Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice,

Queensland University of Technology

Response to the Expert Panel on the

Quality Initial Teacher Education Discussion Paper

15 July 2021

The Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Expert Panel on the Quality Initial Teacher Education Discussion Paper. The submission provides feedback on some of the specific questions posed in the paper. However, before responding to the questions, the Faculty would like to make some general observations.

Firstly, while the Faculty acknowledges the Minister's intention 'to launch a review looking at the next evolution of reforms to initial teacher education' it is worth noting that the most recent review and resulting significant reforms from the 2014 TEMAG Review have not yet had an opportunity to be fully bedded down, and there may be some merit to allow sufficient time for this to occur before proceeding on further major reform.

It is also important, when proposing reforms to the sector, to take a whole system approach by looking at all the components that relate to initial teacher education including not only the quality of teaching and teachers, but also teacher employment, and the preparation and continuing professional development of teachers.

Secondly, both the TEMAG reforms and those at a state and national level, previously, have raised concerns regarding quality in relation to the use of accelerated programs to attract mid-career professionals into teaching, as well as challenges with retention. The Teach for Australia Program Evaluation Report (Dandolo Partners, May 2017) noted that 'From the third year after completing their placement the total population teaching remains steady just below 50%, with around 30% in schools below the national median (based on Victorian payroll data, p. 3).' It also found that:

> 'Principals who do not intend to hire Associates again primarily cite concerns about retention, and wanting greater return on the investment they make in Associate training and development, given their length of service in schools.
>
> Principals who are enthusiastic about the TFA program also expressed strong interest in greater retention.
>
> A range of stakeholders reported that other teachers are frustrated by Associate retention, and see this as demonstrating a lack of genuine commitment' (p 16).

If this pathway is pursued, it will be important to resolve these issues to optimise retention as well as determine whether this is pursued across the board or whether to align placements based on areas of

need, either discipline-specific or regional locations, and that this needs to be undertaken in partnership with employers in the sector.

We acknowledge that there are teacher shortages, however, in order to address this effectively, the sector needs to work together to not only understand, but be in a position to predict, shortages (both discipline and location), and therefore be able to provide sound advice to potential teachers (whether school leavers or mature age students) on future career direction.

The focus on academic achievement in school at the point of entry to ITE, motivated by the creditable desire to encourage more high achieving students to pursue a career in teaching, must nevertheless be balanced by consideration of other non-academic indicators that support quality teaching, and must not present a further barrier to students entering with diverse education backgrounds. If this somewhat reductive bar is set too high, then there is a risk of excluding individuals able to make a positive contribution. This is an important consideration, given that one of the critical roles of universities is to support students to reach their true potential.

There is also a need to ensure multiple pathways into the profession. To do this, we need to build on learnings from successful targeted initiatives that seek to grow the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and those from low-income backgrounds in teacher education programs. At QUT, we achieve this through the pathway from the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) into the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood), which enables wider entry into the profession, recognising and leveraging professional experience.

Thirdly, developing, supporting and sustaining a high-quality teaching workforce is a shared responsibility, spanning the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments, school sectors and employers, professional organisations, unions and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). To have a positive impact, there is a need to think holistically about the education workforce ecosystem, and to consider factors and strategies that influence the attraction and retention of highly skilled teachers within this context. Evidence suggests that factors such as professional recognition (i.e. value and standing within the community), professional remuneration, and professional autonomy have significant influence on attraction and retention of the education workforce. Linked to this is the visibility of multiple career pathways that offer teachers new intellectual challenge and reward.

The Finnish experience is an excellent example where teachers are so highly valued that the competition for places is fierce and only a small percentage of those applying are accepted. Finland is also near the top of the PISA rankings, and rather than being strictly centrally controlled, allows more autonomy by putting more trust in educators at the local level. HEIs and ITE programs have a role to play in this context but there is a need for a shared approach to address these broader and interrelated workforce challenges.

Fourthly, the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration recognises the critical role that high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) plays in meeting the vision for a "world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face" (p. 3). As a longstanding provider of specialist early childhood teacher education programs, preparing teachers to work with children birth to 8 years, QUT questions the exclusive focus on school education of the present review, and the exclusion of early childhood teachers who choose to teach in early education contexts prior to school

(e.g. preschool, kindergarten, long day care centres). This seems shortsighted, recognising that these are shared challenges across the education continuum.

Finally, the current exercise presents an excellent opportunity for the Commonwealth to provide some financial support to encourage and support what universities and states are already doing together in ITE and PDL. These initiatives are already producing early successes that would be greatly enhanced with the support of further resources. To mix incommensurable metaphors, the Commonwealth will see a much better return from picking the low-hanging fruit than from attempting to reinvent the wheel.

In terms of some of the specific questions raised in the Discussion Paper, the Faculty would offer the following feedback.

PART B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

<u>Standards</u>

Are ITE programs preparing graduates for teaching diverse student cohorts, including through cultural competency and inclusive education? 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? (TOR 6)

Accreditation bodies in jurisdictions across Australia require all ITE programs to prepare graduates to work effectively with diverse learners, but research suggests that these same programs lack the space to address all the dimensions of this challenge.

Responding appropriately to the diversity of a student population requires teachers to have a robust understanding of three interrelated bodies of knowledge: teaching about, catering to, and teaching for diversity (see Rowan et al., 2021; ARC DP180100160). Teaching *about* diversity involves providing future teachers with information about the common needs and challenges of particular groups of learners (such as patterns of success or failure that have been linked to groups such as migrants, or children from low socio-economic backgrounds). Teaching *to* diversity refers to strategies for teaching these particular groups of learners: working with the status quo. Teaching *for* diversity, however, recognises that educators need to create genuinely equitable environments that enable *all* students to achieve excellent outcomes. Developing the sophisticated skillset to teach for diversity takes time and deliberate effort. Teacher educators need to be empowered to ensure that future teachers are genuinely classroom ready, that is, able to understand the complexity of a social and geographical context and make decisions that will impact positively on students in the short and long term (Ryan et al., 2020; ARC DP180100160). This requires intentional planning to enable preservice teachers to use evaluative and reliable knowledge processes about diversity when developing cycles of evidence-based action (Lunn et al., 2021 forthcoming; ARC DP180100160).

We would therefore recommend that all teacher education programs should include courses that allow future teachers the space to understand what it means to teach about, cater to, and teach for diversity.

Teaching Performance Assessments

It is worth noting that, when the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) was introduced, assessors of the TPA acknowledged that it made them reflect more deeply on their own teaching and how they could better prepare pre-service teachers (PSTs) for culturally inclusive classrooms. At QUT, preparing PSTs for the diverse social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a priority. We have noticed over time, graduates increasing in confidence in planning and implementing the teaching and learning cycle for the diverse learners in their classroom.

What are the benefits and costs of the number of TPAs in operation?

There are a number of benefits of TPAs including:

- enabling ITE providers to develop their own TPA, and ensuring that the key components of the TPA are mapped and embedded in units across ITE programs;
- bringing together ITE providers, within the same consortia, to collaborate and engage in professional conversations regarding expectations of graduate standards, the classroom readiness of graduate teachers, the quality of teacher education programs and their assessment practices; and
- enabling ITE providers to develop a TPA that takes into consideration their local context and understanding of the diverse professional experience placements pre-service teachers experience.

The main financial costs associated with TPAs that are absorbed by universities include considerable staff time and resources (academic, sessional and professional staff) as well as administrative support. It is QUT's experience that the cost of running TPAs can exceed $200,000 per annum. This estimate does not include the initial (and substantial) investment of time and resources involved in the development phase (only two TPA consortia (the AfGt and GTPA) received initial funding to design their TPAs). This financial cost also omits the domain knowledge burden upon supervisors and mentor teachers, who must be knowledgeable of a range of different TPAs they could be supervising.

How could the TPA endorsement process be improved?

There are substantial financial and labour costs associated with designing and implementing a TPA to ensure the reliability and validity of the TPA tool and its assessment process (including ongoing assessor and refresher training, evidence of between panel and cross-institution moderation, examining the correlation of the TPA with other measures, evidence from supervising teachers and schools about the extent to which the TPA assesses specified constructs, re-evaluating the TPA cut score etc). The sustainability of the TPA is in jeopardy due to the large, on-going costs to ITE providers. It also requires an ongoing commitment by a designated research team to evaluate the reliability and validity of the TPA tool and its impact on preparing graduates for the classroom.

Are the current arrangements leading to quality outcomes?

In collaboration with our partnering universities, QUT has worked to refine our TPA tool and its moderation processes to uphold the rigour of the assessment tool to ensure that it clearly differentiates between graduates that meet or do not meet the Graduate Teacher Standards.

Professional Experience

Do the current professional experience arrangements support the preparation of ITE students for the classroom and school environment?

While the current arrangements largely support the preparation of ITE students, there is scope for funding to support the development of partnerships between universities and educational sites that would address the theory/practice divide by focusing on developing a strategy to form large scale, sustainable university-school-system partnerships. We would also support a consistent final assessment report of pre-service teachers across all ITE providers in Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission and the Faculty is happy to provide further clarification to the Expert Panel if required.

References

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