


Statement of response

**Teacher Education Ministerial
Advisory Group – Issues Paper**



 This statement provides a response to the Teacher Education Ministerial Group (TEMAG) Issues Paper. The statement highlights key areas that are of interest for the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). It proposes ways forward in the light of both the characteristics of initial teacher education in high performing systems and the current state of initial teacher education in Australia.

1. Characteristics of initial teacher education programs in high performing systems¹

Evidence from high performing systems suggests that high quality initial teacher education is an important component of an effective approach to improving teacher quality. Three significant characteristics of initial teacher education identified in high performing systems include:

1.1 Rigorous selection into initial teacher education

- Programs are aimed at attracting high calibre candidates.
- Candidates are assessed on three criteria: academic qualifications, teaching ability, and disposition to be a teacher.

1.2 Effective graduate outcomes

- Rigorous evaluation of teacher education courses takes place against specified criteria.
- Programs are focused on strong subject content, knowledge and pedagogical expertise, and classroom management techniques for the 21st Century.
- Graduate capabilities are rigorously assessed within the course and after graduation.

1.3 Integration of theory and practice

- Programs have strong components of theory and practice, with high quality school placements.
- Programs prepare student teachers to continue to seek development opportunities throughout their career as part of ongoing professional learning.
- Mentoring programs are in place during and after the initial teacher education program.
- Strong links exist between theory and practice including constant feedback between the initial teacher education providers, which gives the theoretical foundation, the schools, which provide the practical experience, and the employer.

¹ Jensen, B., Hunter, A., Sonnemann, J., and Burns, T. 2012, *Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia*, Grattan Institute.

2. Initial teacher education in Australia

The current system of national accreditation through the implementation of *The Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures* (Accreditation Standards) and the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards) represents an important step forward in assuring the quality of initial teacher education in Australia. Accreditation of programs continues to be carried out by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities. For the first time in Australia this accreditation takes place under a national approach, with common standards and processes.

2.1 Strengths of the current national system include the following:

- Accreditation standards provide an accountability framework for the development and delivery of initial teacher education programs.
- Criteria for entrants to initial teacher education programs are clear.
- A balanced focus on both theory and practice is embedded so that the requisite knowledge and skills can be acquired and applied in practice.
- There is flexibility within a standards-based framework in how education providers and program participants demonstrate the achievement of high standards along with an acknowledgement that there are multiple pathways to excellence.
- All graduates are required to meet the Teacher Standards and are thus prepared with the requisite skills and knowledge, including the ability to select the most appropriate teaching practices for their context, content, and students.
- Panels with nationally trained members who have relevant expertise are convened by State and Territory teacher regulatory authorities to make recommendations about the accreditation of initial teacher education programs. Panels are made up of teacher educators, principals, teachers and employers of teachers, creating a strong role for the teaching profession in accreditation.

The interim report of the evaluation of the implementation of the Teacher Standards undertaken for AITSL in 2013 showed a total of 93 per cent of teacher educators and 72 per cent of pre-service teachers who completed the survey reported having a 'fair amount' or more knowledge of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. This indicates an encouraging level of engagement with the Professional Standards for Teachers at a relatively early stage of implementation².

² Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2011, *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Interim Report on Baseline Implementation 2013 Key Findings*, Melbourne.

3. Continuing challenges

However, initial teacher education in Australia continues to be faced with a number of challenges. While the Accreditation Standards and Teacher Standards have provided a national quality benchmark for both initial teacher education programs and the quality of beginning teachers, these two sets of standards are still in the initial stages of implementation.

The reforms put in place through the national approach will necessarily have a time lag before their impact is evident in classrooms and there continues to be varying quality in initial teacher education programs and preparedness of graduate teachers. Employers report that graduate teachers are not fully prepared for some aspects of their teaching practice. Less than a third of principals perceived graduate teachers as 'well prepared' or 'very well prepared' in managing classroom activities, providing effective feedback and understanding differences among students and how to cater for them³. Likewise, some graduate teachers reported their initial teacher education program was least helpful in preparing them for teaching students from Indigenous and/or different cultural backgrounds, students with learning difficulties and working effectively with parents and guardians⁴.

Mirroring the three characteristics of high performing systems listed above, initial teacher education in Australia faces major challenges:

3.1 Attracting high quality entrants

- Teaching is not routinely the choice of the highest academic performers. Only seven per cent of domestic students with an ATAR, commencing an initial teacher education program in 2011, had an ATAR 91 and above⁵.
- Graduate entry programs, which require content knowledge and a record of academic success through completion of a prior degree, still only account for a minority of commencements. In 2011, 31% of commencements into initial teacher education programs were at the postgraduate level⁶.
- The practice of selecting for both academic ability and aptitude for teaching is not widespread.

3.2 Lack of confidence in graduate outcomes

- Among employers, and in the public debate, there is frequent criticism of the quality of initial teacher education graduates.
- Despite the adoption of national teacher standards, universities and employers of graduates often have different expectations of what graduates should know and be able to do.

³ McKenzie, P., Rowley, G., Weldon, P., & Murphy, M. 2011, *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010: Main report on the survey* p. 116.

⁴ McKenzie, P., Rowley, G., Weldon, P., & Murphy, M. 2011, *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010: Main report on the survey* pp. 77-78.

⁵ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013 *Initial Teacher Education: Data Report*, Melbourne, p. 16.

⁶ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013 *Initial Teacher Education: Data Report*, Melbourne, p. 11.

- Accreditation of initial teacher education under the national approach has shifted towards a focus on program outcomes and attainment of the graduate teacher standards, however the approach is not yet based primarily on the *quality* of graduates, although this is envisaged as programs are re-accredited under the national approach.

3.3 Variability of professional experience placements

- The number of professional experience placements required in Australia means a large number of schools are involved, with varying capacities. Excellent models exist alongside placements organised at the last minute, including by students themselves.
- Supervising teachers play a critical role, but their capacity and available time to provide quality support is varied. Training and other resources are available to support them, but take up is variable.
- Communication between pre-service teachers, teacher educators and supervising teachers is complex and not always effective, and roles and responsibilities are not always clear.

4. An agenda for action

In order to further strengthen the quality and consistency of ITE in Australia AITSL proposes a focus on:

- strengthening the national accreditation process to focus on the quality of the program and the attributes of candidates
- accreditation more fully based on an assessment of graduate outcomes
- better integrating theory and practice.

This work should be informed by relevant, timely and practical research and benchmarking. Research in this area must focus on the key policy questions in initial teacher education, particularly graduate quality and the impact of their teaching on student outcomes.

4.1 Strengthening the National accreditation process

The existing national accreditation process provides a solid foundation upon which to further strengthen initial teacher education programs in Australia.

- **Collecting and reporting program data** – it is proposed that data be collected at a provider or program level. This would help identify areas of strength and weakness within programs, contribute to the development of an evidence base and allow discrimination between the quality of programs.
- **A risk-based approach to accreditation** – it is proposed that an approach be taken to program accreditation, program monitoring and re-accreditation that would differentiate between offerings according to an assessment of the risk posed by a particular program or provider.
- **Developing greater consistency in the accreditation process** – it is proposed that the current construction of panels be enhanced by the development of a national pool of panel chairs with the experience and expertise to facilitate rigorous and consistent accreditation panel decisions.
- **Undertaking further research and data collection on the impact of candidate attributes and the effectiveness of selection processes** - it is proposed that the link between academic qualifications, prior experience and disposition to success as a teacher be explored along with mechanisms for selecting for relevant attributes.

4.2 Outcomes based program accreditation

The Accreditation Standards provide for an approach to re-accrediting programs that focuses on the quality of graduates. As programs come to be re-accredited against the national Accreditation Standards, there is a need for better measurement of graduate performance to support an outcomes based accreditation process.

- **Better information on outcomes** – it is proposed that more effective evidence of graduate outcomes be sought from measures such as a common assessment tool and results from the proposed Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (graduate and employer surveys).
- **More rigorous and consistent graduate assessment** – it is proposed that a comprehensive, moderated, national assessment be developed and adopted as a graduation requirement. Such an assessment would go beyond a literacy and numeracy test and would cover practical skills, theoretical knowledge, subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.


4.3 Integration of theory and practice

Professional experience is central to initial teacher education, as the component of a program where pre-service teachers can develop and demonstrate their skills in the classroom. Quality professional experience placements are required to ensure programs have a strong coverage of both theory and practice. The integration of theory and practice continues into a teacher's induction into employment and progression to full registration.

- **Partnerships** – it is proposed that through the accreditation process higher expectations for the depth of school-university partnerships are established that clearly outline to providers of initial teacher education and accreditation panels the key elements of quality professional experience placements.
- **Supervising teachers** – it is proposed that through the accreditation standards higher expectations for the quality and experience of supervising teachers be introduced, for example, a requirement that supervising teachers have been appropriately trained. Over time, there could be an aspiration that all supervising teachers are certified as highly accomplished or lead teachers.
- **National approach to assessment** - it is proposed that a nationally consistent approach to the assessment of professional experience against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers be implemented. This would be developed through a collaborative approach involving

employers, initial teacher educators, principals and supervising teachers. A framework that described the skills, knowledge and practices of pre-service teachers through to graduation would form part of this work.

- **Induction** - The years immediately following graduation are essential for learning and development as a teacher. It is proposed that approaches to induction be strengthened to ensure a quality experience for all beginning teachers. The induction phase culminates in achieving full registration. It is further proposed that consideration be given to strengthening the rigour of this process.

 The existing Accreditation Standards and Teacher Standards provide a basis for improving the quality of initial teacher education in Australia. AITSL welcomes the work of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group as an opportunity to further strengthen this approach.

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