

# Australia-wide accreditation of programs for the professional preparation of teachers

A consultation paper



Teaching Australia

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Teaching Australia was established as the national body for the teaching profession with funding provided by the Australian Government under the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme.

The views expressed herein are those of the Board of Teaching Australia.

# Purpose of this consultation paper

1. Teaching Australia is currently working to establish an Australia-wide system for accrediting teacher preparation programs. Accreditation is important because it provides the basis for public confidence in graduating teachers. A consistent, transparent, Australia-wide system for accrediting pre-service preparation programs will encourage a comparable level of skill attainment for all commencing teachers. It will also give members of the profession the opportunity to be involved in the preparation process and so closely guide the skills new teachers require to begin their professional careers.
2. At the core of a profession is the quality of the preparation of those entering it. Most other professions in Australia have responsibility for national accreditation of programs preparing entrants. As the body with responsibility for supporting and advancing the quality of teaching and school leadership, and of strengthening the standing of the profession, Teaching Australia, in collaboration with universities and state and federal stakeholders, is well positioned to develop such a framework. A national approach to accreditation has the potential to build stronger partnerships between higher education institutions, schools and the profession as a whole, thus strengthening the quality of teacher education in Australia.
3. As a first step in this process Teaching Australia commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to undertake a review of national and international trends and practices in teacher education accreditation. The report<sup>1</sup> of this review has informed the development of this consultation document.
4. To establish an Australia-wide system of accreditation of teacher preparation programs in universities and other higher education institutions, Teaching Australia will consult with professional associations and key stakeholders on the development of a national, voluntary, profession-driven accreditation process. This consultation will inform the design of the system of accreditation.
5. The purpose of this consultation paper is to invite feedback on the major policy issues associated with the development of Australia-wide accreditation. The paper sets out a series of propositions as a means of focusing attention on the central elements of the accreditation system. Teaching Australia will work with higher education institutions, employers, state and federal bodies and the profession over the next six months on the core elements, before moving to develop detailed arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> Ingvarson, L., Elliott, A., Kleinhenz, E. and McKenzie, P. (2006). *Teacher Education Accreditation: A Review of National and International Trends and Practices*. Teaching Australia: Canberra. (Available at <http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au>)

## Accreditation of courses and registration of graduates

6. The ACER report refers to accreditation as ‘an endorsement by an independent external agency that a professional preparation course meets the needs of a particular profession; that the course is able to produce graduates who reach standards for entry to the profession, and are therefore competent to begin practice. Accreditation is a key mechanism for assuring the quality of preparation courses in the professions<sup>2</sup>. The public benefit is served through the capacity of accreditation to assure quality outcomes and relevance of courses to professional practice, and to support continuous improvement.
7. Typically in the professions, accreditation of courses precedes professional registration of successful graduates, in that accreditation is an endorsement that a program produces graduates who can meet provisional registration standards and may begin professional practice. The setting of standards for the registration of new entrants to a profession is, in turn, a mechanism whereby the profession acts in the interests of the public by shaping accreditation standards and practice based on research and best practice. In this document registration is a process which recognises individuals as being ready to practise, whilst accreditation applies to the quality of the preparation courses themselves.

## Existing arrangements for quality assurance within higher education

8. All Australian universities have the legislated authority to accredit their own academic programs under their own Acts of Parliament. They have primary responsibility for their academic standards and the quality assurance processes underpinning them. They submit annual quality assurance and improvement plans to the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training.
9. In addition to these internal quality processes, there are external reporting requirements. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), a partnership between the Australian government, state and territory governments and the higher education sector, undertakes national quality assurance in Australia’s higher education system. AUQA’s core task is to carry out quality audits of Australian universities, other self-accrediting institutions and accrediting agencies.
10. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has introduced National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes as a further quality assurance mechanism. The Protocols aim to protect the standing of Australian higher education nationally and internationally by assuring students and the community that higher education institutions in Australia have met identified criteria and are subject to appropriate government regulation.

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<sup>2</sup> Ingvarson, L., Elliott, A., Kleinhenz, E. and McKenzie, P. (2006). *Teacher Education Accreditation: A Review of National and International Trends and Practices*. Teaching Australia: Canberra. (Available at <http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au>)

## Existing arrangements for accreditation of professional preparation programs

11. There are no Australia-wide requirements for the accreditation of teacher preparation programs. Teaching is one of the last professions in Australia not to have national accreditation. State and territory teacher registration and accreditation authorities require graduates to meet minimum standards for registration as a teacher. Their arrangements for the accreditation of teacher education courses are however at widely differing stages of development. Since the mid 1960s there have been calls for the introduction of national pre-service teacher education course accreditation.
12. Currently, just three states have legislation requiring formal approval or accreditation of teacher preparation programs. The New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland bodies have a direct, legislated accreditation function. In other states the relevant body has an influence over pre-service programs because graduates need to satisfy the requirements to be registered in those states. Different state-based systems can create difficulties for universities preparing graduates to practise in different jurisdictions.
13. Other professions have already instituted national approaches for the accreditation of preparation programs for practice. Engineering, medicine and accounting have established bodies to oversight the professional accreditation of pre-service courses. Engineers Australia accredits only engineering programs, that is they do not accredit universities or engineering schools. Medical schools and courses are accredited by the Australian Medical Council, while the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia jointly accredit accounting education courses delivered in tertiary institutions.

## The benefits of Australia-wide accreditation

14. Significant benefits will accrue to the community, the profession, students and universities from an Australia-wide approach to the accreditation of teacher preparation programs.

### Assuring consistently high quality

15. An Australia-wide approach to professional accreditation will assure the general public that a consistently high quality of professional preparation for new teachers is being achieved, irrespective of state or institution. It will provide confidence in the quality of programs and the preparation of graduates for the profession, employing bodies and the wider public.

### Sharing evidence on successful practice

16. An Australia-wide approach to accreditation will provide new opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas and sharing successful practice among education faculties and teacher educators. In turn, this closer collaboration will allow for improvements to be identified and implemented. A national approach offers a greater capacity to design programs that meet a wide range of professional, institutional and employer needs. Importantly, a national system based on agreed measures of quality will enable universities, through their academic boards, to benchmark their teacher preparation courses against national standards.

## **Strengthening the profession through partnerships**

17. While there are many factors that influence the quality of teaching, initial professional preparation is the foundation on which the profession is built. Accreditation is an important mechanism for engaging members of the profession in decisions about the standards expected of those entering their profession, as well as standards expected of preparation courses.
18. A profession-wide accreditation system will provide a sound basis for strengthening and sustaining partnerships between universities, employers and the profession.

## **Positioning Australian teachers in a global education market**

19. It is important that Australian universities offer professional preparation courses leading to nationally and internationally recognised qualifications. Teachers themselves benefit from professional mobility. An Australia-wide approach will enable graduate qualifications to be recognised throughout Australia and be marketed internationally. It will create a basis for the establishment of international mutual recognition arrangements.

## **Reducing duplication**

20. An Australia-wide accreditation system will reduce duplication of effort. Those universities that cross state boundaries need to seek course approval in several states. Most universities need graduates from their programs to be eligible for registration in more than one jurisdiction and overseas, without having to undergo multiple accreditation processes. A single process of accreditation will reduce the overall resources that universities and state and territory agencies have to allocate to accreditation procedures.

## **Matching needs and resources**

21. The quality of a teacher preparation program is critically dependent on the level of resources available and the way they are allocated. Current funding models for teacher education are generally seen as inadequate. An Australia-wide profession-based accreditation system will enable requirements to be identified across the country and matched with resources. Such resource matching will also allow for the necessary research and development to create a system that meets the fundamental conditions of objective assessment.

# Developing an Australian accreditation framework: issues and processes

22. Prior to developing detailed arrangements, Teaching Australia is seeking discussion and feedback on the fundamental elements of an accreditation system. These are presented in the following series of propositions.

23. Once the shape of the system is broadly agreed, it will be possible to then develop detailed arrangements, in collaboration with the profession, universities and registration and accreditation authorities.

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## Proposition 1

The accreditation process will be based on a balanced consideration of the standards expected of graduates, the course content and course delivery.

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24. Traditionally, accreditation systems have tended to focus on course inputs - course and subject outlines, assessment and staffing. Current accreditation processes place a greater emphasis on the outcomes of programs and their capacity to produce graduates ready to embark successfully on their teaching career.

25. The accreditation system must consider a balance of outcomes, content and delivery, and whether the inputs to the program, the program methodology and the assessment mechanisms are sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes. Developing two broad types of accreditation standards—program standards for courses and professional standards for graduates—will provide a sound basis for accreditation and will provide guidance and support for program developers.

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## Proposition 2

An Australia-wide accreditation framework will define the standards expected of graduates.

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26. One of the central tasks for an accreditation body is to develop standards that are valid indicators of effective courses of preparation. These include the professional standards expected of graduates, so that they '...know and demonstrate the content, pedagogical and professional knowledge, skills and disposition necessary to help all students learn.'<sup>3</sup> The extent to which the accreditation system is useful for improvement and the extent to which it gains respect and credibility are critically dependent on the relevance and validity of these standards and the rigour of the assessment process.

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<sup>3</sup> National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). (2006). *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education*. NCATE: Washington DC.

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### **Proposition 3**

Accreditation standards will build on existing acceptable practices and frameworks, in collaboration with state and territory teacher registration and accreditation authorities.

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27. Most of the state and territory teacher registration and accreditation bodies have legislated responsibilities for the approval of teacher education programs, related to assessing suitability of graduates for registration in that state or territory.

28. Teaching Australia will work closely with regulatory authorities in developing an Australia-wide accreditation system. It will take as its starting point the National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching as agreed by Commonwealth and State Ministers and accreditation processes already in place or being developed. Building on these processes will allow national accreditation standards to draw on both graduate standards and accreditation arrangements already in place or being developed.

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### **Proposition 4**

An Australia-wide system will accredit programs at different levels.

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29. One option is to grant accreditation at just one level, so that a course is either accredited or not accredited. Another option is to recognise the quality of programs by granting accreditation at different levels. This could be part of the decision to grant accreditation, or it could be open to institutions to seek accreditation at a higher level.

30. The main purpose of profession-led national accreditation is the assurance of consistently high teaching quality and continuous improvement. Teaching Australia is proposing the development of levels of accreditation, based on criteria yet to be established, that indicate the extent to which a program meets the accreditation standards.

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### **Proposition 5**

The national system will take account of the requirements of specific stages of schooling.

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31. There is a basic issue as to whether accreditation should be generic, or based on specialised areas of teaching or stages of schooling (such as early childhood, primary, middle years, secondary). Specialised accreditation will provide an opportunity for assuring the public and the profession that teachers have achieved the required knowledge and skills relevant to that stage of schooling (such as the development of literacy and numeracy in early childhood and primary). While this will add complexity to the development of professional standards for graduating teachers, Teaching Australia sees public benefit in taking account of the requirements of specific stages of schooling.

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## **Proposition 6**

**Accreditation will assess the effectiveness of school experience arrangements and of the partnerships between universities, schools and the profession.**

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32. One of the most critical components of the professional preparation of teachers is the professional learning that occurs during the school experience or practicum components of courses. Student teachers and teachers themselves universally identify these components as being central to the success or failure of their preparation for teaching.

33. High quality school experience components of preparation programs require universities and schools to work in partnership so that prospective teachers receive support and supervision from excellent practitioners who understand and demonstrate best practice in both teaching and mentoring. The accreditation system will assess the quality of the partnership and encourage higher education institutions and schools to develop innovative and productive relationships.

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## **Proposition 7**

**Judgements about programs will be made by expert panels. Membership will include teachers and principals, employers, teacher registration and accreditation authorities and teacher educators.**

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34. The assessment of courses by panels consisting of members of the profession and others knowledgeable about the profession provides opportunities for the engagement of the profession itself in determining entry, and applying the standards necessary for becoming a teacher. By establishing expert panels, the system will provide opportunities for the national cross-fertilisation of ideas about the development and delivery of teacher preparation programs, the achievement of national and international benchmarks, and the features of successful programs.

35. Members of national accreditation panels will require training to achieve consistent decision making and reporting and valid and reliable accreditation processes. The accrediting body will rely on the advice of panels, and must have confidence in the rigour of the advice.

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## **Proposition 8**

**Accreditation will be for a maximum of five to six years.**

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36. Accreditation for a specified period recognises the need for programs to change in order to remain relevant and respond to changing needs.

37. The period of currency of accreditation varies in other places and other professions. In some instances, it is for the length of the program for a cohort (for example, four years for a four-year course). In the majority of instances, however, accreditation is reviewed every five or six years. In reality, few teacher preparation programs continue without major changes for longer than six years, and it is likely that some will undergo a review of their accreditation because of major program changes after shorter periods.

38. The period for which programs are accredited may vary, for example, depending on the level at which accreditation has been granted.

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**Proposition 9**

An Accreditation Council, responsible to Teaching Australia, will have oversight of Australia-wide accreditation.

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39. An Accreditation Council will be established to take responsibility for the accreditation system. This arrangement is paralleled in a number of other professions.

40. A Director of Teaching Australia will chair the Council. Organisations with strong claims for membership include professional associations, teacher educators, registration and accreditation authorities, employers and unions. The Board of Teaching Australia will determine the Council's mission and terms of reference, its composition and membership, the processes for appointment to the Council and arrangements for reporting to the Board.

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**Proposition 10**

Resourcing will recognise the public benefits of Australia-wide accreditation.

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41. An effective accreditation system provides a major public benefit. As an effective accreditation system can be both complex and costly to administer, costs must be kept within reasonable bounds and be commensurate with benefits.

42. The resourcing of the system must reflect the benefit to the community flowing from an accreditation system focused on high quality teacher preparation. Given the importance of national accreditation of programs of teacher preparation and its public benefit, the major cost should be borne by government.

## Where to from here?

43. Individual organisations in each state and territory will be invited to discuss these proposals with Teaching Australia over the next few months. Following those discussions, forums of interested groups and individuals will be organised in each state and territory in the first half of 2007. This will give an opportunity to bring different perspectives to the debate and will encourage dialogue and the exchange of views.

44. Individuals and organisations may wish to respond in writing to the propositions. Submissions would be appreciated by end March 2007 and should be sent to:

**Teaching Australia**  
**5 Liversidge Street**  
**Acton ACT 0200**

or emailed to:

**accredit@teachingaustralia.edu.au**

Specific questions can be addressed to **Graeme Hall**, telephone **02 6125 7649**

45. This consultation will inform the development of policies and procedures for the national accreditation system.

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