



NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Submission 131
TE Inquiry

In reply Please Quote:
11357: 5/6/5

3 May 2005

Ms Janet Holmes
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Holmes,

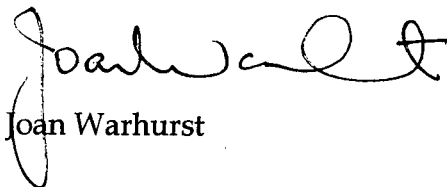
Re: National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia

Please find attached a submission from the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) to the House of Representatives' Inquiry into Teacher Education.

The NCEC is the peak body representing Catholic Education at the national level. The State/Territory Catholic Education Commissions, and Dioceses, have autonomy over their own jurisdictions and as such have direct responsibility for the employment of teachers and the management of schools. Separate submissions from these bodies will pick up on issues that are specific to their areas and this submission will focus on those issues that are significant across all jurisdictions.

The NCEC welcomes the Inquiry and looks forward to the final report. We would be happy to discuss any of the issues in this submission.

Yours sincerely



Joan Warhurst



NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

Response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training

National Inquiry into Teacher Education

1. Introduction

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Inquiry into Teacher Education in Australia.

Catholic schools in Australia educate some 660,000 in 1700 schools with approximately 50,000 staff. One in every five Australian school students attends a Catholic school. NCEC is, however, concerned with the provision of a high quality education for all Australian students. It is committed to ensuring the highest quality of professional training, induction and service of teachers in Catholic schools through out Australia, and by the profession generally.

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2. Criteria for Selecting Students (Ref No 1)

The profession of teaching is arguably one of the most important in society given the responsibility teachers have for the education of the next generation of Australians. The selection of appropriate persons to be educated as teachers is critical to their success as teachers and ultimately to the success of the system of education.

The Catholic Education sector is highly supportive of those tertiary institutions that take account of personal qualities, in addition to intellectual qualities, in their selection of teacher education students. Where the selection of students for

teaching courses is determined by tertiary entrance score alone (supply and demand) there are bound to be fluctuations in quality, and the quality of the system is dependent on the quality of the teachers within it.

Selection processes which include interviews and references (as already occur in some institutions), in addition to academic achievement, are more likely to result in teachers who are suited to the profession and committed to remain within it.

NCEC is also supportive of promoting the teaching profession to mature age students as a second career option.

3. Attrition Rates (Ref No 3)

The NCEC does not believe that attrition rates are of themselves inherently bad. It is important that those who are not suited to the profession, or those who are "burnt out", have the opportunity to move on. It is of concern when those who are good teachers choose to leave teaching because the financial rewards and status of other professions are more attractive.

The status of the profession and the issue of remuneration are ongoing issues and the NCEC applauds the initiative of the Australian Government in setting up the National Institute of Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL) to explore these issues further.

4. The Preparation of Primary and Secondary Teaching Graduates (Ref No 7)

The areas listed for comment highlight the multifaceted nature of teaching and the increasing demands being placed on teachers – without even touching on key learning areas other than numeracy and literacy. What is not listed here is as significant as what is and is indicative of the crowded curriculum in both teacher education institutions and in schools.

NCEC is concerned that teaching graduates emerge from their teacher education training with deep subject knowledge, pedagogical understanding and classroom management skills. Good teachers require all three.

As the aging of the workforce is an issue in teaching so it is in teacher education. The NCEC believes that is important to have some members of teacher education faculties with recent teaching experience.

The NCEC believes that there needs to be a coordinated system of induction into the profession for beginning teachers to assist them to cope with the demands on them, and that this should be funded by the Government. Possible options include formal induction, a two year internship, and a mentoring/monitoring system over the two years of internship.

5. The Practicum (Ref No 8)

Issues around the Practicum relate to the length of the experience, when it occurs, who is responsible, quality control and cost. There is no doubt about the important role that it takes in teacher education. Schools play an integral role in providing teaching experience, for very little reward, and while there are excellent teachers prepared to take on this role, the quality of experience for the students

involved is also variable. As work loads in schools intensify the good will of teachers and schools in providing practicum experience for student teachers is being severely tested.

As the education of beginning teachers is reliant on teacher education institutions and schools, the NCEC believes that it would be appropriate to explore a different relationship between schools and universities, based on a partnership model rather than a supervisory role, and which recognises teachers as mentors and teacher-researchers as well as supervisors.

Such an approach is currently hampered by severe under-funding and by the differential salaries between teachers and teacher educators, where teacher educators are the poor cousins.

6. The Split Between Primary and Secondary Education (Ref No 9)

The primary/secondary divide is an historical construct which lingers as much because of the investment in buildings as because of educational merit. It is also based on different pedagogical approaches – generalist versus specialist.

Some teacher education institutions already offer courses for teachers in the middle years of schooling which qualify them to teach at the top end of primary as well as in the early years of secondary schooling – but these are rare.

The NCEC believes that the old notion of primary and secondary teaching needs to be examined in the light of phases of development such as early, middle and late.

7. Resourcing (Ref No 11)

The terms of reference of this inquiry are testament to the complexity of the teaching profession and the implication this has for high quality training for those who wish to become teachers.

It is clear that that teacher education is under resourced. The Practicum is illustrative of this as is the salary differential between university faculty and experienced teachers from either a primary or secondary school background.

In order to ensure the ongoing quality of teachers in Australia, it is important that this review consider the provision of a framework for funding of Teacher Education courses in Universities and the effect that changes to Government Policy have on enrolments in Teacher Education courses.

8. Conclusion

The NCEC appreciates the opportunity to present this submission to the Inquiry is willing to participate in any further consultation.

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The NCEC also appreciates the action by the Minister for Education, Science and Training to initiate this Inquiry in order to evaluate the strengths of current Teacher Education courses and to identify areas for improvement.