

# **Australian Catholic University**

**Submission to the Teacher Education  
Expert Panel discussion paper**

**April 2023**

## **ACU Faculty of Education and Arts (FEA)**

### **Submission to the Teacher Education Expert Panel discussion paper**

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## Executive summary

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel discussion paper (the discussion paper).

ACU's submission addresses the four reform areas outlined in the discussion paper and responds to the issues raised at the end of each area.

Our primary focus is on Reform Area 2, which concerns linking performance and funding of initial teacher education (ITE), and the proposed performance measures for ITE.

The significance of linking funding to performance cannot be understated for either ITE or the sector more broadly given that funding is not currently allocated based on performance at a discipline/degree level within Australian higher education.

In proposing a link between performance and funding the discussion paper does not specify what funding will be allocated through any performance measures it adopts, nor how the various measures will be weighted.

The paper notes the Performance Based Funding (PBF) model, should it become operational again, may be used to distribute funds. There is significant overlap between the measures included within the PBF model and the Panel's proposed performance measures which may result in unintended outcomes that do not support the objectives of either scheme. Even if minimal funding is involved, the proposed indicators will become the default means by which the relative quality of ITE provision is evaluated across the nation.

It is therefore crucial that adequate measures are adopted, as the stakes are too high for inadequate measures.

ACU therefore adopts the principle that having a smaller set of agreed and robust indicators is far superior to a broader set that includes inadequate measures. We believe that the performance measures for the six-year drop-out rate, "classroom readiness" and two of the three measures for "transition" are inadequate and should not be included as performance measures and recommend that the TSCI defined adjusted attrition rate be used as the measure for first year attrition. Further, the accuracy of the TSCI attrition data should be confirmed.

Regarding the other reform areas, ACU is satisfied with the proposed content for the first reform area, which emphasises professional experience reform in the third area, and the improvements for postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants in the fourth area. ACU offers our experience in these areas for the panel's consideration.

ACU is the largest educator of pre-service teachers in Australia, operating across four jurisdictions, the partner of Teach for Australia (TFA) and an early adopter of flexible and accelerated ITE programs. We have also played a leading advocacy role on ITE amongst other Australian universities.

ACU hopes that the panel carefully considers our recommendations. As a well-placed institution with significant expertise and experience in ITE, we are committed to ensuring that the proposed reforms will benefit the entire sector and improve teacher education in Australia.

## Recommendations

ACU proposes 17 recommendations for the Panel's consideration.

### Reform Area 1: Strengthen ITE programs

- 1 Establish a national teacher education accreditation board contingent on it replacing state accreditation requirements.

### Reform Area 2: Link performance and funding of ITE programs

- 2 Identify the weightings to be used for each of the five "selection" indicators and define STEM students.
- 3 First-year attrition rates to be based on adjusted attrition as defined and measured by TCSI once these data are confirmed as accurate.
- 4 Dropout rate is not included as a performance measure.
- 5 Suspend indicators of classroom readiness and investigate whether
  - a) a measure of an institution's improvement on TPA judgement consistency over time can be used.
  - b) the sample size of the QILT ESS can be increased to use as one indicator of classroom readiness.
- 6 Graduate employment outcomes to be the only indicator used for transition until ITE is funded so that it can provide support beyond employment.
- 7 Use the "improvement" rather than "relative performance" approach, but limit the additional information required.
- 8 ATWD data, if used, to be more up-to-date and include eight-year completion rates for undergraduate ITE courses.

### Reform Area 3: Improve practical experience

- 9 Prior to engaging in system level agreements, States and Territories to research and publicise best practice, including payment processes for supervision, and whether supervision is recognised in industrial awards and professional standards.
- 10 Expand the "hub model" for practical experience.
- 11 Target any future scholarships for teachers as their immediate living expenses rather than course cost relief.
- 12 Employ pre-service teachers in their early years of study to work as learning support officers in schools.

- 13 Teacher Regulatory Authorities to recognise simulation as a substitute for some physical placements in schools.
- 14 Trial a technological solution involving networked databases maintained by the three major school employer groups (government school authorities, Catholic Education Commissions, and Independent Schools Australia offices) that links the workforce needs of schools with teacher education student placements, noting this task requires technological expertise and Commonwealth coordination, funding and leadership.

#### **Reform Area 4: Improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants**

- 15 That Teacher Regulatory Authorities undertake a 24-month trial allowing postgraduate students with formal qualifications and relevant content depth eligibility to teach after six months or the equivalent of 0.25FTE volume of learning on a conditional basis while completing their Master of Teaching if they do not already do this.
- 16 Encourage career changers with relevant life experience but no formal qualifications to enter ITE, but for these candidates, confine recognition of prior learning (RPL) to eligibility for entry into a pathway program and assess their academic skills and personal aptitude to teach as they progress through this program.
- 17 That development of a Framework for assessing the success of mid-career programs be implemented through a Request for Proposal process, leverage existing data and metrics, and include a cost / benefit analysis.

## Reform Area 1

### Strengthen ITE programs

#### *i) Evidence-based teaching practices*

ACU supports the content described in the discussion paper. We also acknowledge other important content in teacher education programs, including social contexts of learning, ethical practices, and enabling student belonging.

#### *ii) Amending Accreditation Standards and Procedures*

In incorporating the core content outlined in the discussion paper, ACU recommends changing program standard 4 (on program structure and content) rather than program standard 1 (on program outcomes).

This is partly because ACU does not view the TPA mentioned in standard 1 as the best vehicle for embedding the proposed content (see our response below), and because it seems logical that any core content should be included in the program standard relating to content (i.e., 4).

We do not recommend a prescribed volume of learning for the core curriculum given that it is quite narrowly defined and other important content needs to be represented.

#### *iii) Curriculum specific content*

ACU does not support the proposal to embed the assessment of core curriculum within the TPA. The purpose of the TPA is to focus on a particular topic or skill that a pre-service teacher will plan, teach and assess over several weeks and this is essential for their job readiness and learning. Embedding the variety of curriculum canvassed in the discussion paper will result in a dilution of the intent of the TPA and is unlikely to provide sufficient evidence that the extent of core content proposed has been embedded in ITE courses.

Rather, ACU proposes that the changes proposed in the discussion paper are included within course accreditation processes and documentation which are better suited to this task.

#### *iv) Ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices*

ACU supported the TEMAG's proposal in 2014 for a national accreditation body and supported QIT's 2022 proposal for a national moderation and standard-setting board.

However, to remove any further impost and complexity in a highly regulated space, ACU recommends that the establishment of a national board should only occur if it replaces state registration boards.

#### **ACU recommendation 1**

**Establish a national teacher education accreditation board contingent on it replacing state accreditation requirements.**

## Reform Area 2

### Link performance and funding of ITE programs

#### i) *ITE performance measures*

##### Selection

ACU supports the diversification of students enrolling in ITE which is the intention of this indicator. However, the measures proposed and the lack of clarity around implementation are problematic.

In relation to implementation, it is unclear from the Discussion Paper if, or how, the indicators will be weighted and what if any will be the relative weightings. ACU requests that the relative weighting of the five selection indicators be made clear, and that there be clarity on how selection indicator #5, STEM students, is defined (e.g., does it include design and technology students). As stated in the TEEP discussion paper (p. 42), prospective students are more likely to select a university based on factors such as location and the institutional reputation rather than the quality of individual programs, so the attraction of high ATAR students is not a valid measure of the quality of an ITE program.

##### **ACU recommendation 2**

**Identify the weightings to be used for each of the five “selection” indicators and define STEM students.**

##### Retention

The discussion paper proposes two indicators to measure retention:

- First-year attrition rate: the proportion of students leaving ITE in their first year.
- Six-year dropout rate: the proportion of commencing students leaving the ITE program within six years.

Both attrition and retention were the subject of considerable discussion and input from universities as part of the PBF model consultation.

##### *First-year attrition rate*

The discussion paper proposes the first-year attrition rate as a quality indicator on the basis that providers should be able to assess a pre-service teacher's suitability for teaching before they are accepted, and then offer appropriate support to ensure they do not leave in their first year.

However, this contradicts other reports, such as the QITE review, which encourage the first year to be a time for pre-service teachers to determine if teaching is a suitable career path and to leave early in their candidature if it is not. This is an important milestone for pre-service teachers and ensures that time and resources are wasted by neither the pre-service teacher or ITE provider if teaching is not a suitable profession.

The definition of attrition as proposed by the Panel is unclear. The Australian Government's Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI) has two measures of attrition – normal and adjusted.

- **Normal attrition rate** “identifies students that neither complete a course nor are retained the following year at the same institution”
- **Adjusted attrition rate** “identifies students at either the same or a different higher education institution. In other words, if a student moves from one institution to another in the following year, he or she would be counted as retained in the adjusted attrition rate calculation”<sup>1</sup>

In the Performance Based Funding for the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, Report for the Minister for Education, June 2019, the Expert Panel recommended the use of adjusted attrition and noted:

*As widely supported by the sector, adjusted attrition rates are a contemporaneous measure (lagging by a year). The first-year attrition rates are a very good proxy for long-term failure to complete (9-year non-completion rates).*

ACU acknowledges that movement from one university to another is a valid measure of attrition. However, if a student moves from one university to another but remains in the broad field of teaching, it should not be considered attrition.

Adjusted Attrition will account for those students who continue studies but choose to change providers.

### **ACU recommendation 3**

**First-year attrition rates to be based on adjusted attrition as defined and measured by TCSI once these data are confirmed as accurate.**

#### *Six-year dropout rate:*

It is unclear whether this indicator refers to “non-completion rates” or “dropout rates.”

Assuming that the proposed indicator is a dropout rate, it should be noted that a six-year dropout rate does not account for part-time candidature.

The proportion of part-time pre-service teacher enrolments is increasing. From 2017-21, part-time domestic ITE pre-service teachers increased by 6%, while full-time domestic ITE pre-service teachers declined by 1%.<sup>2</sup> Many part-time ITE pre-service teachers have family responsibilities and work in schools, partly in response to workforce shortages.

A four-year undergraduate degree can take eight or more years to complete part-time, so a six-year dropout rate misrepresents part-time pre-service teachers who may be progressing satisfactorily by their sixth year.

The use of a six-year dropout rate is also a significant lag indicator and will result in funding being allocated to an ITE provider based on data relating to its performance 8-9 years prior.

Given this lag, and the view of the Expert Panel on PBF that the first year attrition rate is a very good proxy for long term failure to complete, ACU recommends that the six-year drop out rate is not used as a performance measure.

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<sup>1</sup> [Attrition rate | TCSI Support](#)

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth Department of Education, *Higher Education Statistics, Section 8 Special courses*, Table 8.4 from 2017-21.



**ACU recommendation 4****Dropout rate is not included as a performance measure.**Classroom readiness

The proposed performance indicators for this category are:

- Pre-service teacher satisfaction with the quality of their course (evidence from Student Satisfaction question – QILT survey data).
- Graduate preparedness for employment (Graduate Outcomes Survey: Preparedness to teach question).

Pre-service teacher satisfaction and perceptions of classroom readiness at one point in time are not a valid measure of classroom readiness.

An objective measure of classroom readiness exists through the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). However, the discussion paper does not recommend using the TPA process (which all pre-service teachers complete, unlike the survey questions proposed) because:

- a) Any pre-service teacher at risk of failing the TPA will be redirected to non-teaching qualifications, thereby inflating TPA pass rates.
- b) Providers will have a perverse incentive to pass pre-service teachers who would not otherwise pass, thereby inflating TPA pass rates.
- c) TPA quality is not benchmarked across the sector.

The first issue involves a pre-service teacher not becoming a qualified teacher, which is a significant step that changes the entire career trajectory for that pre-service teacher. The discussion paper suggests this may happen to “protect” TPA pass rates. However, this is not evidence based and underestimates the individual agency of pre-service teachers. This practice may also affect attrition rates, so there is little incentive for ITE providers to engage in it.

The second issue involves fraud, which is prohibited by the regulator, TEQSA. All assessment in university courses undergoes rigorous moderation processes, and TPAs are externally moderated.

The third issue is that TPA quality is not benchmarked across the sector (i.e., against other TPAs). This is true, although most universities are part of consortia that benchmark TPA results (e.g., ACU leads the GTPA consortium, which measures judgement consistency across 19 universities).

ACU prefers to use judgement consistency in externally moderated TPAs as an indicator of classroom readiness rather than some pre-service teachers’ subjective perception of their own readiness or course satisfaction.

Another potential measure for graduate teacher classroom readiness is their direct employer’s views of their performance once they graduate (which is proposed for the next indicator, “transition”). The discussion paper suggests that direct supervisors’ views on

graduating students via the QILT Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS) are inadequate because of its small sample size. However, the panel could investigate ways to rectify this.

#### **ACU recommendation 5**

##### **Suspend indicators of classroom readiness and investigate whether**

- a) a measure of an institution's improvement on TPA judgement consistency over time can be used.**
- b) the sample size of the QILT ESS can be increased to use as one indicator of classroom readiness.**

#### Transition

The proposed indicators for this category are:

- i) Graduate employment outcomes: The proportion of teaching graduates employed upon graduation.
- ii) Sustainability of employment: The proportion of graduates registered and employed at the end of the second year post-graduation.
- iii) Employment in areas of highest workforce need: The proportion of graduates employed in regional and remote, low SES locations, and in STEM subjects.

While an ITE provider's impact on its students' employability is a valid measure, the other two indicators depend on decisions made by individual teachers and their employers, which are beyond the control of ITE providers. Nor are ITE providers funded to support these outcomes.

For instance, sustainability of employment often depends on the type of school in which a beginning teacher works, rather than their potential effectiveness as a teacher. A graduating ITE pre-service teacher who works in a hard-to-staff school (e.g., a low SES or regional or remote school) will be more likely to leave the profession early in their career than one who begins in a high SES metropolitan school, all else being equal.

Although this pattern exists, there is no hard evidence to prove it, just as there is no hard evidence to prove that early career attrition in Australia is 50% rather than 8%.<sup>3</sup> This is an area over which ITE providers have no control.

Similarly, the employment of graduates in hard-to-staff areas and subjects is a matter for employers, not ITE providers. The "selection" indicator aims to reward ITE providers based on the number of secondary STEM pre-service teachers they enrol. This is appropriate and within the control of the ITE provider. However, decisions around where to employ teachers are the responsibility of schools and ITE providers should not be measured against these decisions nor incentivised to influence them.

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<sup>3</sup> A 2013 literature review on early career teachers who leave the profession in their first five years found huge variability in Australian estimates, ranging from 8 to 50 per cent. See Queensland College of Teachers, *Attrition of Recent Queensland Graduate Teachers*, November 2013

There is also a contradiction across the measures, where the higher the proportion of pre-service teachers employed in areas of highest workforce need (indicator three), the lower their sustainability of employment (indicator two), and vice-versa.

#### *ITE not funded for transition*

A more fundamental problem is that ITE providers are not funded to support pre-service teachers' transition to employment. Universities are resourced to support pre-service teachers until graduation, but post-employment support is meant to be provided by employers and accreditation agencies.

For example, from 2020-22, the proportion of early career teachers who underwent a formal induction process decreased from 65% to 59%.<sup>4</sup> Employers should be providing induction to 100% of new employees, rather than having it decrease from already inadequate levels. ITE providers are not responsible for this situation.

This is not to say ITE providers do not want to provide this support, nor is it to say that beginning teachers do not seek it. In fact, ACU agrees with all the comments made by the discussion paper under the heading, "Why is transition important?" (p. 37). However, the fact is that ITE providers are not funded to provide this support and cannot do so within an already limited and stretched funding envelope.

ACU welcomes a wider "settlement" between universities, employers, and accrediting authorities where ITE support extends beyond the school gate. But in the absence of this settlement, ITE providers should not be measured as if the funding and responsibility exists when it clearly does not.

#### **ACU recommendation 6**

**Graduate employment outcomes to be the only indicator used for transition until ITE is funded so that it can provide support beyond employment.**

#### Relative performance vs improvement approach

ACU endorses the improvement approach recommended by the discussion paper. However, ACU is concerned about whether this approach will require additional administrative work for ITE providers.

Universities already provide significant documentation to TEQSA and teacher regulatory authorities (TRAs) and this administration and compliance work must be undertaken within ITE providers' funding envelopes. Additional administration will further diminish funds available for the direct delivery and innovation of ITE. Therefore, it is worth considering using existing documentation or limiting the length of the qualitative information required.

If this information were confined to one page or a similar format, it would be more manageable. Additionally, it is worth considering whether ITE providers can provide their own quantitative data to demonstrate their performance against relevant indicators.

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<sup>4</sup> AITSL, *Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) Key Metrics Dashboard Release*, 29 March 2023.

**ACU recommendation 7**

**Use the “improvement” rather than “relative performance” approach, but limit the additional information required.**

*ii) Public reporting and transparency*

ACU supports the public reporting of performance measures to increase transparency. The Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) collection could be a suitable option for this purpose, but some improvements are needed. Firstly, the data should be more up to date, and secondly, the constructs used should be clearly explained (e.g., completion rates over time vs attrition rates). Additionally, accuracy should be improved. Currently, the ATWD uses completion rates at six years, which would need to change to eight years.

The use of bronze, silver, and gold ratings, as discussed under the UK’s Teaching Excellence Framework, would be overly reductive because most of these indicators use weak proxies.

**ACU recommendation 8**

**ATWD data, if used, to be more up-to-date and include eight-year completion rates for undergraduate ITE courses.**

*iii) Transition funding to support performance improvement*

*iv) Excellence pool for higher quality programs*

ACU supports both transition funding to support performance improvement and an excellence pool for high quality programs. ACU strongly recommends that any transition funding is in addition to the existing funding envelope.

The changes to content and processes envisaged by the discussion paper will require assistance, and higher quality ITE programs cannot be expected without additional support.

## Reform Area 3

### Improve professional experience

#### i) *System level agreements*

ACU supports system level agreements but notes that their effectiveness can vary. For example, in 2021, only 11% of the 233 Victorian government schools that indicated a willingness to host ACU pre-service teachers in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACU and the Victorian Government did so.

ACU's experience suggests that many teachers consider supervising professional experience to be an unrewarding chore, despite their willingness to host pre-service teachers. This problem is not specific to ACU. A national study conducted by the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) for the Commonwealth Government found that teachers are typically required to self-nominate for supervisor roles and receive little professional recognition for their work.<sup>5</sup> ACU has observed that the same schools and teachers within those schools often host pre-service teacher professional experience.

ACU recommends that States and Territories engaging in system level agreements first research best practice in supervision, including whether pre-service teacher supervision is recognised in industrial awards and professional standards. If it is, the time and resources allocated to this activity should also be considered.

#### **ACU recommendation 9**

**Prior to engaging in system level agreements, States and Territories to research and publicise best practice, including payment processes for supervision, and whether supervision is recognised in industrial awards and professional standards.**

#### ii) *Centres of excellence*

ACU fully supports the development of centres of excellence to facilitate an integrated approach to teacher education along with high-quality placements for pre-service teachers. Additionally, centres of excellence would also provide opportunities for collaborative research, professional development, and curriculum development. Two ACU initiatives that promote the centre of excellence model include:

1. Hub Schools
2. The National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools Program (NETDS)

#### *Hub Schools*

Hub schools are clusters of schools that work in partnership with a single university. The purpose of the university-school hub partnership is to facilitate deliberate collaboration and action that sees academics and teacher educators work seamlessly alongside one another as part of the ITE program, co-creating and sharing ideas and resources to facilitate an integrated approach to teacher education. In this way, the hub model involves the conscious

<sup>5</sup> ACDE, commissioned by the Federal Department of Education and Training, *Professional Experience in Initial Teacher Education: A Review of Current Practices in Australian ITE*, October 2017, revised March 2018.

collaboration that includes an equal and dialectical relationship between the university and schools in support of developing profession-ready pre-service teachers.

ACU has established several hubs, including:

- The NSW Department of Education school hubs. This includes a twenty-two-school hub located in the inner west of Sydney, a ten-school hub for Schools for Specific Purpose providing intensive support for pre-service teachers with intellectual or physical disabilities, and a third hub with schools in Western Sydney. These hubs are funded by the NSW Department of Education.
- NSW Catholic Education Hubs. This includes hubs in the inner Sydney city, Western Sydney, Broken Bay region and Wollongong.
- The Catholic Schools Metropolitan Melbourne hub.
- The regional hub in Swan Hill on the Victorian/NSW border.

Hubs schools as centres of excellence move beyond the supply of professional experience placements. Hubs as centres of excellence are authentic, evidence-driven approaches that build a nexus between schools and universities and make the ‘university’ visible in schools. This approach has seen programs co-designed, co-taught, and high-quality teacher mentors developed to best prepare pre-service teachers to be effective in diverse and changing educational contexts.

The main impediment to expanding these centres of excellence is funding, which is currently provided only by state governments.

#### *The National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools Program (NETDS)*

The National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools Program (NETDS) sees the highest performing pre-service teachers provided with the knowledge and support to work in low SES schools.

NETDS has produced critical new theoretical understandings regarding teacher education for disadvantaged schools and shown the importance of working in close partnerships with schools to co-develop the scaffolded exposure of pre-service teachers to low-SES schools.

NETDS at ACU, engages with key educational stakeholders to set up mechanisms to channel these exceptional pre-service teachers into sites (centres of excellence) where they can have the greatest impact. This includes a close relationship with partnering schools, regular school visits, careful mentoring during professional experience to ensure these pre-service teachers are well supported and co-developed distinctive workshops that focus on real-world issues related to disadvantage and poverty.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**Expand the “hub model” for professional experience.**

#### *iii) National frameworks*

ACU strongly supports the development of national frameworks that provide specific guidance on professional experience and highlights the excellent work of ACU’s Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education (ILSTE) in this area.

iv) *Pre-service teacher support during placements*

The discussion paper mentions the challenges that full-time, in-situ placements creates for some pre-service teachers, which is a valid concern. Full-time, in-situ placements remain a requirement of teacher regulatory authorities (e.g., the NSW Education Standards Authority, NESA). Part-time placements could be made available in some cases where schools are open to more flexible arrangements. Organising professional experience placements is already administratively complex and demanding, so a technology-supported system is needed to introduce more flexible placement options. There is no doubt that pre-service teachers require more support during their professional experience placements, particularly with regard to their living expenses.

*Immediate living expenses*

Placements result in additional living expenses for pre-service teachers, especially if they are unable to work their regular paid employment or must pay for extra travel costs. More targeted incentives could help alleviate this situation.

For example, support could be directed at pre-service teachers' immediate living expenses rather than providing course cost relief. ACU supports the view that any scholarship for in-demand professions should shift their focus from course cost relief to relieving a pre-service teacher's immediate living expenses, as tuition fees are often not the primary obstacle (due to HECS).<sup>6</sup>

**Recommendation 11**

**Target any future scholarships for teachers at their immediate living expenses rather than course cost relief.**

*Paraprofessionals / Learning Support Officers*

- Pre-service teachers could also be offered paraprofessional roles in schools in a more systematic way, with incentives provided to schools to offer these positions. Employing pre-service teachers as paid Learning Support Officers (LSO) in schools in the early years of their candidature could have several additional benefits: It allows for greater immersion in schools, strengthening the understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.
- Pre-service teachers can gain valuable hands-on experience working with students with diverse needs, which will enhance their preparation.
- Pre-service teachers can serve as additional support staff in schools and classrooms, reducing the workload burden for teachers.
- It offers a part-time salary, with the de facto stipend making teaching a more attractive option thus reducing one of the barriers to uptake.
- Providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to work in schools can help them develop a sense of connection and belonging to the school community, which can improve teacher retention.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Andrew Norton, "Governments are making nursing degrees cheaper or 'free' – these plans are not going to help attract more students," *The Conversation*, 2 September 2022.

However, this initiative would only be applicable to the early years of candidature as final-year pre-service teachers can be registered as conditionally accredited teachers instead of working as an LSO.

### **Recommendation 12**

**Employ pre-service teachers in their early years of study to work as learning support officers in schools.**

#### v) *Integrating theory and practice*

ACU recommends developing stronger and deeper partnerships between universities and schools to foster a closer relationship between theory and practice. This can be achieved through various approaches, including:

- Expanding the hub model for professional experience (discussed above).
- Employing pre-service teachers in their early years as paraprofessionals and/or Learning Support Officers (LSOs) in schools (discussed above).
- Utilising emerging technology such as simulation software, to expose pre-service teachers to the skills they will need.

The integration of technology into education is critical. Emerging technologies, specifically simulation and VR technology, provide a unique opportunity for pre-service teachers to experience the challenges and complexities of the teaching profession in a safe and controlled environment. By using these technologies, pre-service teachers can gain a deeper understanding of the realities of teaching and develop the necessary skills to be effective educators.

Simulation and VR technology enable pre-service teachers to engage in authentic, immersive, and interactive learning experiences. They can simulate real-life classroom scenarios, including challenging student behaviours, and teaching culturally diverse student cohorts. Pre-service teachers can practice a variety of different teaching methods and strategies, receive immediate feedback, and then reflect and refine their strategies. This can help them develop the confidence and competence required to manage real-world teaching situations effectively.

For example, ACU has integrated SimSchool and virtual reality into our education degrees. Such use is a prime example of how technology can be effectively integrated into ITE. In our ITE degrees, virtual reality technology is used to familiarise pre-service teachers with the diverse range of early childhood contexts and experiences they may encounter. Additionally, SimSchool is used to generate data that evaluates the pre-service teacher's performance of their simulated teaching experience. Pre-service teachers are then required to use the data to reflect on the feedback and their practice as they plan for improvement. Moreover, we are exploring the use of Simlab to enable pre-service teachers to practice engaging with parents. The continued exploration and integration of technology into ITE will be essential to help pre-service teachers further develop their skills and strategies.

Teacher regulatory authorities have only recently started to consider the question of whether simulation can count *in place of* rather than *on top of* existing professional experience requirements early in the program. Differences are already emerging across jurisdictions, with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) endorsing some proportion of



simulation as a substitute for professional experience placements, particularly in the early years of ITE candidature, while the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) does not.

Simulation used as a partial substitute for placements can be the enabler of more pre-service teachers completing their degrees on time and entering the profession with additional knowledge and capability. Properly executed simulations require adequate resourcing, but high-quality simulations can be a legitimate substitute for professional experience. Moreover, using simulation and VR technology can enhance the quality of teacher preparation and support continuous professional development. Pre-service teachers can use these technologies to assess their preparedness for the teaching profession, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and set learning goals for ongoing development. This can enable pre-service teachers to be more effective and reflective practitioners, committed to ongoing learning and growth.

Overall, the use of emerging technologies in the preparation of pre-service teachers provides a bridge between theory and practice. It allows pre-service teachers to see how the theories and concepts they have learned can be applied in a real-world setting and gives them the opportunity to refine their teaching skills before they enter the classroom.

### **Recommendation 13**

**Teacher Regulatory Authorities to recognise simulation as a substitute for some physical placements in schools.**

#### *vi) Role of schools in supporting practical experience*

Schools may be more willing to host professional experience if ITE pre-service teachers can directly address the workforce needs of the school.

Currently, school placements are coordinated haphazardly on a school-by-school basis, with no consideration for the workforce requirements of each school. This is despite the fact that pre-service teachers who complete the professional experience at a school, particularly in their final year, are more likely to be employed by that school, often prior to the completion of the professional experience.

In some Canadian provinces, professional experience placements are centrally managed and linked to workforce data. For instance, a school that requires a Design and Technology teacher is assigned a pre-service teacher with that specialisation, who can later be employed on a permanent basis if they are found to be suitable.

A system that matches the pre-service teacher with specific subject needs could make professional experience more relevant to schools and encourage their teachers to supervise them. Placements could become an opportunity for schools, rather an imposition. If managed centrally, it would also provide detailed workforce data at the school level, which would be useful for workforce planning.

ACU recommends a trial of a technological approach that connects ITE pre-service teacher specialisations with school workforce needs.

However, this will be a complex task requiring significant resources, including technological expertise. Queensland recently attempted to implement this system but had to put it on hold

due to the complexities involved. The task is not insurmountable, but it will require funding, expertise, and leadership to succeed.

**Recommendation 14**

**Trial a technological solution involving networked databases maintained by the three major school employer groups (government school authorities, Catholic Education Commissions, and Independent Schools Australia offices) that links the workforce needs of schools with teacher education pre-service teacher placements, noting this task requires technological expertise and Commonwealth coordination, funding and leadership.**

## Reform Area 4

### Improve post-graduate ITE for mid-career entrants

#### Better Pathways for mid-career entrants

As the university partner of Teach for Australia (TFA) since 2018 and an early adopter of flexible and accelerated programs, ACU is well-positioned to comment on the barriers and opportunities for mid-career entrants to teaching.

ACU offers several programs aimed at mid-career entrants, including:

- TFA's accelerated Master of Teaching (Secondary) program.
- Victoria's Birth-5 Early Childhood Education (ECE) accelerated program, which recruits ECE workers with a diploma who can upskill to a Bachelor-level qualification.
- Master of Teaching (Secondary) (Internship) in Victoria which accelerates coursework and placements in the first year so pre-service teachers can work three or four days a week in a school in their second year.

These programs incorporate elements designed to reduce barriers to entry for mid-career changers such as fast-tracking their entry into the classroom to minimise time away from paid employment while learning.

Based on this experience, ACU offers the following observations and recommendations:

1. **Volume of learning and permission to teach:** ACU fully supports maintaining the current volume of learning to ensure accreditation standards, including those suggested by the Panel, are met. However, this volume of learning could be compressed into one or one-and-a-half years through a more flexible offering.

The Panel identified that mid- to late-career professionals with formal qualifications are often frustrated by the time and costs involved in transitioning into teaching. Nevertheless, there are fundamental knowledge and skills these pre-service teachers must acquire, such as the ability to translate subject knowledge into real-world classrooms through lesson planning, etc. The challenge is striking the right balance between recognising the skills these individuals already possess and front-loading the content they need to be "classroom ready."

ACU advocates that all appropriately qualified postgraduate applicants should enter ITE via the Master of Teaching (MTeach), but with the option of conditional accreditation and paid teaching roles (0.6-0.8 FTE) after six months while completing their degree.

This approach will help address workforce shortages and meet the primary concern of career changers, which is the loss of income while studying. However, it will require flexibility from some Teacher Regulatory Authorities (TRAs) to provide permission to teach at an earlier stage.

TRAs need to be assured that quality standards are maintained. To that end, ACU proposes a 24-month trial be undertaken by TRAs that do not currently provide first-year MTeach pre-service teachers conditional registration to teach, to assess its value and impact.

**ACU recommendation 15:**

**That Teacher Regulatory Authorities undertake a 24-month trial allowing postgraduate pre-service teachers with formal qualifications and relevant content depth eligibility to teach after six months or the equivalent of 0.25FTE volume of learning on a conditional basis while completing their Master of Teaching if they do not already do this.**

## 2. Admission requirements

One specific barrier that the panel did not consider is that not all mid-career changers have formal qualifications. There are many mid- to late-career professionals with life experience but no formal qualifications who can become excellent teachers. For example:

- The lab technician who wants to teach chemistry has experience and interest in science but lacks a science degree.
- The bank teller who wants to teach maths or commerce has real practical skills and is intuitively numerate but lacks discipline expertise.
- The technical officer in the Bureau of Meteorology who wants to teach geography but does not have the relevant undergraduate degree.
- The gym instructor who wants to teach Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) but lacks a tertiary degree.

For career changers without tertiary qualifications, academic ability and personal aptitude are complex questions to answer.

Often, their suitability cannot be properly assessed through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes that are systematically applied across all university applicants.

ACU proposes that for career changers without tertiary qualifications (such as in the examples above), RPL only be used to gauge eligibility into a postgraduate pathway program, rather than as credit towards a formal ITE qualification.

Before these applicants are allowed to enrol in a MTeach, their personal aptitude and academic ability should be carefully assessed through a Graduate Certificate, which may articulate into a MTeach.<sup>7</sup>

Within these strictures, ACU recommends ITE entry open more widely for career changers who want to teach but have no formal qualifications.

TRAs will need to show a positive bias and flexibility in this matter because, for example, some NSW preconditions cannot be met by a candidate with no undergraduate degree at all.

Two steps are needed before postgraduate ITE entry can open more widely for career changers without formal qualifications:

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<sup>7</sup> Another reason for RPL for entry rather than credit is that entry is an internal university decision whereas credit must be justified to TEQSA, with learning outcomes mapped against the credit provided.

- i. An agreed process for determining equivalence between life experience and undergraduate learning; and,
- ii. A willingness of TRAs to be more flexible in recognising these non-conventional yet legitimate pathways into postgraduate ITE study.

**ACU recommendation 16:**

**Encourage career changers with relevant life experience but no formal qualifications to enter ITE, but for these candidates, confine recognition of prior learning (RPL) to eligibility for entry into a pathway program and assess their academic skills and personal aptitude to teach as they progress through this program.**

**Building the evidence base**

ACU is supportive of developing a framework for assessing the success of mid-career programs for the purpose of creating a body of best practice knowledge and has three proposals in this regard:

1. **Inclusion of cost / benefit analysis:** The discussion paper makes several references to the high cost of delivery for accelerated programs in relation to undergraduate programs, but no systematic cost/benefit analysis is proposed to assess the relative cost-effectiveness of the different programs and models of delivery. With significant variations in key factors, such as retention rates, a robust analysis is required to accurately understand the relative cost of delivery.
2. **Funded research program:** To support the development of an evidence-based framework, ACU recommends that it be implemented via a Request for Proposal process where funding is allocated for its development. This will ensure that specific requirements are identified at the outset, and that experts are selected and enabled to undertake the research program to develop the framework.
3. **Data and administrative burden:** Consistent with the discussion paper's approach to performance-based indicators, the development of any framework should recognise the existing heavy burden of administration and regulation and seek to leverage existing data and metrics wherever possible.

**Recommendation 17**

**That development of a Framework for assessing the success of mid-career programs be implemented through a Request for Proposal process, leverage existing data and metrics, and include a cost / benefit analysis.**

### **Increasing flexibility**

ACU notes that while some mid-career changers want intensive, accelerated programs and employment-based programs there are some who prefer two-year programs they can complete part-time because this better suits their learning style, or they have family or community responsibilities and/or work.

We also note that many of the barriers identified for mid-career changers can equally apply to graduate pre-service teachers, including financial pressures, program length and content, status of the profession and competing commitments.

For these reasons, ACU considers that rather than developing an increasing number of bespoke programs targeting mid-career entrants, it would be more effective to provide a range of programs that address the admission and delivery needs of all prospective pre-service teachers regardless of their background.

## Attachment A: Australian Catholic University Profile

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition.

ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with seven campuses across three states and one territory. Campuses are located in North Sydney, Strathfield, Blacktown, Canberra, Melbourne, Ballarat, and Brisbane. ACU also has a campus in Rome, Italy.

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world, with over 33,000 students and 2,300 staff.

ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning. ACU is the number one university in the country when it comes to graduate employment outcomes three years after graduation, with a 95.5 per cent employment rate.<sup>8</sup>

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education, educating the largest number of undergraduate nursing and teaching students in Australia<sup>9</sup> and serving a significant workforce need in these areas. Under the demand driven system, ACU sought to focus and build on these strengths.

ACU has four faculties: Health Services; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy.

As part of its commitment to educational excellence, ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on research areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good. To underpin its plan for research intensification, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in six research institutes.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, the public standing of ACU's research has improved dramatically. The last Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment (in 2018) awarded ACU particularly high ratings in the fields of research identified as strategic priorities and in which investment has been especially concentrated. For example, ACU more than doubled the total number of top scores of 5 (well above world standard) in the 2018 ERA. In health sciences, ACU did not receive a single score below 5 while in education, ACU is one of only four universities in Australia to achieve a top score of 5 in the 4-digit fields of research. ACU's rapidly growing reputation in research is in line with its steady expansion.

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<sup>8</sup> QILT (August 2020), 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L).

<sup>9</sup> Department of Education and Training, 2019 Higher Education Data Collection – Students, Special Courses.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Catholic University, ACU Research, [acu.edu.au/research](http://acu.edu.au/research).