

Submission to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

April 2023

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Board would like to thank the Teacher Education Expert Panel for the opportunity to comment on the Discussion Paper on Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

AERO is Australia's independent education evidence body, focussed on supporting practitioners and policymakers to adopt and implement evidence-based strategies. The Discussion paper highlights the reforms necessary to ensure that pre-service teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement evidence-based teaching practices from the beginning of their career.

The following submission outlines key considerations that the Panel could take into account to ensure that the proposed reforms achieve their intended outcome in improving the quality of ITE in Australia.

Accrediting and regulating Initial Teacher Education Programs

AERO's Board proposes that core content requirements in ITE programs, indications for program design around partnerships and more extensive practice-based models of delivery should be included within the Accreditation of ITE in Australia: Standards and Procedures (Standards and Procedures) and supporting resources.

The Panel should propose an indicative timeframe for the implementation of any of these changes, subject to consultation led by Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and Australian Teacher Registration Authorities (ATRA) (and reported to the Education Ministers Meeting for adoption in late 2023). The timetable should reflect legislative and legal considerations governing the existing accreditation status of programs, and at the same time prioritise a rapid adoption of new measures.

Addressing the core content requirements in the Standards and Procedures is preferable to amending the Graduate Teacher Standards (GTS) in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). While the GTS might be strengthened by including 'to practice/apply' verbs to Standard Descriptors (such as 'know and understand'), there is unlikely to be support for a wholesale revision of the APST due to their entrenchment in formal teacher regulatory and professional practices across Australia. The Standards and Procedures are sufficient to clarify the practice expectations of ITE programs and preservice student teacher assessment requirements. This will be particularly important with the shift to redesigned programs that better achieve an integration of theory and practice.

Currently, requirements for ITE program accreditation are dispersed across a range of documentation including:

- The Standards and Procedures
- AITSL's Supplementary guidelines to support the Standards and Procedures (in entry selection measures, Primary specialisation, partnerships and the assessment criteria for the Aboriginal Education Standards 1.4 and 2.4)
- Jurisdictional templates mapping the GTS and the Standards and Procedures requirements
- Some jurisdictional specific entry requirements
- Some jurisdictional elaborations of the GTS (see, for example, the NSW elaborations on literacy and numeracy, ICT, classroom management, Aboriginal education, special education, EAL/D).

In 2013, AITSL revised the national statements to include NSW elaborations, which overlap with proposed core content and are mandatory for ITE programs in NSW. However the failure to give the national statements authority was a missed opportunity to begin addressing core content. It would be preferable for there to be authoritative national elaborations of core content, anchored in Standard 2 and elaborated in mandatory attachments rather than in the Supplementary guidelines. The language of 'guidelines' is also insufficient to underpin consistent national understanding of these practices by accreditation panels and ITE program developers.

Core content should be supported by suitable accreditation templates, be delivered across the program (evidenced in accreditation documents, and in Stage 2 impact data), and be embedded in Program Standard 1 as well as the required Key Learning Area (KLA) units set out in Program Standard 4.

Standard 4 in the Standards and Procedures sets out design requirements for ITE programs, including KLA unit requirements. The specific unit requirements should remain unchanged with two exceptions: Program Standard 4.2, Schedule 1, undergraduate (b) and postgraduate (b). These should be amended to provide for equality in unit treatment of Mathematics/Numeracy with the recently strengthened English/Literacy requirements, namely 4 units (half of a year equivalent full time student load (EFTSL)) and 3 units (three-eighths EFSTL) in undergraduate and postgraduate programs respectively. This provides an appropriate provision for evidenced-based teaching practices to be fully embedded and practiced in the two foundational KLAs, and contribute to stronger practice in Mathematics/Numeracy in Primary teaching.

Standard 4, Schedules 1 and 2 (the KLA unit specifications) should be governed by a clear requirement that the core content teaching practices set out in Standard 2 must be included and evidenced in the KLA units, and preservice teachers assessed against them. The issue of what such core content look like in individual subjects is one that needs to be addressed over time. It is not sufficient for teaching practices such as formative assessment to be taught in a general theory unit without being developed thoroughly within the KLA disciplinary content and pedagogy units.

Finally, the 8 principles in the Standards and Procedures relating to issues raised by the Discussion paper (i.e. impact, evidence-based, rigour, continuous improvement, flexibility, diversity and Innovation, partnerships, transparency and research) contain few metrics for these principles, and the impact data ITE providers submit as part of the second stage of accreditation does not provide evidence against them. This means that currently there is no evidence of national consistency in requirements or assessments of ITE programs, no clear use made of the data, nor clarity on how the continuous improvement agenda is evidenced or required. There is the opportunity to build on these foundations by developing specific requirements and measures to be applied during Stage 1 and Stage 2 accreditation processes.

Recommendations

AERO's Board recommends revising the two-stage accreditation process to improve both national consistency in ITE accreditation and ensure specific teaching practices are embedded in ITE programs, and evaluated and reported on.

The revision of the second stage of accreditation could be supported by a new national oversight process, conducted by AERO, to review program documentation for research and reporting (noting that this would require information sharing agreements). This could include conducting ITE student and new graduate surveys that provide more granular information on the quality of implementation of core content and the impact of the overall program.

Program performance measures and funding

AERO's Board supports additional funding from the Australian Government to support ITE providers transitioning to incorporate new requirements. This funding should be directed in particular to program redesign which incorporates extended professional experience placements, internships and employment-based components of programs (in ITE programs generally, not just as bespoke initiatives to accommodate career-changers). A transition fund could also support ITE program redesign within a designated timeframe, and the development of comprehensive jurisdictional partnership agreements (with committed school-based arrangements), including indications in the Standards and Procedures of appropriate balances between provider-based ITE delivery and school-based practice (allowing for and supporting flexible models).

The transition to the new core content should be a priority inclusion within the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), and 2023-2024 used to ensure jurisdictions have Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) in place that support improved placement and partnership practices. An Australian Government fund devoted to this end would be a credible option, and preferable to the proposal for 'reward funds' to be allocated to providers who perform well on the proposed indicators. The capacity of providers to 'improve' their outcomes on several of these indicators is either severely limited by their location (or other similar factors), or improvement is reflective of a reverse incentive. The Discussion paper's comments on the low risk of reverse

incentives regarding retention and attrition are doubtful and inconsistent with the view taken on the likely impact of funding incentives on Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) metrics.

The proposals for data collection and publication set out in the Discussion Paper should be collected and published by ATWD project. It should be noted that while this data is not credible evidence of ITE program quality or fidelity in implementing ITE requirements' data, it does provide employing and funding authorities with important information about the emerging profession.

Program oversight, quality assurance and national consistency

The panel should acknowledge steps currently in place to promote national consistency (e.g. common accreditation training, AITSL nominated interstate panel members on every accreditation panel, regular meetings of TRA accreditation officers and AITSL, AITSL-hosted advisory resources, etc). However, it should also be noted that the absence of more specific indications or elaborations of necessary core content, and requirements of the GTS (such as assessment) leave accreditation panels in each jurisdiction with no common benchmarks, and subject to different views of ITE sufficiency.

The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) mandated inclusion of nominated impact metrics and evidence within Stage 1 documentation. Annual reporting on Stage 1 and consolidated Stage 2 impact reports from the ITE providers appears to be underutilised and opaque. There is no public visibility on the outcomes, no professional national scrutiny or benchmarking, and little clarity around how the continuous improvement principle is met.

Recommendations

AERO's Board recommends an approach based on the current 2 Stage accreditation process to improve national consistency in ITE accreditation, and to ensure specific teaching practices are embedded in ITE programs, and that these are appropriately evaluated and reported on.

This approach could include:

- mandatory inclusion of core content within the nominated impact measures
- national agreement on which measures might be required for inclusion annually (a rolling approach)
- agreed TRA commitment to scrutiny of these core content measures through the annual reporting
- a national process, annually, in which one or two such measures are selected for national shared scrutiny (nominated well in advance, over rolling 3-year cycles, encouraging proactive agency within ITE providers)
- AERO to prepare authoritative reviews of relevant literature and research on the specific core content (published ahead of the national scrutiny process) and lead

the review process in tandem with the providers and TRAs (ideally to include major employer representatives and experts in the field).

- Information sharing protocols should be put in place in each jurisdiction to enable AERO access to program documentation (with TRAs and/or ITE providers).

Program design and partnership arrangements

AERO's Board, in line with the Panel, strongly supports maintaining a Masters degree for the postgraduate teaching qualification as it is the academically and professionally proportionate approach to the complexity and status of teaching.

AERO's Board also supports ITE postgraduate program designs routinely embodying more sustained school placements, under models that include extended internships and employment options (as teachers or teacher aides). The Panel should more fully describe the actual models now in place, for example, in Victoria, there are 7 universities with postgraduate ITE programs that generally require 1.3 - 1.5 years of study and include an 0.6 FTE employment model.

The Panel should include reference to the NSW Conditional Accreditation legislative option (preferably described as Conditional Registration to accord with preferred national terminology). In addition, the Panel should recommend a standardisation across jurisdictions of the Permission to Teach (PTT) option to facilitate the employment-based designs as a regular rather than exceptional arrangement.

Undergraduate programs should also evolve into designs with more substantial internships and employment options, at least in the final year.

The Panel should recommend that the NSRA be used to ensure new comprehensive partnership arrangements, supported by jurisdictional MOUs. These MOUs should include:

- the public schooling systems, and consider non-government systems and schools, perhaps as a condition of school funding,
- dedicated mentoring/supervisory roles,
- professional learning to ensure supervision expertise,
- more efficient and coordinated placement arrangements and
- shared assessment practices.

The Panel should consider advocating for initial arrangements to be developed in 2023-24, to be fully in place for the commencement of the 2025-29 NSRA with appropriate metrics for implementation and improvement in place for the NSRA period (in line with the Productivity Commission's suggested approach).

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Deputy Chair, AERO Board

Declaration

The AERO Board would like to note that Dr Jenny Donovan, the CEO of AERO is a member of the Teacher Education Expert Panel and that AERO conducted the review of the evidence base which identifies the core content as outlined in the Discussion paper.