

INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Theme:

Summary



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The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
NSW 2000

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INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

NSW Legislative Council 2005

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) is pleased to provide a submission to the NSW Legislative Council inquiry into the recruitment and training of teachers, commissioned by the NSW Minister for Education and Training. It is ACDE's intention in what follows to provide brief and incisive comment on the basis of its wealth of experience in dealing with these matters. There is also a wealth of data that can easily be called up to support this brief submission. ACDE is of the view that, at this point in time, clear identification of the issues is of paramount importance. Beyond this point, ACDE will be most willing to provide expanded comment and any of the embedded data that the Inquiry might seek. The submission will proceed by specific comment against the Terms of Reference enumerated below.

1. The best means of attracting quality teachers to NSW Public Schools and meeting the needs of school communities.

ACDE would argue that the evidence is substantial that the single best means of attracting quality teachers to NSW Public Schools is through the University system and the teacher education courses thereof. In the past few years, the quality of applicants for these courses has risen demonstrably, as demand for teacher education places has soared. In many universities, the average teacher education applicant is capable of entering Engineering in terms of entry scores, and is 10 and more UAI points clear of applicants into Arts and Science, as well as into professional degrees, like Accounting for instance, that would once have been considered more prestigious than Teaching.

This is not an accidental trend. It has occurred on the back of a huge amount of work undertaken by Education faculties themselves, as well as by the profession through its employing and industrial bodies, in getting the message out that teaching is a good thing to

do, that it requires commitment, dedication and a competitive HSC score or its equivalent for late starters. The importance of the entry score to a profession's training program was never spelled out better than by the Federal Senate Report of 1998 (*A Class Act*) where the integral connection between a profession's status and the status of its training was explored. A status teaching profession is dependent on a number of features, including such basics as financial remuneration and other career rewards. Among these features, however, lies the crucial nature of the profession's training and its reputation within the University sector. Any suggestions of cheaper and more immediate solutions for constructing and maintaining a teaching force should be put off the agenda once and for all. Australian teacher education stands tall in the world because it has maintained the link with higher education as the one and only satisfactory pathway to effective training. This is evidenced in the attractiveness of Australian teachers to authorities in the US, UK and other international spots, seeking to fill places in their own teaching force, invariably denuded and savaged by doctrinaire and expedient attempts to construct a workforce in cheaper ways than via higher education.

2. The effectiveness and efficiency of current means of recruiting teachers to NSW Public Schools, including (a) recent graduates, (b) career change teachers

NSW would seem to have done exceedingly well in recent times in stemming the natural drift towards shortage. In addition to the situation described above which has seen the low point of student teacher intake of the late 1990s turned around in most NSW universities, DET has been creative in providing re-training programs in essential areas. By and large, these programs have been effective in increasing the flow of teachers into classrooms but they have also provided suitable pathways for mature entrants who have brought their life skills with them into teaching. In broad terms, these candidates have proven to be exceptionally committed students and equally exceptional employees.

3. Differences and similarities between primary and secondary school recruitment needs.

There is no doubt that the prospect of secondary teaching enjoys less popularity than is the case with primary. This tends to translate into a stronger candidature for primary than most secondary areas in the standard teacher education cohort, at least as far as the school leaver population is concerned. Granted that most of the more immediate shortages are in areas of secondary, this situation presents as a concern. On the other hand, most of the successful re-training programs relate to areas of secondary. Many of the more acute shortages have been staved off through effective re-training programs being put in place before the shortage has become too acute. A continuation and enhancement of this approach to populating schools with the right mix of teachers is essential.

4. Existing initiatives and programs of the DET, including (a) Teach NSW, (b) Scholarships, and (c) Accelerated Training Courses.

As suggested above, these strategies would seem to have been as successful as ones that can be found in any province. As such, they deserve to be endorsed, strengthened and extended.



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5. The role of the NSW Institute of Teachers and its accreditation and endorsement requirements.

The Institute constitutes one of the most important frameworks ever established in NSW to promote and guard the standards and reputation of the profession. Its role in assessing teachers for personal registrability is vital and its role in assessing the appropriateness of teacher education accreditation continues the very good work of TQAP. In regard to this latter, moves towards a national accreditation procedure should be encouraged. Australia's reputation in teacher education, as well as the significant export and import potential attached to this reputation, demand a national form of accreditation. This would not in any way threaten or demean the work of the Institute. Indeed, it would enhance such work by elevating it to national and international importance.

6. The role, distribution and effectiveness of university pre-service teacher education.

As suggested, university-based teacher education has been one of the key factors driving the greater professionalism of Teaching in recent years, a fact recognized and understood well by our international partners. Australia produces world class products through its university teacher education. Granted that faculties of Education have been sliced and carved like no others during the 1990s, this is a remarkable event. The secret to Australia's success in this regard has been the mutual understanding that has been generated among the key stakeholders, in particular between the universities, the employing systems and the unions. The irony is that it seems to have been a feature and result of being starved of funding that university teacher education has had to be ever more innovative in doing the job of producing an adequate professional. In this quest, its professional partners have come to the party. This has never been better evidenced than in NSW where DET and other systems have combined with unions in providing more cost efficient and often more effective field experience opportunities for student teachers than was the case in the past. This would appear to be part of the reason that Australian teachers are so popular overseas. They are seen to have had a wealth of practical experience of a wide-ranging type. While university teacher education faculties must continue to fight for the greater level of resourcing that is clearly needed in the long haul to do the job, the ironically positive effects of fifteen years of being starved and decimated should not be lost.

7. Any other matter arising from these terms of reference.

Granted that we are about to undergo a national inquiry mounted from the Federal House of Representatives, the NSW inquiry is timely. NSW has a proud history of managing teacher education well in difficult circumstances. It continues to enjoy a high quality workforce. There clearly are problems of resourcing and regeneration of the profession (not least because of the huge numbers of impending retirements to come from the end of the baby-boomer era). These concerns will need to be gathered up in the national inquiry which should be told of NSW successes, its realistic approach to recruitment, its own diversion of much needed resources to provide accelerated programs into areas where Federal Government policy has



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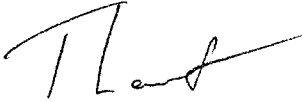
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led to shortage and overly high attrition, as well as the outright difficulties that have resulted from teaching and teacher education being under-resourced for far too long.



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