



Australian Council of State School Organisations Limited

Submission

to the

Teacher Education Expert Panel  
Discussion Paper

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*One voice for every child in government education*

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Please indicate your name if an individual, or your organisation name if you are responding on behalf of an organisation.

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## Introduction

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) is the voice for the families and communities of Australia's 2.6 million government school students. We are one of Australia's oldest continuously operating national parent organisations and possibly the world's oldest. We were established in 1947 to bring together various state and territory parent organisations and other families interested in public education to develop national policies that reflect how families want public education to be provided for all children. Membership varies due to differences in how our members in state and territory peak parent organisations have addressed national issues over time; however, our commitment to promoting equality and access for all young people attending government schools in Australia remains consistent.

We believe that the primary responsibility of governments, federal, state and territory is to establish and maintain government education systems that:

- Positively engage with family and community at all levels of education;
- are of the highest calibre and open to all, regardless of race, gender, religion, social/economic status, geographic location, or ability; and
- can respond to changing educational landscapes by developing flexible and diverse programs to meet all student needs.

ACSSO holds that the quality of education is closely related to the quality of teachers.

The selection of potential teachers, their training, subsequent development, and professional attitudes and standing are all critical variables in school education quality.

Among the qualities to be looked for and developed in teachers are enthusiasm, imagination, acceptance, empathy, sensitivity and perceptiveness, affinity with young people and an ongoing desire to support the learning journey of younger generations. Teachers need to build and sustain positive relationships with their students, the families of their students, their colleagues, and the community they serve. Many of our more successful teachers come to their initial training with valuable prior learning and experiences.

ACSSO believes that education is a partnership between the home and school. Teaching is most successful when the teacher can contextualise content delivery to bring relevance to the learner.

Teachers' contributions to developing a collaborative school community are essential to good schooling. Teachers should recognise that the school is an integral part of the community and encourage families' active participation.

Family engagement must be incorporated into pre-service training. Universities must instil in their students the importance and purpose of sharing the wealth of knowledge held by all parties to inform their practice and meet the particular requirements of their students.



## Reform Area 1: Strengthen ITE programs to deliver effective, classroom-ready graduates.

Teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention are all interconnected. Still, Australia needs a policy framework that connects them consistently and is tied to national and state/territory educational goals and standards.

Although developing a policy framework that combines teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention presents significant hurdles, ACSSO believes these challenges must be solved.

Recruiting quality people into the teaching profession is difficult due to its poor standing in Australia and lack of attractiveness. Those who are currently in the profession have contributed to this issue. Too many teachers provide a negative image in the media, on social media, and elsewhere about being overworked, underpaid, undervalued, and subjected to violence. The marketing of the profession, by the profession itself, is nothing more than a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In Australia, the teaching profession must compete with firms with sophisticated human capital systems to support their staff. As a result, ITE requires assistance in attracting and keeping committed and diverse people.

*ACSSO agrees that all ITE programs should prioritise the four key content areas identified in the discussion paper. As a secondary priority, ITE should include resiliency. Building and maintaining teacher resilience.*

Although teaching can be rewarding, teachers face numerous and complex obstacles in a sector that has seen work intensification, more accountability, and calls for teacher quality improvements. Teacher burnout and stress are significant problems. However, teacher resilience has been connected to positive outcomes such as teacher quality, enthusiasm, devotion, and positive student outcomes. Teacher shortages have resulted in larger class sizes, multi-stage classrooms, and various other arrangements. This frequently results in reactive rather than proactive strategies.

We know that teacher resilience directly impacts their job satisfaction, engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation; this is crucial for the profession, particularly considering that many new teachers leave within the first five years. We know that resilience is a quality that can be learned, nurtured and supported through time by being aware of ideas, behaviours, and responses that work as protective factors in challenging situations.

Another shortcoming of teacher education programs is that they must prepare teachers for the reality of their professions, their tensions, and issues, and how to cope with such challenges while staying strong. Currently, it appears that Teacher Education programs focus on a teacher's pedagogical skill development and student test results whilst overlooking the social and emotional aspects of teaching.

### Enabling factors for learning

Students' thoughts, feelings, and attitudes generally impact their interest in studying and involvement in class. As a result, getting to know and understand students should be a primary focus in the classroom. A classroom practitioner must be aware of the student's learning readiness. Teachers need strategies to allow students to discuss who they are, their thoughts and feelings, and their overall physical education experiences, a wellness check. Giving students a voice can improve their learning experiences while informing and guiding the learning.



ACSSO believes that within the core content, enabling factors for learning should be the priority in any ITE program. Creating a caring environment for learning is critical for teachers to develop a classroom environment that supports mutual support and caring and fosters a sense of community. Learning and teaching are most enjoyable when the student is ready and interested in learning, and the teacher is interested in education. Furthermore, the entire process benefits significantly when all participants care for each other. An environment where students are known, valued and cared for facilitates optimal learning.

### Classroom Management or Student Engagement

Classroom management ACSSO believes should be reframed to *student engagement*; the classroom management area outlined in the discussion paper gives students little agency over their learning. “Teacher rules” is a little archaic and appears dictatorial with punitive consequences.

There are so many benefits to building a classroom that feels like a community:

- improved student learning,
- respectful discussions, and
- a growth mindset, are just a few.

Accepted classroom behaviours can help establish community when built on collective classroom values.

In recent years, teacher education programs have been required to react to government agendas centred on academic achievement. Inclusive education and classroom management/student engagement programs have been considered secondary.

Unfortunately, classroom management/student engagement abilities are significantly more sophisticated than “excellent teaching”. A common misconception shared by both new and seasoned teachers is that if their teaching is engaging, there should be no cause for misbehaviour. A young person’s behaviour can be linked to many challenges, least of all the teacher’s delivery – however, the teacher’s response can adversely affect it.

However, more than curiosity is required. Classroom energy varies, as do skill levels, and only some are inspired by the same material. Teachers must read the room and react to various student needs to keep things moving. Quality teaching addresses individual needs: knowing and valuing the student is critical.

Professional learning in dealing with behavioural challenges would be of great value in an ITE program. Teachers need to be proficient in identifying and using proactive measures. They should be assisted in developing such abilities.

ACSSO’s position is that:

- Despite appearances, the key to a well-managed engaging classroom is not magic. Most of it is built on building *strong relationships and connections with students*.
- Students are more willing to follow the “rules” when they trust their teachers, and teachers gain more from their teaching experience when they try to get to know each student on a more personal level.
- Students must be able to collaboratively co-design the learning environment.
- Each class should have a more family-like atmosphere. Teachers must dive deep into what they are doing well and what might be improved. Teacher-student connection development needs to be an area of continuous improvement for everyone.



- Engage parents and carers in all areas. Every student is someone's child, and parents/ caregivers want teachers to understand, like and see the strengths students possess. A healthy relationship with a student's family will benefit the classroom.

#### Trauma-informed teaching

A critical area for today's teacher is 'Trauma-informed practice'. Teachers need to understand how trauma can impact learning and behaviour. With this approach, teachers can consider what student behaviour may be telling them. And enable them to reflect on their teaching practices to find ways to better support students experiencing trauma.

When traumatised, students may become distracted or take longer to accomplish activities. They may become more irritated or jittery. They're also more likely to fall behind in class or get in trouble for misbehaving.

We know that *trauma can inhibit or entirely halt our ability to learn.*

#### Inclusive education and teaching the neurodiverse.

Today's classroom is far more inclusive of the many types of student learners. We are also far more aware of our learners' diversity and the various adjustments that should be made to ensure these young people have access to the curriculum. Many of our young people remain undiagnosed or do not qualify for support. Our early career teachers must be able to adjust the lessons for these students. Awareness of critical indicators to identify and accommodate these students will assist with student support and meeting outcomes.

#### General Comment

Studies show that family engagement is a well-established driver of academic achievement.

This fundamental reality should serve as a guiding concept when considering how ITE programs should be structured. Teachers alone cannot meet a child's developmental requirements; Engagement with parents, family and community is essential.

Principals, Teachers and school staff are crucial to developing family-school partnerships. Students benefit substantially when schools understand that families are actual partners in education. Learning happens beyond the classroom, and parents are the experts regarding their children. Schools that support family engagement and support teachers to engage with their student's families develop sensible, equitable policies and initiatives to foster that collaboration. This deepens student learning and maximises student success.

Decades of studies have revealed that family engagement in their child's educational experience is vital. Evidence has confirmed that children are more likely to succeed when their families are engaged with the school and their child's school education.

It is concerning that in the Summary of the proposed core content and alignment with the Graduate Teacher Figure 1.1 - the teaching Standards 3.7 and 7.3 only appear once.

- Classroom Management
    - Managing Behaviour - 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process.
- and
- Enabling factors for learning - 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers.

Families and schools can improve a child's learning, health, and well-being. Working together requires strong interpersonal relationships. A student's education is a shared responsibility of the



family, the school, other students, and the larger community. When schools and families become active participants in their children's education, it promotes and helps them to enjoy their education.

## Reform Area 2: Strengthen the link between performance and funding of initial teacher education.

Unfortunately, teachers leave the profession for a variety of reasons. Many people enter the profession hoping to make a difference in their community and the lives of their students. They quickly find, however, that they are overwhelmed by unreasonable expectations, ever-changing priorities, restricted opportunities for progress, and a lack of support.

The Productivity Commission's examination of the National School Reform Agreement (2022), which aims to improve educational outcomes nationwide, revealed a bleak image for teachers. Teachers contemplate abandoning their jobs due to a demanding workload and a poor work-life balance. Inadequate pay was so much further down the list.

Across Australia, the teacher shortage is worsening, putting further strain on already overloaded school staff at a time when student enrolments are increasing.

According to recent Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates, 21% more students will start school in 2030 than in 2021. However, studies suggest that over half of teachers are considering quitting, threatening a significant imbalance in teacher-student ratios in schools across Australia.

We must also acknowledge that young people don't always go into employment as a lifelong career. It has been estimated that millennials stay in a job for approximately three years; if there is no room for growth or if they feel disengaged, they will move on.

### ITE performance measures

The primary purpose of performance measurement should be to identify opportunities to improve ITE programs. Performance measures should address high-level patterns and ITE outcomes by comparing various dimensions of quality and cost across ITE programs and geographic areas. Performance measures must be used for improvement efforts, public reporting, student decision-making, accountability, or allocating resources toward identified gaps in ITE delivery.

We stress that performance measures are different but may overlap with quality measures that should accelerate internal ITE improvement.

Publication of Performance information and how it is used to demonstrate whether public funds are making a difference in ITE delivery should be a key component in developing an ITE program.

While an evaluation should be planned during the design phase of a new or amended ITE program, a clear strategy for reviewing and evaluating existing programs is also needed. We believe this is important because:

- a very high proportion of government spending for ITE programs is on an ongoing basis – which means regular evaluation keeps the program on track and achieving the intended outcomes in a changing environment.
- the nature and outcomes of the ITE program may have evolved into something different; and
- some ITE pilot programs may be used to inform future design processes, and evaluation helps identify lessons learnt and necessary areas for improvement.

Because government funds are being utilised to fund ITE programs, institutions must be held accountable for performance.



As an institution's ITE program and services touch students, families, schools, and the community, they should be included in the formulation and assessment process of setting performance targets. Consultation with stakeholders and the community aids in the establishment of relevant and practical targets.

#### Transition funding to support performance improvement.

A transition period with relevant monetary support is required for an ITE program to perform at its best and best serve its student population. During the transition period, young people will require assistance from the receiving school and the outgoing institution. Opportunities for early career teacher support can take many forms and should be delivered flexibly. Examples are quality induction programs with longer follow-ups, quality mentoring, and regular peer assistance. If a Transition fund is considered, we recommend that it be no more than a four-year reform agreement designed to strengthen the delivery of the ITE program and better prepare neophyte teachers. During this period, there should be ongoing evaluation and adjustments to meet the feedback.

#### Excellence pool for higher quality programs

All ITE students need access to a comprehensive and rigorous education that provides opportunities to gain deep knowledge and essential life skills across many disciplines to prosper academically and be globally competitive. However, what also must be considered is that access to a complete and challenging education must be more equitable across all ITE programs. Current arrangements limit access and often exclude some young people who, like our school students, learn differently. This lack of equitable access currently excludes many of our young people from demonstrating their potential as teachers and excelling in the profession.

The goal of the Transition fund should be to accelerate the development of the ITE program to enable every interested student access and opportunity to attain levels that close underlying achievement and opportunity gaps.

Offering an Excellence pool for higher-quality programs, we contend, is counterproductive. The assumption that there is a scale return on the concentration of funds is typical when using an "Excellence Pool." However, we contend that the relationship between funding and such returns is frequently assumed rather than forensically evaluated. An Excellence pool will encourage hyper-competition that may conflict with appropriate ITE norms and reduce educational output quality.

These monies would be better invested in developing improved teaching and learning, practise excellence, curriculum planning and evaluation, and developing evidence-based, high-impact teaching practices. This would be beneficial to all early career teachers.

#### Reform Area 3: Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching.

ACSSO's position is that Initial teacher training should be as long and comprehensive as possible. It should be of high quality in terms of academic material and educational/teaching practical content, as well as abilities to work as part of a team, communicate with other stakeholders, particularly families, and instil a love of learning in their students.

Implementing education impacts Australia's development and prosperity, and nurturing high-quality teachers is a critical component of a sound education system. The quality of education is frequently determined by the quality of teachers, and professional development for teachers is intimately related to teaching effectiveness and student learning results. High-quality teachers are commonly cited as the cornerstone of student accomplishment in talks about teacher education reform, and nurturing high-quality teachers depends on research-based teacher education. To provide high-quality teacher education, theory and practice must be interwoven. Theory can improve practice,



and practice may be used to update theory; in other words, teacher education theory can guide implementation and thus increase teacher education quality.

ACSSO sees the teaching practicum as an essential component of a teacher education program because it helps prospective teachers put theory into practice, learn from direct field experiences, practice their craft, learn from peers, and respond to student diversity with appropriate accommodations.

ITE may only be effective once prospective teachers spend time in the classroom. The actual classroom experience is vital for putting prospective teachers' tacit knowledge into practice and developing teaching knowledge. The practicum program equips future teachers with valuable practical teaching experiences.

ACSSO agrees that national guidelines for high-quality, practical experience are needed to help higher education providers and schools satisfy the requirements for suitable experience placements outlined in the Accreditation Standards and Procedures.

We support the creation of a national framework for arranging practical experience placements to improve the quality and quantity of available placements while reducing the load on schools, teachers, and higher education providers in terms of planning and administering these placements.

Supervising teachers can vary in expertise and quality. Currently, there needs to be consistent training or oversight of supervising teachers.

Supervising teachers require:

- significant classroom experience
- personally supported to supervise by the principal.
- clear understanding of what skills the student teacher needs to develop.
- ability to give appropriate feedback and support for improvement.

Anecdotally, we have been made aware that due to the required paperwork, many supervising teachers will often pass a student that would not be considered competent. Supervising teachers must be accountable for their work.

ACSSO acknowledges that students with employment or family obligations and those with learning or physical challenges may find it difficult to complete full-time in-person placements. ACSSO strongly agrees that this is an opportunity to provide targeted support to students with competing commitments or those with learning or physical requirements, as well as students in areas of the workforce who need to boost their chances of finishing their ITE program.

ACSSO supports the concept of 'teaching schools,' which can give ITE students a variety of experiences, such as exposure to various learners and regional and remote environments. These teaching schools can collaborate with higher education institutions to improve the practical experience and gain access to professional learning.

In terms of the teaching practicum, we believe that:

- a) pre-service teachers should have the opportunity (at a minimum) to be placed in schools for at least six months per year under the direct supervision of an experienced teacher, and
- b) Supervising teachers (school-based teacher educators) should be recognised as requiring different knowledge and skills than classroom teachers.



- c) Federal funds should be made available expressly for additional professional learning, allowing current supervising teachers to expand and improve their knowledge and skills in that capacity. This professional development should be recognised with a micro-credential.

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

How do mid-career entrants (those already in the workforce and highly regarded for the different experiences they bring to the classroom subject) change careers while remaining financially afloat? We value the life and professional experiences they contribute, but full-time education for up to four years is required for many. This is a significant loss of income combined with a HECs debt, and if they select part-time, it adds to the stress of balancing employment, family, and study. ACSSO believes that ITE programs should examine their admittance criteria as well as establish a more equitable policy that enables advanced standing and recognised prior learning for their job, particularly if it is relevant to the subject area in which they will be teaching.

**Case in point:** ACSSO learnt of a mature age individual who had run a laboratory for over 25 years and was still obliged to complete a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Teaching with no advanced status. Before spending 25 years managing a National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) registered Materials Research Laboratory leading mix design for roads and asphalt on projects such as the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and the Hong Kong Airport, the individual held a Biological Technician Certificate, had worked in Veterinary Vaccines, and was a Reptile Curator at a Wildlife Park. This individual began teacher training at the age of 44 and began teaching at the age of 48. Despite receiving a scholarship for three of his four years of school, he would not "break-even" (that is, recuperate lost wages and repay HEC's debt) until age 62.

It is also clear that promotion is uncommon among older people. While it is not always overtly stated, education frequently favours younger classroom teachers.

Anecdotal data reveals that teachers whose first employment was not teaching contribute direct insights from their particular field to the classroom, making learning relevant. Their "field knowledge" adds realism to the subject's narrative.

Although a sufficient number of teachers graduate from ITE programs each year, teacher shortages persist partly because graduates either do not enter teaching or depart within three to five years. Beginning teacher support should be viewed as an extension of their pre-service preparation, and resources should be increased in this area.