



Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

Auspeld submission in response to the Discussion Paper



Enquiries regarding this submission can be directed to:

Mandy Nayton (President)
AUSPELD
T: (08) 9217 2500
E: admin@auspeld.org.au



Introduction

The key questions for this Review are **how best to attract and select high-quality candidates into the teaching profession**, and **how best to prepare Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students to be effective teachers**. It is our intention to consider these key areas with reference to a selection of the specific questions posed by the Discussion Paper that are relevant to the role AUSPELD, as the national federated body representing the five state SPELD organisations, plays in the Australian education system.

In this submission, we propose that ITE *does not* (at worst) or does inconsistently (at best) currently prepare teachers with the knowledge and skills required for them to be able to provide high-quality, effective instruction in literacy and numeracy for all students, including those with language and learning difficulties or those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This deficit in ITE has been identified in previous reviews and submissions within Australia, most notably in the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (*Teaching Reading*, Rowe, 2005) and *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (Craven et. al, 2014). Whilst it is acknowledged that some progress has been made since 2014, the consistent characteristic across the nation is one of great variability which is in and of itself a major cause for concern.

Well-trained and knowledgeable teachers have the potential to significantly change the academic outcomes achieved by students and to reduce the gap between those making progress and those who are not. Teachers are our most powerful agent for change, and it is essential that they receive the pre-service training and the in-school support and mentoring they need to succeed.

It is our intention to consider both sections of the Terms of Reference. We have placed particular emphasis on the specific questions posed in Part B, as we believe this is the area to which we can contribute the most; however, we also wish to address selected questions from Part A.



Part A

Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession

1. How can we further encourage high-performing and highly motivated school leavers to enter ITE and choose teaching as a career?

and,

4. What more can be done to address issues with workforce supply in some subject areas (particularly maths) and schools?

As noted in the Discussion Paper for the Review, a '2019 Grattan Institute survey on the career motivations of high achieving young Australians found that they *perceived teaching to fall well short of the intellectual challenge and pay offered by their chosen career*' (p. 5, Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Discussion Paper, April 2021; italics added by the authors of this submission). This perception is perpetuated, in part, by the difficulty many teachers experience after graduation from their ITE course and the failure of some schools to adequately support and mentor newly qualified teachers. The lack of preparation in effective, evidence-based teaching practices affects the impact early-career teachers are able to have in the classroom. This is highly likely to lead to frustration when students fail to achieve the academic standards articulated in the curriculum and contributes to the perception that beginning teachers have of their capacity to be effective teachers. While there is a lack of national data quantifying teacher attrition rates, the available research suggests that a common factor influencing the choice teachers make as to whether they remain in the profession or leave, is their sense of effectiveness and their work satisfaction (Mayer et. al, 2015; referenced in AITSL Spotlight, August 2016). Mayer et al. indicated that the degree to which teachers viewed themselves as *being effective* related to whether they believed they had *reached* the students they were teaching, and whether the students were, as a result, learning the content being taught. However, as noted by the Discussion Paper, Australia's decline in student academic performance against international benchmarks suggests that a significant number of students are

not learning the skills and conceptual knowledge required for academic success, and as a result, it is likely that this is having an impact on teachers' sense of effectiveness. This may be exacerbated at those schools at which there is a high rate of underachievement.

A secondary consequence of this lack of preparedness in evidence-informed practice, is that upper primary and high school teachers often struggle to teach the curriculum, or their specialist subject, because the students arrive in the classroom with very poor literacy and numeracy skills. This may be the result of a lack of robust, evidence-informed teaching in the early years or it could be related to language or learning disorders. Teachers of older students find that they increasingly need to provide instruction or remediation in foundation-level skills, such as reading, writing and basic numeracy, rather than (or as well as) their own subject area. They are also often required to provide support, intervention and adjustments to students with specific learning disorders (in the key areas of reading, written expression and mathematics), as well as to students with language disorders with very little knowledge of how to go about this. It is currently the case that very few secondary ITE courses include content that adequately, or even partially, prepares pre-service teachers to deliver such instruction and support.

Unfortunately, the AITSL ITE Accreditation Standards, only require the equivalent of one-eighth of a (full-time student) year for early reading instruction in the primary school setting; with no minimum requirement in terms of



knowledge required to teach foundation-level literacy and numeracy skills in place for secondary ITE programs. It is also the case that although early reading instruction is specified to address evidence-based practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and oral language, the interpretation of what this means varies widely across ITE courses, with some still providing content that is highly questionable. Furthermore, information from overseas suggests that ITE courses for those with a graduate degree in another field, such as science and mathematics, commonly do not include any components regarding pedagogy, yet attrition rates for beginner teachers who have entered the profession through this pathway are sharply reduced when comprehensive pedagogical instruction is a core part of their ITE program (Ingersoll, Merrill and May, 2014). The limited provision of content knowledge and evidence-based teaching strategies in ITE courses in Australia strongly suggests that such findings are applicable to our own context.

Additionally, the way candidates are selected for ITE courses, and the rigour applied in assessing pre-service teachers' readiness for the classroom, are both factors that affect the perception of the teaching profession held by members of the community. As noted in the Discussion Paper, only 24% of ITE candidates are admitted based on their secondary school academic performance (Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank, ATAR). Of that 24%, only 39% achieved an ATAR above 80, a score signalling high academic performance. (The Discussion Paper also notes that while overall completion rates for ITE students are declining, completion rates are stable for those who achieved an ATAR of 80 or above). Likewise, in the report *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (produced by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, TEMAG) the selection of candidates for ITE programs by providers, via pathways other than academic achievement, was questioned. It was suggested that the approach

was likely to perpetuate the perception that teaching would be considered suitable for those who did not excel in their secondary education, or who were ineligible on the basis of ATAR for entry to a preferred undergraduate course.

It is, however, important to stress that high academic performance does not guarantee that a student will become a strong teacher. Teaching is complex and requires knowledge, skill, a great deal of practise, and motivation. Research consistently shows the quality of instruction, which is largely dependent on the knowledge, experience and skill set of the teacher delivering the instruction, is the most powerful influencer of student learning (Allen & Sims, 2018; Slater, Davies & Burgess, 2012). It is important to retain alternative entry pathways for candidates who may not have achieved strong ATAR results but who may be imminently suited to teaching. This, however, does not mitigate the need to raise entry and completion requirements for ITE students.

TEMAG also found that ITE providers are not compelled to provide robust evidence against a national assessment framework that their graduates have the knowledge and skills required for them to be classroom ready. This is indicative of a lack of rigour in ITE programs that is expected by high-performing school leavers and, presumably, mid-, and late-career professionals in other fields. These high aspirations for teachers, and ITE students, are central to attracting and selecting the very best candidates to the teaching profession.

These experiences are likely to contribute to the perception that teaching falls short of the intellectual challenge of other careers open to high-achieving school leavers; similarly, this perception does nothing to encourage mid- and late-career professionals in other fields to transition into teaching.



Recommendations

- Increase the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards expectations for the time spent on instruction in literacy (including both reading and written expression) and numeracy in both primary and secondary ITE courses.
- Include in the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards expectations for the time spent on teaching strategies that support the participation and learning of students with both learning and language disorders in both primary and secondary ITE courses.
- Increase the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards expectations for the time spent on both a knowledge of, and practice in, evidence-based pedagogy in ITE courses.
- Increase the expectations for the academic competence demonstrated by those accepted into ITE courses and provide additional academic support (as needed) for those ITE students who have been accepted through non-academic pathways.



Part B

Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

6. 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?

The *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* report found that there were significant barriers to raising the quality of initial teacher education. In addition to the finding that ITE programs did not consistently equip beginning teachers with the knowledge and skills they need, it also found that a number of courses included content not informed by evidence (p. xvii). It noted that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) had been established to improve teacher expertise (AITSL website, accessed July 2021), but that the implementation of the AITSL-developed Professional Standards and Accreditation Standards are regulated by the teacher regulatory authorities in each state and territory (AITSL website, accessed July 2021). In addition, ITE providers are themselves responsible for determining the manner in which they will demonstrate the impact of their ITE courses, with only general indications as to the type of evidence that may be gathered to demonstrate that graduates are classroom-ready (AITSL, 2015). The absence of a national regulatory body for nationally-determined Accreditation Standards, and the lack of explicit criteria by which the impact of an ITE course is to be determined, are highly likely to be affecting the consistency with which the national Accreditation Standards are being implemented.

Moreover, the Accreditation and Professional Standards developed by AITSL are vague and unambitious in regards to the content knowledge and skills teachers require in order to be effective. The AITSL Graduate Teacher Standards are the explicit professional expectations for those graduating from ITE courses, and ‘because they define what graduate teachers should know and be able to do, the Graduate Teacher Standards are the key to the accreditation of programs’ (p. 20, AITSL, 2015). Each of the seven standards for

professional knowledge include between four and seven focus areas; of these focus areas, only **two** relate to knowledge about child and adolescent development and learning, and only **two** refer to the content knowledge graduate teachers must have (one regarding their teaching area and one regarding literacy and numeracy). The source(s) of the knowledge to be gained in these areas is not specified. In contrast, ten focus areas refer to teaching strategies and four relate to teaching sequences, with no reference made to the content knowledge or skills to be taught through these strategies and sequences or how that content may influence the strategies and sequences used.

As mentioned earlier in this submission, the Accreditation Standards state that ITE programs intended to equip teachers across the primary school grades require only one-eighth of a year (full-time course equivalent) to be dedicated to early reading instruction, with some indication of required content. This represents an enormous body of knowledge to cover in the equivalent of one unit of study. Far less specificity is included for written expression (arguably an even more complex area of instruction) or oral language (which is vitally important across all areas of the curriculum). Secondary ITE programs do not include any mandatory requirements regarding study in foundational reading or written expression instruction, despite high numbers of secondary-aged students requiring remediation in these areas (2019 NAPLAN data indicates that 22.2% of Year 9 students across Australia achieved on or below benchmark in reading, while 39.5% of year 9 students across Australia achieved on or below benchmark in writing. These levels are below that regarded as essential to meet the demands of daily life or a secondary school curriculum and will almost certainly warrant intervention and support).



Pre-service teachers may or may not fully appreciate the extent to which such content is lacking in their ITE course; however, evaluation forms from pre-service teachers following participation in AUSPELD and SPELD workshops strongly suggests that when they are exposed to evidence-based practices and information about learning and development, pre-service teachers are able to recognise the gaps in their training. For example, comments include:

"[I liked] the practical strategies included for all year groups, as a graduate it is great to see this side."

"I wish I knew it sooner! It was great to learn this as a prac student."

"I am a prac student and this has helped me so much. I think there was more info in the course than I had in a unit. A great PD."

The consistency of implementation of the national Accreditation Standards is clearly one barrier to the goal of ensuring the ITE curriculum is evidence-based and adequately equipping future teachers with evidence-based teaching practices. However, the Standards betray low expectations regarding the amount of time and effort to be dedicated to pedagogical, developmental, and content knowledge, and fail to make explicit the expectations regarding the evidence base that must be drawn upon when delivering such knowledge in an ITE course. These weaknesses serve to ensure that even rigorous implementation of the Standards will not achieve the goal of increasing evidence-based content in ITE courses.

Recommendations

- Set explicit and measurable targets for the content taught to pre-service teachers as part of ITE courses, and establish procedures for ensuring these targets are met that are not determined by the ITE provider themselves
- Increase the expectations for the time spent on early and remedial reading and writing instruction, content knowledge and evidence-based pedagogy in ITE courses, as set out by the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards
- Make explicit the expectations regarding the source and nature of the content and information provided in ITE courses, by increasing the explicitness of the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards



7. What more can ITE providers and employers do to ensure ITE students are getting the practical experience they need before they start their teaching careers?

As noted in the *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* report, approaches for the coordination of professional experience placements vary significantly across ITE providers, and this consistency must be addressed in order to avoid a lottery for ITE students when accessing crucial practical experience. The other factor that is key to ensuring that all ITE students get the practical experience they need is the establishment of greater specificity and higher expectations in the Graduate Teacher Standards that determine the experience and outcomes pre-service teachers must gain. Currently, the broad and imprecise nature of the Graduate Teacher Standards allows for a range of interpretations, including very low expectations for what skills and knowledge pre-service teachers will gain, practise and demonstrate during professional experience placements. The ability for ITE providers to set their own requirements regarding the assessment criteria for pre-service teachers only exacerbates this problem.

The capacity of specialist organisations such as AUSPELD and the state SPELDs to provide practical, targeted training in evidence-informed instructional practices to ITE students should be harnessed in order to ensure those students are prepared to deliver high-quality initial literacy and numeracy instruction, as well as evidence-

informed remediation to those students who are at educational risk. This could substantially increase the classroom readiness of pre-service teachers. For example, pre-service teachers enrolled in ITE courses could undergo training in high-quality structured synthetic phonics, written expression, and mathematics programs that have been expertly developed with a clearly defined instructional scope and sequence, instructional methodologies that can be implemented with efficacy and consistency, and strategies for regular review and assessment of student progress. The ideal time to develop competency in such instructional programs is before arrival in the classroom as a graduate teacher, at which time there are far more competing demands and less time to develop the necessary skills. Furthermore, training in high-quality instructional programs while enrolled in an ITE course allows for the application of the program during professional experience placements, when students are well-supported by their supervising teacher/s and staff of their ITE provider. There is significant scope for collaboration between ITE providers and trainers in high-quality programs for reading, written expression and mathematics, and for recognition of completion of this training as part of pre-service teachers' ITE.

Recommendations

- Increase cooperation between ITE providers and organisations that provide professional learning and support to in-service teachers, with the aim of increasing the access that pre-service teachers have to professional learning and training in high-quality pedagogy and instructional programs.
- Offer credit or course equivalence to students in ITE course for completion of high-quality literacy and numeracy training through external service providers.



8. How can Teaching Performance Assessment arrangements be strengthened to ensure graduate teachers are well-prepared for the classroom?

The requirements for Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) arrangements are clear, explicit, and (to some extent) measurable. However, such arrangements are only ever as good as the framework upon which they are based. As with all of the national Accreditation Standards, the TPA must be aligned with, and assess, pre-service teachers' practice against the Graduate Teacher Standards. The issues with these Standards – the low expectations for pedagogical and content knowledge, and the lack of specificity regarding the evidence base of the teaching strategies graduate teachers are expected to know and

implement – will have a negative impact on the capacity for the TPA to fulfil its role in ensuring graduate teachers are well-prepared for the classroom.

As has mentioned earlier in this submission, this is particularly evident in the areas of literacy and numeracy instruction (essential knowledge for **all** teachers) and in terms of the knowledge required by **all** teachers to recognise, support and raise the achievement levels of students with language and learning difficulties (a number of which will be in **every** class that they teach).

Recommendations

- Develop explicit expectations in the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards in terms of the pedagogy, content knowledge and evidence-based teaching strategies that pre-service teachers should acquire as they progress through their ITE course, specifically in the areas of literacy and numeracy instruction. Ensure that these expectations are reflected in the TPA requirement.
- Develop explicit expectations in the AITSL Accreditation and Professional Standards in terms of the knowledge and skill set that pre-service teachers should acquire as they progress through their ITE course, specifically in terms of their understanding of learning and language difficulties, and their knowledge of the teaching strategies that will support the participation and learning of students with such difficulties. Ensure that these expectations are reflected in the TPA requirement.



9. How can leading teachers, principals and their schools play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students?

The capacity for leading teachers, principals and schools to play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students is dependent on their own knowledge and skills in high-quality, effective instruction in literacy and numeracy for all students. Other reports have indicated the difficulty faced by pre-service teachers in securing professional experience placements, and the inconsistency in how well ITE providers coordinate these placements (e.g. Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers). This implies that some pre-service teachers may have limited choice when it comes to accessing support from leading teachers, principals and schools, and so factors such as the knowledge and skills possessed by those teachers and schools may not currently feature highly in that choice. There is also no reason to expect that the knowledge and skills held by practising teachers is far in excess of what was provided to them through their own ITE. One of the most consistent comments provided in participant evaluations of AUSPELD and SPELD workshops relates to the 'overload' of information provided, often on topics relating to fundamental teaching practices or basic knowledge regarding the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers commented that:

"[there was a] lot to digest but very informative"

"[I didn't like] not having the background knowledge/experience on teaching literacy"

"I learnt so much but really wonder why I wasn't taught all of this at University."

Increasing the capacity of teachers, principals and schools to support the development of ITE students will require development of their own knowledge of how students learn, and evidence-based instructional practices, as well as how to ensure this knowledge is actively applied in classrooms across the school. To make sure this occurs, the documents that guide ITE provision and assessment of pre-service teachers must also be of the highest quality; therefore, the aforementioned concerns regarding the expectations and specificity of the Graduate Teacher Standards, and the consistency with which national Accreditation Standards are applied, are also central to achieving effective and meaningful involvement of teachers and schools in ITE.

Recommendations

- Provide clear guidelines to schools regarding the expectations in terms of content knowledge and evidence-based teaching strategies that should be demonstrated by ITE students during their professional experience placement.
- Ensure that leading teachers, principals and schools are adequately equipped to support ITE students on professional placement and can articulate the approach taken in the school and its adherence to evidence-informed, high quality practice, specifically in the areas of literacy, numeracy and learning support.
- ITE students should not be placed at schools for their professional experience placement if the school does not meet a clearly defined set of expectations related to high quality evidence-informed practice. This is particularly important in the delivery of literacy and numeracy instruction, and the approach taken by the school in their support of students with learning and language difficulties.



10. Can ITE providers play a stronger role in ongoing professional development and support of teachers?

It is our belief that organisations such as AUSPELD and the associated state SPELDs are exceptionally well-placed to work with schools and teachers to provide specialist ongoing professional development. Such organisations serve to connect the academic world with the classroom, and are frequently better placed to provide context-appropriate, targeted, high-quality, practical training, in addition to in-school support and mentoring, than higher education and ITE providers. It is frequently the case that the specialised expertise found in these organisations allows for a focus on the development of ongoing professional development and the provision of teacher support in very distinct areas, such as evidence-informed literacy and numeracy instruction, as well as the pedagogy needed for those students most at educational risk (including students with language, learning and attention disorders). One example of the kind of training that can be offered by organisations such as AUSPELD and the associated SPELD organisations is the professional development in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), which is a two-year (mostly online) course focused on the oral to written language continuum and how to use this knowledge to provide high-quality literacy instruction suitable for all students, including those with language and learning challenges. Recent feedback from participants engaged in the LETRS course included the following comment:

“[The best] professional learning I have undertaken in recent years. I would, and am, recommending it highly to all principals.”

Similar feedback is consistently received from participants in response to a wide range of courses, from different cohorts and different educational jurisdictions across the country. Teachers participating in the training have reported a sense of having been ill-equipped by their ITE course to go about the work they have been doing in teaching literacy and numeracy, or supporting students with language or learning difficulties, so much so, that a feeling of having ‘failed’ past students is not uncommon.

“The introduction unit helped to amplify the need for [Science of Reading] practices in our classrooms (...) – instead of L3 or Reading Recovery (which are not effective).”

Such specialisation is understandably difficult to achieve by ITE providers, who must necessarily cover a wide range of subject areas, teach planning and management skills, and ensure that students gain a knowledge of educational theory. Many ITE providers offer specialisation streams, which are likely to explore areas at greater depth, but these courses are not completed by all students, neither do they necessarily adhere to evidence-informed practice (although certainly some do). Community-based expert organisations are often well-positioned to provide significantly more cost-effective, accessible and structured ongoing support than the majority of ITE providers. Specialist community-based organisations often have greater capacity to visit remote and difficult-to-access areas of Australia, and deliver relevant, targeted, culturally appropriate and in-person support to newly qualified teachers.

It is also our experience that the demands for professional development and teacher support are generally focused on the fundamental knowledge and skills for teaching and learning that we would assume are the core business of ITE programs, rather than the specialist professional learning or mastery training that we would expect to be sought by in-service teachers. AUSPELD and the SPELD organisations provide training to tens of thousands of teachers and education professionals across Australia; overwhelmingly, this training targets essential information regarding how students learn, and the development of functional literacy and numeracy skills – as well as how best to support those students who are struggling. Teachers and schools seek out this professional development on a daily basis.

“[to] fill in gaps in my understanding”

“to gain a deeper understanding of how children read, write, and spell from a scientific perspective”



“to learn and understand how to support all students in the classroom without and without learning difficulties”

“to learn how to teach reading and spelling effectively and efficiently”

These comments from teachers provide examples of evidence that many teachers are seeking to correct gaps in the knowledge and skills gained during ITE. As acknowledged in the introduction to this submission, there is no doubt that some progress has been made over the past few years, but the changes made have been

very inconsistent, with a limited number of ITE providers now offering far more rigorous and evidence-informed training, whilst others remain steadfast in their failure to do so.

For this, and the reasons outlined earlier in response to this question, it would be wise to exercise caution when considering the suitability of ITE providers to deliver the ongoing professional development and support required by early career and more experienced teachers.

Recommendations

- Recognise and encourage the role that non-ITE provider specialist community-based training organisations play in the development of pre-service and in-service teachers.
- Increase the collaboration and cooperation between ITE course providers and other organisations offering professional learning and teacher support to improve the outcomes for teachers and educators throughout the education system.



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