

Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia

Guideline: Primary Specialisation (Program Standard 4.4)

Program Standard 4.4

In addition to study in each of the learning areas of the primary school curriculum sufficient to equip teachers to teach across the years of primary schooling, programs provide all primary graduates with a subject specialisation through:

- a) clearly defined pathways into and/or within a program that lead to specialisations, that are in demand, with a focus on subject/curriculum areas
- b) assessment within the program requiring graduates to demonstrate expert content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and highly effective classroom teaching in their area of specialisation
- c) publishing the specialisations available, and numbers of graduates per specialisation through their annual reports.

From the *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures*

This guideline provides further details regarding Program Standard 4.4 and should be considered binding for accreditation panels.

Policy intent

The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) noted the declining engagement and participation of students in maths and science, as well as the lack of confidence that teachers have in these areas. Poor engagement with maths and science in the early years of formal education was identified as a critical link in the chain of students completing school with skills and knowledge in these areas and graduates being qualified to teach maths and science.

TEMAG recommended that:

Higher education providers equip all primary pre-service teachers with at least one subject specialisation, prioritising science, mathematics or a language. Providers publish specialisations available and numbers of graduates from these programs (TEMAG Report p22).

The Australian Government response to TEMAG stated that:

Primary teachers with a subject specialisation will complement the teachers they work with by sharing their expertise and skills. This does not mean primary teachers will teach only in their area of specialisation, but rather that their area of expertise will be available within the school to assist other teachers with the knowledge and expertise to teach the subject effectively (Australian Government response p8).

The approach to primary specialisation reflected in the Standards and Procedures that has been agreed by Education Council is that primary graduates will be prepared to teach in each of the learning areas of the primary school curriculum, and *in addition*, will undertake a specialisation in one learning area of the primary school curriculum¹. Thus primary graduates of initial teacher education programs will be generalist primary teachers, with a deep focus in a particular learning area.

A note regarding nomenclature

The model required by Program Standard 4.4 will result in graduates who are **generalist primary teachers with a specialisation**.

It is important that these graduates are identified as distinct from **specialist teachers** who fulfil specialist roles in schools such as librarian or health/physical education teacher. Program Standard 4.3 covers specialist teachers.

Fields of specialisation

The Program Standard requires a specialisation “with a focus on subject/curriculum areas”. For the purpose of primary specialisation, a subject/curriculum area is defined as a learning area within the primary curriculum.

Providers may argue the case to the accreditation panel and regulatory authority for a specialisation that ties a learning area to a particular cohort of students, for example, an English/literacy specialisation with a focus on Aboriginal education. The rationale for such an approach should be clearly linked to the overall program rationale (which should be articulated in relation to Program Standard 2).

Specialised methods of teaching, for example the Montessori method, do not fit the definition of a learning area within the primary curriculum.

Employer demand should be considered by providers in selecting learning areas to offer as primary specialisations. Employers, at the jurisdiction, sector or local level may advise priority learning areas for primary specialisation. Evidence of how providers have consulted with employers and how these priorities have been taken into account in the suite of primary specialisations offered should form part of the application for accreditation considered by panels.

English/literacy and maths/numeracy have been identified by the Australian Government as national priority learning areas for primary specialisation. It is likely that other national and/or jurisdictional priorities will emerge over time in response to demand and/or supply issues.

Capabilities of a graduate teacher with a specialisation

As required by Program Standard 4.2 all primary graduates are required to study each of the learning areas of the primary school curriculum. In terms of the appropriate level of skills and knowledge expected of graduates, all pre-service teachers must attain the graduate career stage of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (APST) in order to graduate and qualify for provisional teacher registration.

¹ Primary curriculum refers to the primary elements of the Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum or alternative curriculum frameworks that have been assessed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) as meeting the requirements of the Australian Curriculum or any curriculum authorised by jurisdictional authorities.

Primary specialisation requires that graduates have developed additional depth of understanding in one primary learning area, in terms of the three different domains of skills and knowledge that comprise a primary specialisation:

1. Expert content knowledge
2. Pedagogical content knowledge
3. Highly effective classroom teaching in their area of specialisation

Assessment of primary specialisation

The program should be structured so that assessment against all three domains identified in the program standard occurs for each student in their learning area of primary specialisation.

Program requirements

Primary specialisation is a program requirement. Accreditation applications must provide evidence of the program's approach and once accredited, providers are responsible for implementing a primary specialisation for each graduate. Program Standard 4.4 applies to any initial teacher education program that prepares graduates to be primary teachers, including Early Childhood/ Primary programs, Middle Years programs and Primary/ Secondary programs.

The Standards and Procedures are outcomes focussed wherever possible. Flexibility, diversity and innovation are key principles that underpin the accreditation of initial teacher education programs. As such, the primary specialisation Program Standard deliberately does not specify the model that programs use to deliver primary specialisations. The requirements specified by the Program Standard are for evidence of:

- pathways into or within the program that lead to specialisation
- assessment of the specialisation within the program, requiring pre service teachers to demonstrate:
 - expert content knowledge
 - pedagogical content knowledge
 - highly effective classroom teaching of the specialisation

These requirements recognise the diversity of ways that initial teacher education programs are structured across Australia. The onus is on the provider to demonstrate how their chosen primary specialisation pathway meets the Program Standard.

Implementation and timing

Primary specialisation represents a significant reform to the way that primary teachers are prepared. If the reform is to be fully realised, change to the structure and/or content of many initial teacher education programs may be required.

To ensure robust and meaningful implementation of the reform, implementation of the Program Standard is required for commencing students no later than 2019.

Providers are required to submit an initial strategy for primary specialisation in their transition plans, with further confirmation of their strategy submitted to regulatory authorities by end 2017.

Providers are encouraged to implement primary specialisation as early as possible. Information about available primary specialisations will be highlighted on the AITSL website from 2017.

Reporting and accountability

Providers are required to publish specialisations available on their websites and to report numbers of commencing, enrolled and completing graduates per specialisation through annual reporting. The AITSL Initial Teacher Education Data Report will include this information as it becomes available.