

VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Submission to the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training Inquiry into Teacher Education

May 2006

This submission complements the Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee report *Step Up, Step In, Step Out* and the Victorian Government's response to the report, both of which have previously been submitted to the National Inquiry into Teacher Education.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Current Developments in Victorian School Education

The Department of Education and Training in Victoria employs more than 37,000 teachers or approximately 64% of Victoria's total teaching workforce. These teachers are employed in 1606 government schools, including 1213 primary, 263 secondary, 49 P-12 and 78 special schools. In 2005, the Department advertised 12,514 vacancies (including internally filled vacancies) and employed more than 2400 new teachers, the majority of whom were recent graduates.

The Victorian school system is devolved to a greater extent than other state government school systems in Australia with school principals having control of necessary resources and being able to make decisions about personnel, infrastructure and curriculum at the local level and within system frameworks. In highly devolved systems, the ability to set formal central quality benchmarks for new entrants to the teaching profession, beyond initial certification, is generally reduced in comparison to more centralised systems. This makes it imperative that the Department work closely with teacher education providers, VIT and other stakeholders to ensure that courses are aligned with educational objectives and student outcomes, particularly during the present period of significant educational reform and the Department's program of system transformation.

Current and emerging approaches to school system transformation, including workforce remodelling, personalised learning and effective schools models and associated research suggest a reconceptualisation of the work of principals, teachers and support staff in schools in some countries. Increasingly in Victoria, leading edge practitioners and leaders are looking to different combinations of teacher teams and para-professionals, class size and organisation, instructional materials, teaching spaces, technology and other supporting infrastructure.

Victoria's Effective Schools Framework and *Blueprint for Government Schools*¹ and associated initiatives encourage innovative configurations of infrastructure, curriculum and human resources to enhance improvement in student outcomes across an increasingly devolved system. This includes the introduction of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, the Leading Schools Fund and the Performance and Development Culture initiative together with a range of leadership development initiatives. This work is soon to be complemented by the Building Tomorrow's Schools Today program which aims at comprehensive school infrastructure renewal. The success of this program

¹ State of Victoria (2003), *Blueprint for Government Schools*.

of reforms depends in large part on the ability of the system to change the design of education delivery in direct response to students' needs. Such reforms have implications for the knowledge, skills and values required of practitioners and therefore on the structure and quality of preservice education.

1.2 Support for Graduate Teachers

The Department has pursued a range of strategies to ensure that Victoria's graduate teachers are well prepared for the demands of current and future school workplaces including:

- Collaborating with the Victorian Council of Deans of Education and VIT to ensure that the Government's educational objectives are reflected in pre-service courses and in registration and accreditation processes. This is a cross-sectoral endeavour which applies to all practitioners in Victoria, whether in the government or non-government systems.
- Establishing the Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group, consisting of representatives from universities, teacher and principal associations and government and non-government teacher employers, to consider a range of issues impacting on teacher supply and quality.
- Implementing programs at the central, Region and school levels which support graduate teachers at the beginning of their careers, including comprehensive induction and mentoring programs which assist beginning teachers to achieve full registration with VIT.
- Providing differentiated performance management processes to accommodate the needs of beginning teachers in government schools.

The major initiative of the Government in school education in recent years is the implementation of the *Blueprint for Government Schools* which integrates a range of strategies for system transformation. The *Blueprint* recognises the pivotal role of principals and teachers in the quality of educational outcomes throughout the government school system. Of particular relevance to this inquiry are the Flagship Strategies induction and mentoring for beginning teachers, teacher professional development and leadership development. A number of programs have been put in place to assist experienced teachers and new entrants to the profession, including teacher professional leave and mentor training, which are already making a significant impact.

The *Blueprint* and other initiatives reflect the Government's recognition of the importance to the improvement of the system of quality graduate teachers entering the profession for the first time. This was recently confirmed by the recommendations of the Victorian Parliament Committee on Education and Training inquiry into pre-service education, *Step Up, Step In, Step Out*², and the Government's support for 42 of its 44 recommendations. Both the Parliamentary Committee's report and the Government's response have been submitted to this inquiry for consideration.

The Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Institute of Teaching are now working to implement a number of the recommendations contained in the report. Several recommendations have significant funding implications, and it is the Victorian Government's view that the Commonwealth Government – given its responsibility for higher education – should fully, or in significant part, provide the funding. In this regard the national inquiry is timely and it is hoped that the Commonwealth Government will give due consideration to these proposals as a result.

² Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee (2005), *Step Up, Step In, Step Out*.

1.3 Teacher Supply Initiatives

In recent years, the Government has introduced a suite of teacher supply initiatives to attract returning teachers, career changers, delayed entrants and graduate teachers to government schools, particularly schools which are experiencing recruitment difficulties³. These initiatives include:

- The *Career Change Program*, which since 2005 has enabled 61 skilled non-teaching professionals to retrain as teachers in areas of high demand.
- *Refresher Training*, which is offered to teachers who have been away from the classroom for more than three years or are new to the Victorian system. A total of 384 teachers have participated in the program since the beginning of 2005.
- The *Promotion of Teaching* initiative, which aims to encourage undergraduates in relevant degree courses other than education to consider teaching as a career.
- The *Student Teacher Practicum Scheme*, which provides financial support for student teachers to undertake a practicum in a rural school. More than 550 grants have been awarded to student teachers since 2004.
- The *Rural Retraining Program*, which is providing teachers with training in an area of curriculum in need. More than 170 teachers have commenced retraining under this program since 2005, mainly in the areas of special education and languages other than English.
- The *Teaching Scholarship Scheme*, which provides financial incentives to student teachers to take up employment in hard to fill vacancies. More than 900 scholarships have been awarded since the scheme's inception in 2001.
- The *Teacher Graduate Recruitment Program* which enables principals to fill vacancies with recent graduates. 937 new teacher graduates were appointed to Victorian schools for the beginning of 2006.

In addition, the Department has introduced a devolved on-line recruitment system, whereby schools advertise directly and select their own teaching staff, a key difference between the Victorian school system and that of other States.

Four of the above initiatives are focused on attracting recent graduates to the government system. The range of initiatives described above reflects changes in societal trends, career planning and a diversification of pathways to teaching which are also placing pressure on traditional forms of teacher education courses. This has implications not only for the content of teacher education courses but the form of their delivery which the State inquiry identified and which this submission also draws attention to.

2. KEY ISSUES

The Department would like to highlight some of the key issues concerning pre-service education to emerge from the State inquiry and other developments. These issues are addressed in the same order as they appear in the inquiry's terms of reference.

³ Details of these programs can be found in State of Victoria (2004), *Teacher Supply and Demand for Government Schools* or on the Department's website <https://www.teaching.vic.gov.au/>.

2.1 Selection of Students

The Department is of the view that the current method of selecting students into teacher education courses, based exclusively on Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank scores or other academic results, should be reviewed and consideration given to the range of aptitudes needed to function effectively as a teacher. These aptitudes might include such qualities as interpersonal and team skills, organisational skills, communication skills and emotional resilience.

The State inquiry recommended that current selection criteria and processes be broadened to include written or online applications and interviews where appropriate (Recommendation 7.1). Psychometric testing, which is currently used in selecting first year medical students in some universities, could also be explored, as a screening measure and/or supplementary tool. The Government response to the State inquiry has proposed that a research project be undertaken to establish an appropriate combination of academic and aptitude measures, and the feasibility of their use.

2.2 Course Flexibility and Alternative Pathways into Teaching

There is an increasing need to provide readily available and affordable pathways for mature age “career changers” into teaching, particularly for those in regional areas and with direct experience and qualifications in hard to fill subject areas. This may include more flexible courses and scholarships as provided by Victoria’s Career Change Program.

The introduction of the Career Change Program has demonstrated that there are large numbers of mature age non-teaching professionals in the general community who are interested in a career change into teaching. Whenever the program receives any publicity, the Department receives hundreds of phone calls from tradespersons, engineers, information technology professionals, scientists and people from other walks of life wanting to become teachers.

For many of these potential career changers, current university course arrangements rarely provide practicable or affordable options or recognition of prior learning and work and life experiences. However, there are some exceptions. For example, La Trobe University’s Graduate Diploma in Technology Studies offers coursework out of hours through weekend workshops and Deakin University’s Graduate Diploma of Education (Applied Learning) is available part-time and online and is designed to accommodate career changers.

While still in a pilot phase, a preliminary evaluation of the Career Change Program suggests that it or similar programs can fill an important niche in the Department’s overall workforce planning and recruitment strategies. The program has provided our schools with the following benefits:

- It enables schools to gain access to mature people with relevant professional or industrial experience and other life-skills who, in the words of one school principal, “add another dimension of experience” to a school’s cohort of beginning teachers.
- It enables a rural school to engage suitable people within the local community who are often well established and respected in the community and therefore represent a reduced recruitment risk to the school.
- It provides recruitment options to schools experiencing significant and often chronic difficulties in attracting staff, especially in hard to staff subject areas. For example, the

program enabled some of the participating schools to broaden their curriculum by offering new subjects, such as a language or a technology studies program, to its students.

The Department has worked closely with Victoria University and the Victorian Institute of Teaching to develop a teacher education program which is flexible in its delivery, offering on-line components, intensive workshops and a preliminary summer school. The university works in partnership with host schools which also provide induction, mentoring, professional development and other support to complement academic learning tasks.

The State inquiry was strongly supportive of the initiative, and recommended its future expansion (Recommendation 5.6). The Department is currently undertaking a detailed evaluation which will inform the future direction and form of the program.

2.3 Course Content

The State inquiry pointed to perceived gaps in pre-service teaching courses and made a series of recommendations for improvement which were supported in the Government's response.

One recommendation of special interest to the Department was that education faculties should adopt a holistic approach to teacher education and include components that would develop some of the key personal and interpersonal capabilities required in teaching, including emotional resilience, communication skills and conflict resolution skills (Recommendation 4.12).

These teacher capabilities are critical given the increasing demands placed on teachers in the modern classroom, particularly in their relationships with students, parents, staff and other members of the school community. Graduate teachers often find such relationships difficult to manage, a factor which in many cases contributes to their early exit from the profession.

The Department is thus advocating a two-pronged approach to the attainment of these key capabilities. Firstly, in selecting applicants for teacher education places the capabilities of candidates in these areas would be tested and assessed, whether through written or online applications, psychometric testing, interviews, or some combination. This would eliminate candidates who are patently unsuited to teaching, regardless of their academic achievements. Secondly, these capabilities would be developed and reinforced through formal components of pre-service teacher education courses.

2.4 Student Teacher Practicums

The State inquiry regards teacher practicum as being "at the heart" of pre-service teacher education. The Department supports the recommendation of the inquiry that VIT develops a set of common standards governing the design, management and assessment of practicum programs for application to all teacher education providers and users as a means of enhancing the quality of the practicum experience.

The Department is also investigating further the merits and practicability of increasing the length of the teacher practicum to 130 days for undergraduates and 80 days for graduate students as recommended by the State inquiry. The Department would like to examine whether the practicum for students undertaking one year Graduate Diploma of Education studies, where 45 days of practicum experience, generally structured as three 15 day placements, is sufficient to enable students to fully appreciate the demands of day-to-day teaching and the nuances and intricacies of the school environment. Further consideration needs to be given to the length, structure and delivery mode of the practicum to ensure an appropriate balance between practice and theory so that students are properly prepared for entry into the profession.

Any such analysis should also examine the merits of alternative approaches to school experience including internship models such as the one currently being trialled in Victoria's *Career Change Program* and those regularly applied by some universities including Melbourne and Monash Universities in Victoria and Charles Sturt University in New South Wales. There is some evidence to suggest that students experiencing an internship (i.e. a long term placement in one school) are better prepared for teaching than students in regular courses.⁴ Moreover, schools hosting interns can also benefit through (a) freeing regular teachers for professional development activities or special project work, and (b) improving their recruitment options, especially in the case of rural schools who are able to "showcase" the advantages of rural teaching.

The Department's view is that a full analysis of recommended increases to practicum length needs to be undertaken, and that any decision to increase the length needs to be taken in the context of available Commonwealth funding and the need to align State and Territory requirements and standards through the MCEETYA endorsed National Framework for Standards. The Department appreciates that any increase in practicum length would have significant funding implications for universities, and the Australian Government which funds them, and major resource and class allotment implications for schools hosting students.

2.5 University – School Partnerships

A major theme of the *Step Up, Step In, Step Out* report is the need to further encourage the development of effective partnerships between teacher education providers, employing authorities and schools in the delivery of teacher education programs.

Such partnerships already exist at various levels within the Victorian system. The *Career Change Program* represents a good example of where the Department, as an employing authority, has entered into a partnership with Victoria University, as a teacher education provider, to develop and implement a uniquely structured and highly targeted teacher education program. Similarly, Deakin University undertook extensive consultations with schools in the Barwon-South Western Region of Victoria in developing its new Graduate Diploma of Education (Applied Learning) course. Universities have in some cases developed close working relationships with schools in the arrangements for practicums, including that developed by Victoria University with schools in the Tyrell cluster in the State's north-west. This has led to an ongoing arrangement between these schools and the university which sees a group of city-based students obtain valuable experience of rural teaching and community life.

There are a number of ways in which partnerships between universities, the Department and schools can be further developed.

The Department, the Victorian Institute of Teaching and universities need to maintain a continuing dialogue to ensure that (a) issues of mutual concern are being discussed and addressed, (b) the future workforce needs of the Department are being reflected in the allocation of teacher education places, and (c) course content is reflecting current curriculum frameworks and initiatives. In the Victorian context, there are two regular forums where this consultation occurs – the Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group, and the regular meetings of the Deans of Education. A recent example of an ad hoc process to deal with an issue of growing concern to universities was a series

⁴ Buckingham, J. (2005), *Good Teachers Where They are Needed, Issue Analysis*, No. 64, October, Centre for Independent Studies.

of meetings to discuss the difficulty in finding sufficient schools willing to host student teachers for their practicum placements.

The second level where partnerships could be further developed and fostered between schools and universities relates to teacher education course delivery, student teacher practicums and educational research. The State inquiry was strongly of the view that course delivery and research activity can often have greater impact and immediacy with the direct involvement of schools and current practising teachers. Similarly, the quality of the practicum experience and the benefits schools can gain by hosting student teachers will be enhanced when close and regular partnerships are developed between universities and schools.

3. ADDITIONAL MATTERS

Other issues not directly addressed by the State inquiry which the Department believes should be raised in this forum are outlined below.

3.1 Mix of Teacher Education Places

The current number and mix of teacher education places funded by the Australian Government is not reflecting the system's need for more trained secondary teachers, particularly in hard to fill subjects such as mathematics, physics, technology studies and languages.

The Victorian Government has raised concerns in recent years about the current levels of Australian Government funding for teacher education places in Victorian universities and, in particular, that funding levels remain insufficient to address the Victorian system's projected shortfall of secondary teachers in the next five years.

While the Department works with universities to ensure that the allocation of teacher education places in Victorian universities responds to the needs of the school systems in Victoria, it would like to see the Australian Government, as the provider of funding to the universities, intervene more actively to ensure a more appropriate mix of places. From the Department's perspective, for example, there is a pressing need for universities to devote more places to secondary teacher education and fewer to primary.

A shift in universities' teacher education course profiles would require structural adjustments to curriculum, infrastructure and personnel which in turn would require substantial additional funding support from the Australian Government.

3.2 Fees in Hard to Staff Teaching Disciplines

The current university fee structure acts as a disincentive for people wanting to pursue the normal pathway into some of our hardest to staff teaching disciplines such as mathematics and science. Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) students undertaking a three year science degree followed by a Graduate Diploma of Education are incurring an additional \$5000-\$6000 in accumulated debt when compared to a History or English teacher who has undertaken a Bachelor of Arts and Graduate Diploma of Education.

The Department considers the study of science and science teaching to be national priorities and would like to see a fee structure which provides real incentives to prospective science/maths graduates and teachers and which does not compromise the quality of teaching in these courses. Whereas universities may choose to cross-subsidise high cost courses such as science from courses which experience high demand but relatively low delivery costs, a more effective approach is likely to be for the Australian Government to increase its proportion of the cost of a science CSP and cap the student contribution.

3.3 Funding for Student Teacher Practicum

As indicated above, the Department has recently responded to a request from the Victorian Council of Deans of Education to discuss the increasing problems education faculties are having in finding school practicum placements for student teachers. There is a prospect at some time in the future, if a solution is not found, that some students will not be able to graduate within the specified time due to incomplete supervised teacher practicum. This situation is exacerbated by the enrolment of international students in teacher education programs which increases demand for limited practicum places.

The Department, the universities and other stakeholders have identified a number of possible measures to alleviate the problem, including the establishment of a central database to co-ordinate placements, better marketing of the benefits of practicums for schools and school communities, enhanced relationships between universities and schools and the possibility of giving recognition to supervising teachers as part of the teacher registration renewal process. The Department's Student Teacher Practicum Scheme, which provides financial incentives to student teachers to undertake practicums in rural schools, also serves to take some pressure off over-loaded metropolitan schools.

The Victorian Council of Deans of Education is also examining medium to long term strategies which would reconceptualise the practicum, including increasing the flexibility, accessibility and responsiveness of the practicum. The Deans are currently exploring the possibility of conducting targeted research in this area which will require funding support.

There is a general consensus amongst the stakeholders, however, that a key problem is the inadequacy of the payment levels schools receive for student supervision. Payment for supervision has not changed since 1990 and stands at a daily rate of \$12.45 for a single method and \$21.20 for a double method of supervision. Evidence suggests that this level of payment may not be effective as an incentive for supervising teachers. A higher rate of payment for supervision needs to be provided by the Commonwealth to take into account cost of living increases and the responsibilities associated with student supervision.

3.4 Commonwealth Supported Places - Charges for Teaching Courses

Current funding arrangements for universities prevent them from increasing CSP charges for teaching courses by up to the allowable 25 % and place them in a Cluster with courses which are less expensive to provide. In addition, the practicum loading built into teacher education study units is reduced when students undertake combinations of education and non-education units in their course of study. The Australian Council of Deans of Education has drawn attention to this point in its submission to the National Inquiry.

The Department is concerned that this policy, in the absence of compensatory funding from the Australian Government, inhibits the capacity of universities to provide teacher education of the desired quality. For example, universities report that they cannot afford to visit students during their practicum as often as is desirable due to the administrative and staffing costs which such activity requires, particularly for students in rural and remote schools. This effectively acts as a disincentive for universities to encourage practicum in rural and remote parts of Victoria which often suffer from recruitment difficulties.

While it is open to universities to cross-subsidise teacher education courses from other income, the Department believes that a better solution is for the Australian Government to supplement the funding available to universities for teacher education courses.

3.5 Government Taxes on Scholarships and Retraining Grants

In the past few years, the Department has introduced a range of initiatives designed to address the issue of teacher supply, particularly for schools in hard to staff geographic areas and for hard to staff subject areas. These were described earlier in this submission. A number of these initiatives involve financial incentive payments in the form of scholarships or grants to individuals to take up employment in a hard to fill vacancy or to retrain in a hard to staff subject area. These programs include the *Teaching Scholarship Scheme*, the *Career Change Program*, the *Rural Retraining Program*, and the *Student Teacher Practicum Scheme*.

In each case, the grant or scholarship provided is subject to the Fringe Benefits Tax or personal income tax under current Taxation Office regulations. Given the broader public interest in ensuring an adequate supply of teachers in hard to staff subject areas such as mathematics and science, and in hard to staff rural areas, it would be of significant benefit all round if the Commonwealth were to exempt from taxation State teacher scholarships and grants relating to such teacher supply initiatives.

4. CONCLUSION

In closing, the Department appreciates the opportunity to present to the Standing Committee on behalf of the Victorian Government and would like to wish you well in your deliberations. We would be happy to address any questions arising out of Victoria's submission or other areas you wish to cover relating to improving the quality of teacher education in Australia.