

**SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
VOCATIONAL TRAINING INQUIRY INTO TEACHER EDUCATION**

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my views on this important issue. I completed a Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) in 2002 (at the University of New South Wales), spent two years teaching in independent schools in NSW and the ACT and in 2004 decided to leave the teaching profession. I hope my views and this information about my recent experiences of teacher training will be useful to the Committee.

2. Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The extent to which high quality students can be attracted into teacher training courses depends on these prospective students' perceptions of teaching as a career option. Generally, people are attracted to teaching because they want a job in which they can make a positive contribution to society. Other attractions include being able to use their qualifications in subjects such as English and history, and the likelihood of stable employment.

High quality students are turned off teacher training courses when they do not see teaching as an attractive career. Reasons for this can include: salary levels relative to other professions, status compared to other professions, concerns about classroom management and the likelihood of having to initially teach in 'difficult' or rural schools.

The latter concern could be addressed by the introduction of a scheme which provides incentives (such as increased salaries) to experienced teachers working in or relocating to schools that are difficult to staff. Such a scheme would also benefit students in such schools, which tend to have a high proportion of new teachers and high staff turnover. Smaller classes would make classroom management less daunting for beginning teachers, as it is much easier to control 15 or 20 students than 30.

Many students find it difficult to support themselves while studying education, because of the extended amounts of time spent on prac teaching. Prac teaching is an invaluable learning experience, but in order to undertake it, students need to have either income support (through family or Youth Allowance), or an understanding employer who is willing to give them the time off. Otherwise, they either have no income during their prac teaching, or they have to undertake part-time work on top of full-time prac teaching. It would seem reasonable for students undertaking prac teaching to receive some sort of payment in order to help them through this period.

The prospect of adding to one's HECS debt can also be a turn-off for those considering a Graduate Diploma in education. Consideration should be given to making teaching courses HECS-exempt.

3. Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition.

A major reason for students leaving teaching courses is exposure to actual classroom situations during their prac teaching experiences. For some would-be teachers, teaching sounds like a rewarding career in theory, but the reality of classroom management is more than they can handle.

4. Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses (including the teaching methods used, course structure and materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.

Teaching methods

I found that the members of the education faculty in which I studied did not model the good teaching practices they advocated. The quality of teaching was disappointing, particularly when compared with the excellent lecturers I had during my undergraduate BA Hons degree (at a different university).

It is essential that those who teach teachers model best-practice teaching methods themselves. Teaching courses also need to spend more time on practical techniques for classroom management (see 7. below).

Course structure

My Dip Ed course was poorly structured, in that students did not enter a school until halfway through the one-year course. This meant that during the first half of the course we were unable to apply the theoretical information we had learned to observations or experiences of real classrooms. Unlike many other teaching courses, in mine there was only one (long) prac teaching session, so that we only gained experience of one school environment, rather than a range of different types of schools (public/Catholic/systemic/independent/co-ed/single sex).

The more classroom experience trainee teachers have, the better equipped and more confident they will be when they begin their teaching careers. Trainee teachers should be exposed to a variety of schools in order to provide them with a comprehensive view of the education system, and a better basis on which to decide what type of school they wish to teach in.

7. Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:

(iii) effectively manage classrooms

Classroom management is a core component of teaching, and the area that trainee teachers tend to be most concerned about, but was not covered in any detail during my teacher training course. Trainee teachers would benefit from in-depth training in practical strategies for classroom management, focussing on the types of real-life scenarios that they will be dealing with as teachers.

Another potentially beneficial teaching method would involve filming students during their prac teaching, and discussing the footage with them as they go, pointing out areas that need improvement and suggesting new tactics they could use. (This approach seems to work well with parents who have trouble managing their children on the TV show *Supernanny!*)

(iv) successfully use information technology

The information technology aspect of my teacher trainee course covered skills that most students were already competent at and did not cover innovative teaching methods that are successfully being used in schools, such as Webquests, website design, PowerPoint or electronic whiteboards. Since school students are now likely to be more comfortable with new technologies than adults are, it is important for teachers to be taught cutting edge skills so they can at least keep up with their classes!

Thanks again for the opportunity to contribute my views on teacher education.

Yours sincerely

Anna Hough