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The changing face of Initial Teacher Education must still have quality teaching at its core

A rapid rise in online enrolments for initial teacher education (ITE) courses in Australia is outstripping the average growth for all (non-ITE) online tertiary courses by a staggering six-to-one.

In 2007, there were 9,267 Australians studying online – or off-campus - to be a teacher; climbing to 22,100 by 2016. This means the uptake of online ITE has more than doubled, with one-in-four of the country's 87,134 student teachers now choosing online ITE courses.

The rapid rise and other key insights are presented in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) new Spotlight report '*The rise of online initial teacher education: what do we know?*' launched today.

AITSL Chief Executive Officer Lisa Rodgers said while the mini-boom in online ITE is bringing higher education to more aspiring teachers, they must be classroom ready when they graduate.

"No matter where a student completes an ITE course in Australia, the number one focus needs to remain on a student's practice, skills and knowledge so that the highest quality graduates are entering the profession, ready to teach from day one," Ms Rodgers said.

"More people living in regional or remote locations - and those who have to juggle becoming a teacher with work or family commitments - are taking the opportunity to study online ITE. It is important to remember though that like all ITE courses, 'online only' ITE courses also have a mandatory practical teaching component that physically places student teachers in classrooms to teach school students.

"These new teachers are often entering later in life via non-traditional pathways outside the cities, with the potential to further diversify the teaching workforce and mitigate teacher shortages, particularly in regions typically difficult to staff.

"Our research also shows the typical online ITE student is female, older than 25, has children, works full-time, studies part-time, and lives in a regional or outer-metropolitan area.

"Some of the data we're sharing could also help accredited ITE providers see the bigger patterns, opportunities and challenges presented by a growing, national cohort of online student teachers.

"For instance, we've identified approximately 30 per cent of student teachers studying online are enrolled with an interstate provider not in their home state. Giving them the access and support for classroom placements in their home state or territory is important and we know many providers are focused on using technology and more traditional measures to do just that."

The report found student engagement in online learning, and supporting students via distance and online pedagogy, are challenges requiring further investigation and research.

While there has been a rapid rise in online ITE from 2007 to 2016, on-campus ITE enrolment figures have remained relatively stable, our focus is on the skills of graduates so that all

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student teachers, regardless of their learning method, are supported and equipped to be 'classroom ready'.

The march of technology into virtually all industries presents opportunities and challenges for all sectors. AITSL believes sharing new evidence about the uptake of online ITE courses can help providers and decision makers continue meeting the needs of Australia's aspiring teachers.

We know the quality of teaching has the biggest impact on student learning. We continue to develop and advance teaching policies and practices aligned with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* that directly impact student learning.

AITSL thanks the ITE providers of Australia that participated in the research and contributed significantly to the report. Go to <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlight> to find the report.

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Notes for Editors - *The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides national leadership for the Australian, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. AITSL is funded by the Australian Government.*