

ISA SUBMISSION TO THE TEACHER EDUCATION EXPERT PANEL DISCUSSION PAPER

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1. KEY POINTS

The review of existing practices of higher education providers' delivery of initial teacher education (ITE) programs is of national importance given the current challenges posed by the national teacher shortage.

To ensure graduating teachers are better prepared for the classroom, ISA supports improving the quality of ITE programs and placements by:

- providing clearer guidelines to supervising teachers as to their role and expectations of the student's practicum
- investigating the design of practicums, their duration and exploring the possibility of traineeships/internships/apprenticeships in schools
- greater student supervision, advice, and support from universities for ITE students when on placement
- developing stronger partnerships between ITE providers and schools
- developing nationally consistent core elements for every ITE program.

2. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body representing the Independent school sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs). Through these Associations, ISA represents more than 1,200 schools and 690,000 students, accounting for 17 per cent of Australian school enrolments.

ISA's major role is to bring the unique needs and contributions of Independent schools to the attention of the Australian Government and to represent the sector on national issues.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a specific educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. A number of Independent schools have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs or to reflect the religious values of a community. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for eight per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

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Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as grammar schools in some states
- Community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other factors.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some Independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the Independent sector. Four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

3. ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

ISA prepared this submission in response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper. ISA consulted with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) in preparing this submission.

4. INTRODUCTION

Strengthening ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates is essential for all schools and an important part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan to attract future teachers and improve teacher retention rates.

ISA welcomes this Discussion Paper and the opportunity to provide input to the four reform areas. It is critical that these issues form part of the national conversation regarding the challenges facing schools in attracting and retaining classroom-ready graduate teachers.

Although short-term incentives are welcomed, a long-term vision for the national teacher workforce from pre-service to experienced teachers, school staff and leaders is necessary for sustained impact.

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5. REFORM AREAS

5.1 REFORM AREA 1: STRENGTHEN ITE PROGRAMS TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE, CLASSROOM READY GRADUATES

5.1.1 Evidence-based teaching practices

Requiring the inclusion of evidence-based teaching practices in ITE courses is important. It is also essential to arm graduate teachers with the necessary range of teaching strategies and knowledge they will need in order to be effective in the classroom. Critical to their success as an educator, a preservice teacher must have knowledge of, and opportunity to practice a significant number of pedagogical techniques and be able to critically reflect on what worked, what didn't work, and have sufficient professional judgement to adjust strategies as necessary.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers requires graduate teachers to be able to plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content, and effective teaching strategies and to be able to demonstrate a range of strategies to support student engagement. Based on AIS feedback, there seems to be a general lack of awareness among new teacher graduates about the range of teaching strategies they should know, or when and how to use them.

While new teachers may graduate with a basic knowledge of teaching strategies, according to some Independent schools this knowledge is typically limited to a narrow range of strategies, and graduate teachers are often ill prepared to select the most appropriate strategy/ies to engage students or in some cases to plan to deliver an effective lesson.

Acknowledging that it takes time and practice to develop sound professional judgement, something a new teacher will learn in their first years in the profession, without a sound theoretical knowledge base it makes exercising and developing good judgement that much harder.

Combining theory with practice in practical teaching experiences is critical to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to apply evidence-based approaches and adjust practice accordingly in response to a range of classroom contexts. As the Independent sector is diverse, schools can offer a variety of choice for ITE students, to give them a range of experience in schools of different sizes, geolocation or different pedagogical philosophy or faith.

Figure 1.1 in the Discussion Paper provides a useful summary of proposed core content and alignment with the Graduate Teacher Standards; however, it lacks several key elements. One key missing element is reflective practice. This is an essential skill for new teachers as they work their way through a variety of concepts and lesson plans.

While the discussion paper refers to pre-service teachers having 'knowledge of ...' various concepts and practices, knowing when and how often to use them and how to bring these practices together and sequence them appropriately, the importance of ongoing reflective practice to assess impacts on learning, and how to accommodate for the nuances of the classroom environment is a critical skill for pre-service teachers. Knowledge of the effective use of teaching practices, and how they contribute to highly effective teaching has to be a key area of focus for ITE students.

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The first section in Figure 1.1 on the brain and learning is an important key element, yet there is a danger that a holistic view of the student is lost, and the focus becomes only the brain and how it learns. Consistent feedback from AISs is that Independent schools engaged in Teacher Growth and Development Programs strongly state that ITE programs should teach cognitive science content that directly relates to how students learn, including a holistic focus on the learner. ISA would advocate for this content to be considered as part of the core content for ITE programs in Australia.

The section in Figure 1.1 on effective pedagogical practices also lacks the essential element of how to design engaging and interesting lessons that are developmentally appropriate and build on student interest in the world around them.

5.1.2 Amending Accreditation Standards and Procedures

Making changes to any of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is not a small undertaking, and if considered, ISA would suggest that this would need to encompass a review of the entire Standards framework. It is not feasible to make changes to one or two standards without considering how others will be impacted.

5.1.3 Curriculum specific content

Feedback from AISs stated that where teachers require specific curriculum knowledge, this should be appropriately covered in the ITE course. Sound pedagogical practice is something all teachers must learn, regardless of specialisation, so this should form the foundation of any ITE course. Where subject matter expertise is required for specialist teaching areas it should be provided in addition to core content.

5.1.4 Ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices

Examples, or illustrations of practice of the use of evidence-based practices are generally limited across curriculum specific domains. The Independent school sector would welcome an audit of existing resources and investing in the development of new resources which show demonstration of different evidence-based practices in action, particularly in learning areas where resources are scarce, or may be lacking in quality assurance such as The Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies.

5.2 REFORM AREA 2: STRENGTHEN THE LINK BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AND FUNDING OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

5.2.1 ITE performance measures

Assessing the quality and relevance of ITE courses is critical to ensure the quality of graduate teachers. Both quantitative and qualitative outcomes should be measured when assessing the performance of ITE programs. ISA suggests that graduation numbers and attrition rates are not necessarily indicators of quality ITE programs.

More graduates may not equate to more teachers if the quality of graduates is sub-optimal. Some attrition in ITE courses should be expected and may even be an indicator of universities enforcing high standards for their pre-service teachers, ultimately leading to better quality graduate teachers.

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ISA would support mechanisms to increase enrolment in teaching courses while maintaining a quality standard. An overreliance on quantitative performance measures may lead to universities lowering standards to meet graduation quotas.

The agencies currently charged with the responsibility of approving ITE courses have not been empowered, beyond the initial course accreditation, with the authority or funding to monitor quality or implementation of core content in ITE programs. Although it would be challenging, action and measures to ensure national consistency in the delivery of ITE programs would improve quality.

Though jurisdictions have the responsibility for approval of ITE courses in their State/Territory, funding for the ITE providers comes from the Commonwealth. Without a closer connection between funding and the authorising agency, it may be difficult to incentivise providers to improve the quality of their offerings.

Further, refinements to existing data collections, discussed below, could also greatly assist in understanding the efficacy of ITE programs and the quality and performance of graduates.

5.2.2 Public reporting

While the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection has value, at present most of the data is based on teachers' own perceptions gathered through a voluntary survey. Many practicing teachers do not complete the survey. Similarly, there are registered teachers that are not practicing teachers who also complete the survey.

Registration data captures the number of teachers with active registration but not the number who are actually teaching. Many former teachers choose to maintain active registration to keep teaching as a fall-back option. This can provide a false impression of the actual number of practising teachers in the workforce.

ITE data captures graduation figures but does not show how many of those graduates actually go on to teach in schools, nor whether what they learned in their course enabled them to gain and maintain employment as a teacher.

There may be scope to further refine the ATWD to allow greater understanding of these key issues.

5.2.3 Public transparency

A nationally consistent set of performance and assessment measures that ITE providers are assessed against regularly by an external body would be of value. Depending on the scope of the work, an existing statutory authority within the national education architecture could potentially take on these functions.

5.2.4 Excellence pool for higher quality programs

When ITE providers deliver teacher education courses that meet quality standards, market forces play a part in driving quality. Where the number of graduating students is the only measurable goal of a successful ITE provider, there is not a demand for quality or for strategies to improve programs.

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If there is some assessment of the quality of ITE providers, and national data which illustrates which graduates are gaining and staying in employment, this may drive greater demand for quality ITE programs.

5.3 REFORM AREA 3: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING

5.3.1 System level agreements

Establishing clearer, centralised arrangements for professional experience placements in Independent schools may be beneficial. This would require a different process to agreements with education systems due to the Independent nature of the sector.

A current challenge faced by many Independent schools is the short notice often provided by ITE providers seeking to place a student for practicum. Planning in advance for placements and providing schools with an annual schedule may help Independent schools accommodate more ITE students for their practicums.

5.3.2 Centres of excellence

Some Independent schools have expressed a desire to have stronger and more productive partnerships with ITE providers to facilitate a more effective, supportive, and consistent approach to practicums for ITE students. Principals of Independent schools have the autonomy to seek out and develop ongoing strategic partnerships with universities in their geographical regions to further support pre-service teachers.

Other Independent schools have shown interest in being a site of learning or a teaching hub to support ITE students. Some Independent schools have expressed a desire for a model that gives schools direct access to new ITE graduates while also allowing graduates to contextualise their practice in specific school settings. Strong partnerships between ITE providers and hub schools to enhance high-quality practical experience for ITE students is beneficial. The opportunity to develop genuine partnerships provide mutual opportunities and flexible models for sustained, immersive experiences that are broader than a traditional block professional experience placement.

5.3.3 National frameworks

Specific guidance through a national framework for the delivery of practical experiences for ITE students would be beneficial.

A national framework could consider including recommendations for timing and duration that sits outside the current traditional block placements still being used by the majority of universities. Guidance could include the need for targeted professional learning and the provision of time release for practicum mentors/supervisors. This acknowledges that effective mentoring or supervision of ITE students requires training and time.

To ensure graduating teachers are better prepared for the classroom, ISA supports improving the quality of teaching placements by:

- providing clearer guidelines to supervising teachers as to their role and expectations of the student's practicum and increase time provided to mentors/supervisors while the ITE student is on placement

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- providing ITE students with the necessary preparation prior to their practicum experience in school
- having additional and/or longer practicums where students are required to intensely focus on particular aspects to gain further experience e.g., teaching students with disability and making adjustments, classroom management, differentiation of teaching programs, working with parents and carers, cultural competency etc
- greater student supervision, advice, and support from universities when on placement
- exploration of traineeships, mentoring and other initiatives so that graduates are well supported before embarking on their teaching career e.g., first six months in a school graduates could be employed and paid as a teacher, though acting as teacher aide, observing highly experienced teachers, supported gradually into teaching their own class/es
- removing financial barriers by providing financial assistance to students when on teaching practicums so they can afford to be absent from paid work for lengthy periods of time
- duration of the practicum experience requires review
- Independent schools and ITE providers could do more to build in opportunities for exposure to communication with parents during practical experience placements. While the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers require that a Graduate teacher must be able to engage parents in a child's learning, the reality for most graduate teachers is that they start their first teaching job having had little to no contact with parents and therefore have little knowledge from which to draw

Acknowledging that it is not possible to provide a preservice teacher with all of the classroom management skills or differentiation skills they will need for their teaching career, ITE courses should provide foundational knowledge and experience. Graduate teachers will continue to build their skills and knowledge throughout their career as they encounter challenges in different contexts.

5.3.4 Student support during placements

Adopting an approach to practicum placements that allows ITE students to have more time in schools would assist students to:

- apply learning in timely and authentic ways, enabling more effective and sustainable learning
- develop deeper relationships with their mentor/supervisor and with students in a school; this exposes them to change and growth over time, and to different activities/rhythms across a school year.

ISA recommends that an intern/apprenticeship model be explored and trialled to determine best outcomes for graduating teachers.

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5.3.5 Integrating theory and practice

To enhance student learning and preparedness to teach, it is important to consider duration/timing of practicum placements as well as how theory is being learnt and applied in pedagogical practice.

An adjusted approach where students engage in one school environment regularly across a year in balance with block placements would expose them to:

- the natural rhythms of a school, including the non-theoretical elements of being a teacher
- opportunities for timely application and reflections on theory in relation to practice.
- develop relationships with staff, students, and parents.

5.3.6 Role of schools in supporting practical experience

Based on feedback from AISs, some Independent schools noted that if they hold responsibility for supporting, supervising, and evaluating an ITE student on placement, then their views should hold weight with regard to a student at risk of failure. Some schools would like a bigger say on the pass/fail determination of students where they believe a preservice teacher does not demonstrate the standard required of a graduate teacher.

Further feedback stated that Independent schools would like more communication from the university when an ITE student is on practicum. Visits and check-ins are very welcome.

5.4 REFORM AREA 4: IMPROVE POSTGRADUATE ITE FOR MID-CAREER ENTRANTS

5.4.1 Increasing flexibility

Increased flexibility in ITE course delivery to meet the needs of students that are working in education (either teaching or paraprofessional roles) while they are studying would be of benefit. Many of these students work full time and seek a course delivered primarily online.

Independent schools and AISs put forward the following range of options in their feedback for this submission:

- Opportunities for face-to-face engagement and in person assessment, which could be structured as intensive residential schools (one week a semester or trimester) or a weekend/short delivery of face-to-face intensive learning a couple of times a semester or trimester.
- Residential schools could be scheduled during school holidays to allow these students to attend. Weekend/short delivery on campus sessions could be planned during school holidays where possible. Models that already provide accelerated learning pathways (such as the University of Newcastle) could be used as examples for other ITE providers to follow.
- For preservice teachers working in school-based roles while they are studying (in either teaching or paraprofessional roles), ITE providers could have greater acknowledgement that

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these students are applying their learning as they study, rather than waiting until they graduate to put their learning into practice.

- Consideration for alternative recognition of in school experience in lieu of traditional practical experience could be given to ITE students in these situations, particularly those already working as educators.
- For mid-career entrants who can secure full time employment as a teacher while they study for their formal teaching qualification, flexibility in ITE course delivery is important. There needs to be a more common-sense approach to the consideration of recognition of prior learning, particularly for mid-career professionals with significant subject matter expertise. For these mid-career entrants, with a great deal to offer students, the barriers to making the transition to teaching need to be minimised.

ISA strongly supports any action to recognise previous study/experience/skills, however we would caution against any framework being unnecessarily complex and encourage some flexibility in application. ISA also acknowledges the need for all potential teachers to engage in some profession specific pre-service study and practical skills development.

5.4.2 Building the evidence base for mid-career

Assessing the success of transitions to teaching for mid-career entrants should help inform opportunities for improving the process and could also help attract more mid-career professionals to teaching.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- ISA recommends that action and measures to ensure national consistency of key core content, theory and practice are included in the delivery of ITE programs
- ISA recommends that ITE providers are assessed regularly against a nationally consistent set of performance and assessment measures
- ISA recommends that ITE providers consider how they could adapt their course delivery to meet the needs of students that are working in education, either in teaching or para-professional roles, while they are studying.

7. CONCLUSION

ISA welcomes this important review and opportunity for input into the national conversation around the delivery of ITE programs in Australia.

ISA supports the strengthening of initial teacher education programs focused on developing teachers' knowledge and understanding of evidence-based pedagogical approaches, as well as equipping teachers with practical, classroom management practices and skills.

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ISA supports a concentrated focus on assisting teachers' understanding in meeting diverse needs of students and working in collaboration with parents/carers.

It is important to note there will always be attrition in ITE. This is a result of students realising the profession is not for them, therefore it is essential for students to have enough early exposure in schools in their first year of study so that prospective teachers can make that judgement in the early stages of ITE.

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