachers can undertake diverse experiences especially within regional and remote areas. UniSQ promotes these opportunities to preservice teachers and adds the employability strategy around experiencing work/life within a community, as a potential employment option.

- **Centres of excellence:** *Would encouraging centres of excellence, such as hub schools, support high-quality practical experience? What are the impediments to delivering these centres of excellence?*

New South Wales has employed the hub school model with varying success. This is a funded initiative and is dependent on the location of the hub. It is more likely to find centres of excellence within urban environments and yet regional and remote locations are the areas needing focus. One challenge with the centres of excellence model is the limited geographic reach of each centre/hub. Other models may more efficiently disseminate best practice (for example, refer to the lessons learned from the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program, see below).

- **National frameworks:** *Would higher education providers, schools and teachers benefit from more specific guidance in delivering practical experience? What guidance would be beneficial to address key barriers to high-quality practical experience?*
- **Student support during placements:** *What support for students would be beneficial to assist in managing their practical experience requirements?*

Practical experience is a significant component of accreditation with a dedicated program standard to identify and evidence placement processes, assessment procedures and connectivity with schools and supervising teachers. Greater incentives for teachers in schools would enhance the experience and potentially attract a greater range of teaching staff.

Students require ongoing support from academic staff while undertaking placements. In some universities this support is offered through university liaison officers. This is not however mandated and yet would better support students while they are engaging with the profession. UniSQ believes that improvements in these experiences largely relates to funding models including support of preservice teachers wishing to undertake regional and remote professional experiences. Costs to ITE providers levied by placement partners including state departments of education reduce the resources available to universities to support ITE programs, a situation exacerbated by increasing placement fees in the face of the reduction of total funding per ITE student that resulted from the Jobs Ready Graduate reforms..

Regional and rural placement experiences can be costly as a student may need to travel and be accommodated, normally at their own expenses and while not being able to undertake regular part-time work because of their temporary relocation. UniSQ would encourage any further negotiations around funding from appropriate government bodies to better equip our preservice teachers to be able to reasonably live and complete their professional experiences in regional and remote areas. This would also positively impact on the employability of hard-to-staff schools.



There may be lessons to be learned in how to improve student experiences on placement from other programs, such as the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) Program. The RHMT program aims to improve the recruitment and retention of medical, nursing, dental and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia. It does this by, among other things, supporting effective rural training placements for health students. A 2020 review of the RHMT Program found that, between 2016 and 2018, 30 per cent of Australian government-supported medical students spent a year or more at a Rural Clinical School and that nursing and allied health placements had grown from some 3,000 per annum in 2004 to more than 13,000 in 2018. The program is administered by the Commonwealth Department of Health and reflects approximately \$200 million per annum funding commitment from the Commonwealth. It has led to a thriving community of practice, the Australian Rural Health Education Network, where best practice in placement design and student support are shared. There is no corresponding scheme to support the development of a rural and remote teacher workforce, and no apparent process to translate the learnings from the RHMT program to how we support the development of ITE graduates through quality placement experiences.

- ***Integrating theory and practice:*** *How can practical experience be better integrated with the academic component of ITE programs to support ITE student learning and preparedness to teach?*

UniSQ ITE programs have an embedded approach to professional experience where the preservice teachers are equipped to undertake their practicum supported by relevant theoretical underpinnings designed to equip students in diverse learning environments. There is a strong connection with schools supported by paid liaison officers who work with both individual students and their assigned schools. This is an important quality assurance measurement that aids in transition of preservice teachers from theoretical to practical experience, and eventually into the profession.

- ***Roles of schools in supporting practical experience:*** *What incentives can be offered to schools to be more active participants in ITE placements?*

Schools need incentives either for individual teachers, or at a school level, and greater financial motivation to engage in practical placement experiences. Reducing the administrative burden, rewarding and supporting teachers to supervise students and investing in school-level support for placement support all need to be considered. These are canvassed in the Discussion Paper. In particular there is a need to invest in rural and regional schools so that they can provide the high-quality collaborative environment that supports quality placements.

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

- ***Better pathways for mid-career entrants:*** *How can Masters degrees be structured so that mid-career entrants can assume roles in the classroom within 12-18 months instead of two years? What changes to regulatory arrangements are needed to enable this?*

This Reform Area seeks to improve the completion of a two-year Initial Teacher Education Masters program and see preservice teachers in schools sooner through internship models. The opportunity for this fast-tracked approach already exists in Queensland. UniSQ is the only university in Queensland that accepts students through the agreements with the Queensland Department of Education *Trade to Teach* and *Turn to Teach* programs. These programs are both focussed on ITE mid-career entrants, however the *Turn to Teach* is the only one in the postgraduate space. These initiatives see mid-career preservice teachers able to undertake extensive professional experience through programs, such as Permission To Teach (PTT), to be in classrooms ahead of the completion of their degrees. PTT applications are generated by principals in schools



where they have exhausted all systemic possibilities to fill vacancies. They can recruit preservice teachers into the classroom, under strict guidelines and supervisory agreements. The preservice teacher is still required to complete all elements of their degree and be eligible for graduation. One obstacle is how to maintain the integrity of their programs if a preservice teacher is taken into a school and may need to complete courses out of sequence. Queensland has recently strengthened the requirements of prospective Permission to Teach candidates where Principals, QCT and ITE Providers need to offer insight into student suitability.

UniSQ encourage greater support for alternate pathways which better connect the university programs and schools needs as have been identified successfully in Queensland through *Turn to Teach*. The promotion of paid internships would attract more students who would be able to realistically balance their studies and life commitments, and focus on completing their qualification in a timely fashion.

UniSQ is also moving to a flexible academic calendar that allows fast-tracking of student progression so that a student will be able to complete our Master ITE program in under two years. As more institutions across the higher education sector in Australia move to more diverse ways of offering courses, such fast-track Masters programs will become more available to mid-career entrants.

- ***Building the evidence base:*** *Would a framework for assessing the success of mid-career programs assist in sharing lessons learned in designing mid-career programs?*

UniSQ offers several programs aimed at mid-career students. Engaging with longitudinal research would support initiatives in this field. There would be benefit in this being a national study targeted specifically at this cohort and we would welcome the opportunity to engage with such an initiative.

- ***Increasing flexibility:*** *Is their sufficient flexibility in providers delivery of ITE to cater to the circumstances of mid-career entrants?*

ITE providers are able to implement flexibility within the bounds of the AITSL accreditation requirements. Universities vary in their approaches to program delivery so that students have the option to select programs that are offered face-to-face, or online, or a combination of both. The increasing adoption of flexible academic calendars by universities also creates flexibility in how mid-career entrants progress through their programs (they are not bound to completing courses within a rigid 2-semester calendar).

Thank you for the opportunity to respond, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of this submission further.

Regards



Professor Glen Coleman

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs)

T: +61 7 4631 2528

E: DVCAcademicAffairs@usq.edu.au

