

## INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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**Theme:**

**Summary**

# **INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS**

**NSW Legislative Council 2005**

## **NSW Teacher Education Council (TEC) Submission**

The TEC is limiting its comments in this submission to Terms of Reference 6:  
*The role, distribution and effectiveness of University pre-service teacher education.*

As you will know there have been over 20 reports into teacher education over the last couple of decades, though almost all the recommendations of these reports have been ignored by government. The history of education in Australia indicates that this situation has been ongoing now for over a century, and we urge this Committee to ensure that its recommendations are acted upon for the betterment of teacher education in New South Wales.

The most recent of these is the inquiry in Victoria (Inquiry into the Suitability of Pre-Service Teacher Training Courses - [http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/fs\\_inq\\_pre-serv.html](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/fs_inq_pre-serv.html)). It is instructive to examine the findings of that Committee since it could be argued, as they do, that the context in which teacher education is taking place today is unique - one in which teachers need an "unprecedented range of skills and knowledge". Another reason for examining the report is that the situation in Victorian education resembles that in NSW, with the recent formation of an Institute which is developing standards for the profession.

We believe that the issues raised are important ones for all teacher education programs, and could form the basis of your own investigation into the effectiveness of teacher education in NSW.

The Victorian Committee made recommendations in 7 areas: Accreditation and accountability; Flexibility of design and delivery; Content of courses; Teaching practicum; ICT; Student selection into courses; Teacher induction. What we would like to do in this submission is to point out why we feel that many of the things suggested are not possible or are inappropriate, as well as what things we would support in NSW.

In the first area the Committee suggested that the Institute hold teacher education faculties accountable for producing 'teacher ready' graduates - that Universities provide documentation to the Institute on evaluating courses, and on curriculum and delivery, resources, etc. Second that the Universities set up partnerships with local schools.

The TEC supports the idea that teachers who graduate from their courses seeking employment should be ready to teach when they leave our courses. An important question, however, is how such a judgement would be made and by whom. The evidence in the Victorian inquiry was anecdotal, suggesting that a number of groups (principals, parents, etc) felt many graduates lacked practical teaching skills. It is our view that this is not the case for most teachers emerging from our courses in NSW. Their practical teaching experience has all been gained in present-day, fully operational school settings, and all Universities work in collaboration with professional teachers in the judgement of their classroom competence – without which they are unable to graduate. Our own individual University research suggests that our graduates are well received by the profession, with many offered positions prior to graduation in the schools, where they undertake their Internships or professional experience. It goes without saying that not all graduates emerge from our courses with the same capacity, and that all of them will improve with experience and employer support. Our view as an organization is that we prepare teachers for a lifetime career in teaching. That means we need to balance the need for practical skills, which can be used immediately, with the foundations which will serve teachers to grow and develop their professional capacities over a lifetime. Our view is that the balance implied by the Victorian inquiry errs on the side of the former and that the consequences would be harmful for the latter.

### **Flexible design and course delivery**

The Committee suggests that most University courses are only offered weekly from 9am to 5pm and that this excludes non-school leavers from entering teacher education courses.

The TEC supports the desirability of offering courses in a variety of modes and times. We strongly support the desirability of non-school leavers entering our courses and already make efforts to accommodate them. The only limits to our flexibility in course delivery is funding, and our need for connection to schools for practical placements. Our current course offerings are already full, and academic staff have full workloads already. We believe that with adequate funding to expand our current offerings, most of our institutions would take advantage of the greater flexibility this would bring. Clearly, there is considerable expense involved in repeating courses which are offered in normal weekly mode to accommodate additional offerings, such as in mid-term blocks, weekends, or summer/winter schools.

### **Content of courses**

The Committee suggests that current educational priorities are ignored eg. classroom management, development of classroom resources, time management, language and literacy, etc. More emphasis, it argued, needs to be given to the practical dimensions of teaching, and that more of the courses need to be taught by current practitioners.

The Committee also argued that more emphasis needs to be given to vocational and applied learning teachers in teacher education courses.

The view of the TEC is that NSW State priorities, while very important and while given a good deal of emphasis in teacher education courses, are not the only issues that need addressing. It is the case that most Universities now prepare teachers to work in a number of States of Australia and overseas. As stated earlier, there is a need for balance between the perceived immediate needs of the day and the longer terms needs of teachers. While this will always be an issue on which opinions differ, we believe that the current internal University procedures for course accreditation, and for seeking advice on content, enables us to get that balance right. We also feel that current moves towards national accreditation of teacher education providers may help States to overcome this legacy of the history of State Departmental control of teacher training.

The TEC is also aware of the importance of vocational and applied teachers in schools, and several of our members place a high priority on the training of VET teachers in the TAFE sector. However the situation in NSW is that retraining for vocational teachers in schools is undertaken in the DET and there is currently no demand for such courses as we understand it.

### **Practicum**

The increase to 130 days for undergraduate teachers and 80 for post graduate teachers is supported in principle. We would also support a review of the current practice of University payment to teachers for this professional supervision, and the development, alongside and in partnership with the NSW Institute of Teachers, of a code of professional partnership between pre-service and in-service professional teacher educators. We see the need for the profession to take innovative and wide-ranging moves to regenerate itself as a matter of urgent importance.

The greatest difficulty in this area is that there are an inadequate number of quality placements for teachers. Currently at UTS for example, we are short of some 50 placements for teachers commencing in the Grad Dip Ed program. Other examples abound, and Universities providing teacher education in rural locations are particularly hard pressed, for instance, to find appropriate placements for student teachers, particularly in the initial years of their preparation when they have neither the financial nor the experiential resources to be located far from the providing University. Charles Sturt University for instance, needs to place hundreds of first year students in a small number of 'local areas' that are severely limited in the number of schools willing to take on increasing numbers of students for professional teaching experience in intensity it requires. Schools in districts close to rural Universities are sometimes requested to provide placements for student teachers for large proportions of the school teaching year, making it difficult for both school and the partner teacher concerned to provide continuous high quality experience for the teachers in training.

We agree that it would be desirable that the NSW IT might develop some protocols for such practicums which ties in schools across the State to allow students to undertake a variety of placements. This would need to be appropriately and adequately funded, to ensure that student teachers are able to leave their ongoing employment and accommodation in order to be available for professional teaching experience in other geographical locations.

## **ICT**

It is claimed that there is a divide between the ICT competencies of teacher educators and those of our students. We do not believe this to be the case. Over recent years all Universities have spent a great deal of time and money in building staff expertise. While it is true there may be a number of older staff who are not ICT literate this is a small minority, and they are fast retraining as their own University workplaces become highly dependent on ICT. Nevertheless, we would greatly welcome the Committee's suggestion of an increased emphasis on using best practice schools in the teaching of ICT competencies.

### **Selection of students**

The TEC agrees that it would be desirable to have a selection procedure which uses written applications and interviews to select our teacher education students. The only barrier to this is money and the time between the need to make student offers and when courses commence in late February. Neither of these are available at this time. As a result of Federal funding freezes to Higher Education over the past five years, there are few Faculties of Education currently operating with a full complement of academic staff. Most must rely heavily on casual workers to fulfil the teaching responsibilities of their programs, in order to ensure that experienced and knowledgeable full time academic staff are in positions of most responsibility, which include responsibility for the selection of new entrants. These staff also have teaching, research, and other administrative duties. We believe that all institutions would warmly welcome an increase in funding for staff that would enable renewal and greater interpersonal involvement in the selection of new student teachers. There is no Faculty among our membership that does not give this important process its highest priority.

We would be very happy to elaborate on any of these points if the Committee desired.