

Australian Catholic University

Submission to the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government

The Future of Education community conversation: Discussion Paper – Workforce

June 2018

Submission to the ACT Future of Education community conversation discussion paper on the teaching workforce

Executive Summary

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the ACT government’s “Discussion Paper – Workforce” (the discussion paper), which is an aspect of *The future of education ACT community conversation*.

ACU affirms the recognition of teachers as expert professionals charged with leading the formation of young peoples’ lives, a principle central to the discussion paper. The preparation of teachers for the profession and the enhancement of leadership within the profession is the core business of ACU’s education team, both in the ACT and nationally. We support your endeavours to collaboratively critique current practices with a view to enhancing the quality of teaching and leadership within the educational community in ACT.

ACU makes the following recommendations:

- (i) That the ACT government give the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) reforms the opportunity to demonstrate their efficacy.
- (ii) That the ACT government support the TEMAG advice on selection into initial teacher education (ITE) programs and reject simplistic requirements for admission based on Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR).
- (iii) That the ACT government reject a Master level qualification as a pre-requisite for teaching.
- (iv) That the ACT government support greater practical experience for ITE students through equitable funding decisions.
- (v) That the ACT government support final year ITE students working part of their final year as paid interns to allow more time for teachers to focus on their core teaching and learning activities.
- (vi) That the ACT government establish an “ACT Academy of Teacher Professional Learning” drawing on the expertise of ACU and the University of Canberra in partnership with ACT’s Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) to deliver modern, relevant, research-based professional learning in the ACT.

Responses to issues raised in the discussion paper

Teacher Selection

The TEMAG reforms are showing great promise for improving the quality of teaching graduates although they need time to bear fruit. TEMAG provides a national blueprint for all stages of teacher education, including selection for admission into ITE, accreditation of courses, and required standards for transition into the classroom. These reforms should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their efficacy.

The TEMAG report highlighted the importance of teacher selection. The discussion paper quotes Professor Geoff Masters from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) that “following recent demand-driven reforms, some universities are admitting larger numbers of teacher education students with increasingly low Year 12 performances.” However, Professor Masters’ views were published before the TEMAG reforms had come into effect,¹ as these reforms were only accepted by the Australian Government in 2015.

TEMAG rejected simplistic requirements for admission into ITE programs and advocated rich selection methods to answer the complex question of who is likely to make a good teacher. There is no research that firmly establishes whether a positive or negative correlation exists between an Australian student’s school results and their later success or failure as a teacher. In fact, research involving student teachers in Australia indicates that there is no correlation between high academic performance at school and practical success as a teacher.² ACU recommends the ACT government follow the TEMAG approach in considering strong selection processes.

ACU values diversity in selection so that the teaching profession can be enhanced by future quality graduates who represent people from regional, disadvantaged, lower socio-economic status and Indigenous backgrounds. This diversity is as important in ACT as it is elsewhere in Australia. As such, ACU offers multiple pathways into teacher education programs all of which are accredited by the TQI. In doing so, ACU recognises that some students face disadvantage and adversity that restrict their entry to university based on a school leaving score.

Many universities recognise the ATAR as a blunt selection tool and some universities (e.g. the Australian National University) are moving away from the ATAR as the measure of selection. ACU is moving towards a more comprehensive system of selection that values both academic and non-academic qualities of the applicant, including life experience, attributes such as motivation and passion, and also offers students a range of entry points into higher degree study such as bridging courses, preparation courses and recognition of diploma courses that are aligned to entry into a teacher preparation course (e.g. Early Childhood).

¹ Masters, Geoff N. (2015). ‘Big five’ challenges in school education. *Teacher*, 10 August 2015. NB: not 2017 as indicated in the discussion paper.

² Research confirms that ratings of performance by associate teachers on placement are unrelated to their school performance. See Wright, V. J. ‘Is ATAR useful for predicting the success of Australian students in Initial Teacher Education?’, *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, (2015), 40 (9).

Teaching remains a highly demanding yet relatively under-remunerated profession. In the absence of changes that make a career in teaching more attractive, any changes to teacher selection that rely on simplistic admission standards will reduce the number of future teachers rather than raise the status of the teaching profession. The TEMAG reforms will improve the profession without damaging the workforce. These reforms are being implemented nationally and ACU recommends the ACT government continue to support them.

Masters degrees for teachers

The discussion paper asks: “Should a higher qualification level be required for teacher preparation programs? Gradually establishing a Master level qualification as the minimum standard can be achieved with little disruption to the supply of new teachers.”

ACU values multiple pathways into the teaching profession but there is no research to suggest that a graduate program is a better program. Also, regardless of the merits of Masters-level preparation, the higher education system is simply not equipped to provide it. Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) for postgraduate degrees are rationed by the Commonwealth Government and allocated on a historically-fixed basis. Any move to graduate-only ITE courses would require the allocation of significantly more postgraduate CSPs from the Commonwealth Government, which looks highly unlikely in the current fiscal environment.

In the absence of additional postgraduate CSPs, the majority of students undertaking postgraduate ITE would do so on a full fee-paying basis, piling large postgraduate debts on top of their existing undergraduate HECS-HELP debts. This would put a career as a teacher further out of reach of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and further reduce the desirability of teaching as a career for students who want, or need, to be out in the workforce as soon as possible.

Students who undertake existing four-year undergraduate ITE courses – the same length as an undergraduate degree in Law – graduate from ACU with the level of pedagogical skill and training necessary to commence work as a teacher.

Practical experience

The discussion paper asks: “Is greater emphasis on practical experience required? Should the final term of an education university degree be connected to the upcoming workplace of a new teacher, to enable a clearer understanding of their school environment?”

The short answer is, yes. An effective way of increasing practical professional experience is through an embedded, school-based ITE model, which involves the ITE student spending a significant portion (though not all) of their candidature at a school, where they work, in effect, as an additional staff member under supervision, and where university academics visit the school to deliver the theory component of the degree. The model requires flexibility on the part of the university to deliver classes to relatively small numbers of ITE students at the school, and also on the part of the school to host larger numbers of ITE students and their associated tuition. The model allows a greater immersion in the school environment and strengthens the relationship between theory and practice between the school and the university.

ACU conducts some embedded, school-based ITE at St. Mary Mackillop College at Tuggeranong. As with all of its supervising teachers, ACU provides free professional development programs which contribute to the supervising teacher’s accreditation hours with the TQI.

Yet there are more significant costs associated with the embedded model. Universities are delivering instruction to a relatively small group of students on a school site, smaller than would attend an equivalent class on a university campus. These inefficiencies raise staff costs for universities. Host schools also incur costs due to the additional and generous time teachers give to supervising students, partly off-set by the work the students perform, the opportunity to identify promising candidates for future employment, and the per-diem pay supervising teachers receive for their work.

An increased roll-out of the embedded model would increase the practical experience afforded ITE students and would benefit these students. It is precisely because of these benefits that universities incur the additional costs involved. But the ACT government will need to financially support the model’s expansion, as universities cannot continue to bear larger staffing costs on an on-going basis.

This financial support should also be distributed equitably, so that the benefits of greater practical experience apply to all school sectors (Catholic and Independent, as well as Government) and all universities providing ITE (i.e. ACU and the University of Canberra). ACU was disappointed by the decision of the ACT Government, announced in the 2018-19 Budget, to allocate funding to only one local university (the University of Canberra) for “improved collaboration” with schools on ITE and professional learning. Across all of its campuses, ACU is the largest provider of ITE in Australia and has highly-developed skills in teaching, research and collaboration across all school sectors.

Regarding the final term of an education university degree being connected to the upcoming workplace of a new teacher, ACU supports this initiative which can, and should,

be linked in to the point made later in the discussion paper that “teachers need to be relieved of administrative work outside their core focus of facilitating learning” (p.9). ACU recommends a greater use of final year teaching students working part of their final year as paid interns to allow more time for teachers to focus on their core teaching and learning activities. An “Associate Teacher Internship” could, for example:

- help with home, school and community partnerships;
- help to develop and implement data management systems;
- assist teachers to plan and modify curriculum and learning activities for individual students; and,
- help with extra curricula programs and activities.

Opportunities for the future

The discussion paper notes, “There is a real opportunity presenting itself at the moment to further strengthen relationships with local tertiary institutions to deliver research-based teacher education combined with modern, relevant professional learning in the ACT.”

Research-based teacher education should be better integrated with modern, relevant professional learning and in doing so, ACU recommends the creation of an “ACT Academy of Teacher Professional Learning” (the Academy) that draws on the expertise of ACU and the University of Canberra in partnership with ACT’s TQI.

The purpose of the Academy would be to provide high-quality professional learning for teachers and school leaders that would count towards TQI professional development requirements as well as towards Masters of Education or Master of Educational Leadership qualifications. The objective would be to strengthen the relationship between theory and practice, build teacher capacity as leaders of education both in the classroom as well as in the school and community, and broaden awareness amongst ACT school communities of new insights into pedagogy, assessment, curriculum, policy and delivery.

ACU has a very positive relationship with ACT teacher employment systems and we value our partnership with the TQI and the ACT Department of Education. We would welcome further discussion on any of the matters outlined in this response.

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 four states and one territory. Campuses are located in North Sydney, Strathfield, Canberra, Melbourne, Ballarat, Brisbane and Adelaide. ACU also shares a campus in Rome, Italy with the Catholic University of America.

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world. Today, ACU has more than 33,000 students and 2,300 staff.³

ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning. ACU graduates are highly sought-after by employers, with a 94 per cent employment rate.⁴

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education, educating the largest number of undergraduate nursing and teaching students in Australia⁵ and serving a significant workforce need in these areas. Under the demand driven system, ACU sought to focus and build on these strengths.

Since 2014, ACU has had four faculties: Health Services; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. The consolidation of the previous six faculties has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners.

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.⁶

In recent years, the public standing of ACU's research has improved dramatically. The 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment awarded ACU particularly high ratings in the fields of research identified as strategic priorities and in which investment has been especially concentrated. These include selected areas of Health, as well as Education, Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy, in which ACU's research was rated as "above" or "well above" world standard.

³ Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

⁴ Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) 2016.

⁵ Department of Education and Training, 2016 Higher Education Data Collection – Students, Special Courses. Section 8, table 8.3

⁶ Australian Catholic University, ACU Research, <http://research.acu.edu.au/institutes/>