

Submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Secretariat

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

GPO Box 9880, Canberra, ACT 2601

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Dear Expert Panel,

The Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACCS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Review and provide recommendations to the Expert Panel about how to improve our capacity as a sector to attract and retain high quality, effective teachers.

Introduction

AACCS represents over a hundred schools and thousands of Australian families from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and church denominations. Our schools are in every state and territory across Australia, ranging from very small to large; urban to regional; rural and remote. Characterised as low-fee schools that operate from an authentic faith-based foundation, our schools operate autonomously and are accountable to their parent and school communities. AACCS have consulted with our member schools on their experiences with ITE and provided a summary of their feedback in response to the Review's Terms of Reference questions below.

PART A - Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession

1. How can we further encourage high performing and highly motivated school leavers to enter ITE and choose teaching as a career?

One of our member schools, St Philip's Christian College located in the Hunter Valley region of NSW, was challenged by this very question to develop their own alternative model of ITE to attract and

retain high quality trainee teachers¹. They commenced their Teaching School in 2018 with an initial cohort of nine students which has grown to 40 students enrolled across four different year levels in 2021. The Teaching School offers an alternate ‘apprentice’ and ‘sponsorship’ model of ITE where students are embedded in the life of the school for their entire educational journey and are paid a part-time Teacher Assistant wage. This combination of sponsored tuition, immediate employment and a future career pathway with an employer of choice drives up the quality of candidates at the point of selection. The potential of this teaching model has recently been recognised by the NSW State Government and was named a pilot project with \$2.9 million of funding allocated to advance its development in partnership with tertiary provider Alphacrucis College.²

AACS recommends the federal Government consider the St Philip’s Teaching School as a best practice example of ITE and explore opportunities to expand this model across both government and independent sectors in other states and territories.

2. What changes to admissions and degree requirements, including recognition of prior experience, would better attract and support suitable mid- and late-career professionals from other fields transition into the profession and become quality teachers?

There are a range of factors that contribute to the successful transition from mid- and late- career professionals from other fields. High performing professionals from other fields do not always make the most effective teachers when it comes to relating to students and their ability to make their subject area knowledge accessible to young people. Universities could improve their screening of prospective students, in a similar process to medical students, through interviews and a high level of recognition of prior experience working with young people. For example, through leading youth groups, coaching sports teams, and involvement in local clubs. The personal qualities and attributes of prospective students that cannot be measured by academic testing alone must have an equal weighting in the selection of all ITE students.

¹ See <https://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/foundation/our-schools/st-philips-teaching-school>

² See <https://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/foundation/news/st-philips-christian-college-teaching-school-instrumental-in-state-government-allocating-2-9-million-to-the-development-of-teaching-schools-across-nsw>

Students entering the St Philip's Teaching School go through an in-depth screening process prior to being accepted into the program. Students are selected based on a combination of ATAR or previous academic transcript, and an interview with school representatives and tertiary provider Alphacrucis College to assess suitability to the profession. The students also present a short lesson to a class prior to acceptance into the course. Due to the rigorous nature of the selection process, students who commence the course are generally convinced that the teaching profession is the path for them which translates into low drop-out rates throughout the course. Employing students as a Teaching Assistant throughout the course of the degree also makes the course a viable option for mid-career professionals transferring from another industry. Providing ITE students with a part-time wage while they study and contribute to the life of a school reduces the financial barrier which otherwise may have prevented a quality professional from making the switch into teaching.

AACS recommends:

- ***universities place a higher value on the skills and experience of prospective ITE students in relation to working with young people as part of their screening process.***
- ***consideration be given to reducing the financial impact of commencing ITE mid-career.***

3. How can we increase ITE completion rates so that quality ITE students graduate and pursue careers as quality teachers?

A positive and realistic school placement experience from the first year of ITE is key to ensuring that students are well suited and prepared for a career in teaching. The classroom is where ITE students learn the craft of teaching through observation, mentoring, quality feedback and ongoing support. We believe ITE students need more time in the classroom throughout their course and an improved connection between the theory of teaching, learnt at university, and the practice of teaching, learnt during school placements. A close partnership between the academics at university and the mentors in the school placement is key to ensuring this occurs. Often academics who are teaching ITE students at university have not been in a classroom setting themselves for many years which results in a significant disconnect and deficit in the preparation of ITE students for a career in teaching.

The feedback our schools have provided is that the shift away from practical teacher colleges to universities in the 1990s has not improved the quality or educational experience of ITE students. Many of the proven teaching techniques were lost when this shift occurred. Students now spend most of their time focusing on educational theory in the first few years of study and do not experience the practical skills of teaching in a classroom setting until later in their degree. As a result, many students are well into their coursework before they know whether they are fully committed to a career in teaching.

In contrast, an apprenticeship model of ITE enables students to discern early in their training whether they are well suited to the career choice of teaching. The Teaching School at St Philip's experiences a small number of students dropping out of the course in the first year, however, by their final years of study students are fully invested in their career choice, having been employed in the industry and are committed to completing their degree, resulting in a very low dropout rate.

AACS recommends the Government consider ways to improve partnerships between universities and schools to enhance the practical experience of ITE students and embed them in the life of a school through an 'apprenticeship' training model from the first year of their course.

4. What more can be done to address issues with workforce supply in some subject areas (particularly mathematics) and schools?

Our schools have reported increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining quality teaching staff, particularly experienced secondary teachers in regional areas. For example, secondary LOTE and science teachers are in short supply in South Australia while in the Northern Territory our schools struggle to recruit secondary English, Science and Maths teachers. The Government could consider financial incentives, such as scholarships and subsidised university courses to attract new students with these areas of specialist knowledge to fill identified gaps in the local teacher workforce. AACS also believes the apprenticeship model of teacher training could attract new ITE students to 'earn while they learn' in identified areas of need across both the government and independent school sectors.

AACS recommends the Government consider providing additional financial support, such as reduced HECS fees and other incentives to attract and retain high quality teachers, particularly in subject areas of identified need and regional schools.

5. How can we attract a more diverse cohort into ITE so that teachers better mirror the diversity in school students and society?

Scholarships could encourage more students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage into teaching along with mentoring and internship opportunities in schools. Schools report that ITE students from an ESL background often struggle with the academic demands of study and struggle to communicate and build relationships with staff and students while on school placements. We believe targeted mentoring and study support would help attract and retain a more diverse cohort into ITE.

PART B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

6. What more can we do to ensure that ITE curriculum is evidence based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices?

Student teachers need quality mentoring from teachers who are self-aware of their teaching practice and committed to continuous improvement based on evidence-based teaching practices. Identifying highly effective teachers to be mentors to ITE students and providing support with reduced teaching loads and professional development could entice more teachers to take on this additional responsibility. Mentor teachers also need encouragement and support as they play a vital role in the experience ITE students have during their school placement. A partnership approach between the university and the mentor teacher could improve the connection between what is being taught at the university and what is being delivered in the classroom. This would help address the disconnect that is experienced by ITE students between their course requirements and the expectations of schools during practical placements.

The New Zealand School of Education (NZGSE) is another intern model worth considering.³ This is a post-graduate intensive teaching program with two thirds of ITE student time spent in school classrooms compared to university classrooms. The NZGSE tutors are the mentors rather than classroom teachers and spend many hours observing students and providing rich feedback. Students do not pass their degree until mentors believe they are ready which may be in 12 months, two years or never.

AACS recommends greater professional learning be provided to mentor teachers to better support and train ITE students.

7. What more can ITE providers and employers do to ensure ITE students are getting the practical experience they need before they start their teaching careers?

The apprenticeship model of teacher training provides ITE students with more time in the classroom and better prepares them for a career in teaching when they graduate. Some pre-service teachers express their disappointment regarding the disconnect between what is covered in their education courses and the skills they need to be successful teachers in schools. University style academic subjects are best suited towards the final years of coursework once a student teacher has made it through their initial few years of practical training and is ready to pursue deeper understanding of theories and/or undertake further research based on their experience.

Improved partnering between schools and ITE providers, along with a rebalancing of ITE course requirements to have a greater emphasis on practical skills earlier in their coursework would go a long way to address these issues. St Philip's Christian College developed their Teaching School in response to concerns about the standard university model of ITE. They were motivated by a desire to attract and train prospective teachers into their school community in a way that supports them to graduate, confident and accomplished in their craft. Teachers who are well-versed not only in the theory of teaching but also the practice of teaching. Students are immersed in the classroom environment from

³ See: <https://www.nzgse.ac.nz/>

the outset of their course which provides them with exposure to the practicalities of life in a classroom and what teaching entails. The Teaching School is proving to be highly successful and a more attractive option than standard education degrees offered at universities with St Philip's experiencing a high level of demand from prospective students for their course.

Groves Christian College in Brisbane have developed a similar model and are in their third year of delivering a cadet teacher program within the school. Pre-service teachers are enrolled in various universities across the city to complete their studies but are attached to the school for the practical elements of their studies and are placed on an individually tailored employment contract. The experience of working within the same school on an ongoing basis provides them with valuable practical experience within a learning community where they are known and where they work with students in real life learning contexts.

AACS recommends ITE providers improve their partnership with schools and place a greater emphasis on practical requirements earlier in their university course.

8. How can Teaching Performance Assessment arrangements be strengthened to ensure graduate teachers are well-prepared for the classroom?

While an apprenticeship model of ITE is preferred to ensure graduates are well prepared for the classroom, we recognise that graduate teachers who have been trained through mainstream tertiary providers may need additional support in their first year of teaching. A reduced teaching load in the first year of teaching to enable more observation time along with quality mentoring and feedback. This would improve the classroom experience for graduates in the initial year of teaching where there is a steep learning curve and adjustment to the busy school environment. ITE tertiary providers could also explore opportunities to provide mentoring opportunities to graduate teachers into their first few years of teaching.

AACS recommends the Government consider alternate funding models to enable school Principals to provide a reduced teaching load for graduate teachers.

9. How can leading teachers, principals and schools play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students?

The current university model of ITE is not conducive to a positive relationship between schools and student teachers. Many principals and lead teachers are not deeply invested in the development of the student teacher who are only there on a short-term placement and may not be seen again. Another factor is that classroom teachers are not necessarily trained or equipped to effectively mentor and provide feedback to students. In comparison, a key benefit of the apprenticeship teacher training model is the school's direct investment in the education and development of ITE students through sponsorship and employment.

At Groves Christian College, cadets are placed on a part-time paid work contract. At St Philips Christian College, the school sponsors 50% of the clinical teaching training costs and provides at least one day of paid placement as a Teaching Assistant. By investing in the ITE students in this manner, schools take a keen interest in supporting the development of ITE students. Pre-service teachers accept their position into these programs with pride in the high level of confidence placed in them by the school. The school leadership team and teachers also place a high value on the ITE students because they are an important feature of the long-term journey of the school. Students enter the program with confidence in the knowledge that, if they impress, they are virtually guaranteed employment upon completion of their degree.

AACS recommends students are embedded in the life of a school throughout their course and mentoring programs be offered as professional learning hours for lead teachers taking on student teachers as mentors.

10. Can ITE providers play a stronger role in ongoing professional development and support of teachers?

We believe that ITE could play a significant role in the ongoing professional development and support of teachers. The previous South Australian teachers' college Bachelor of Education programs (now

UniSA) used to hold 'lab school' where live primary and secondary student classes were taught on campus by lecturers for observation by ITE students. This proved to be a highly valuable experience. It also provided an exciting opportunity for visiting school students to learn about university life and consider teaching as a career pathway.

As previously mentioned, providing professional learning courses for mentor teachers on effective feedback and observation practice would improve the experience of ITE students on placement and their preparation for the classroom. There could also be an ongoing role for ITE providers to support their graduate teachers in their first year of teaching.

AACS recommends ITE providers partner with local schools to develop a positive relationship of ongoing professional development of teachers which directly feeds into the ITE programs on offer.

Conclusion

AACS agree that quality teaching has a lifelong influence on student outcomes and believe that alternate models of ITE could play an integral role in attracting and training high quality candidates to secure our future teacher workforce. We encourage the Expert Panel to investigate the models of ITE our member schools have established and would be happy to elaborate further on any of the points outlined above.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this review.

Kind regards



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