

Australian Education Union Submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Education and Training Committee Inquiry into Pre-Service Teacher Education

May 2004

1. Introduction

The AEU welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Education and Training Committee to provide a submission to its inquiry into pre-service education. There have been many inquiries and reviews of pre-service teacher education over the past several decades without, in most cases, any substantial change to courses. At present, there appears to be at least three separate reviews and inquiries looking into pre-service education. Apart from the Education and Training Committee's inquiry, the VIT is presently involved in its own review of teacher education courses, preliminary to the development of standards for pre-service education. At the same time, there is work being done through the MCEETYA Taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership to nationally align 'graduate-level standards' and to map current practice in pre-service education including: student selection, course structure, course content and accreditation. The relationship between these separate processes seems unclear to the AEU. It would be, however, highly problematic if there was a lack of consistency and coherence in the outcomes from the different reviews and inquiries.

2. National Guidelines

The AEU believes that teaching should be seen as a national profession and there should be broadly consistent national standards and outcomes for teacher education courses across Australia. The adoption of agreed national guidelines for teacher education courses, and processes for reviewing programs in terms of the guidelines, would assist teachers seeking recognition in other states or overseas, and assist higher education institutions in ensuring that graduates from their programs will be eligible for professional recognition throughout Australia. The caveat that the union places on its support for national guidelines is that they should be developed in partnership with all of the major stakeholders in the teaching profession and represent the consensus views of the profession.

3. Course Structures

- 3.1 Beginning teachers should have university award qualifications which represent at least four years of full-time academic study including a minimum of one year of full-time teacher education professional studies. Ideally, teacher education graduates should have undertaken the equivalent of two years of full-time professional studies as part of their academic study. A preferred teacher education model for primary teachers would be a four year integrated course incorporating two years of professional studies. The AEU does not have a preference for any particular teacher education program for secondary teachers and supports both three-plus-one, three-plus-two and four year integrated or concurrent models.
- 3.2 Any requirement that teacher education students complete two years of professional studies before graduating would need to be introduced over time. Given the existing funding arrangements for higher education and the present problems with teacher supply, the AEU does not, at present, support mandatory five year pre-service courses (eg a three year academic degree followed by a two year professional qualification) for intending teachers. However desirable this model may appear to be as a preparation for teaching, it imposes significant financial burdens on students both in terms of HECS and other charges incurred through study and the unreasonable deferral of income. It would also exacerbate the teacher supply situation at a time when a range of specialist areas in secondary schools are experiencing shortages

which are predicted to continue until, and possibly beyond, 2010.

- 3.3 The major concern about the length of pre-service teacher education courses relates to the one year Diploma of Education. Most secondary teachers complete a first degree and then gain their teaching qualification through this pathway. While one year of professional studies is a necessary minimum, the AEU believes that pre-service education itself should be seen as only the initial step in the ongoing professional education of teachers. There needs to be a greater integration of pre-service education with the professional development of beginning teachers who are working in schools. The 'competent beginner' who emerges from their pre-service course is entering the next stage of their professional education when they start working in schools. The skills and knowledge of beginning teachers should be further developed not only by the experience of working as a teacher but through a structured school-based induction program, including a reduced teaching allotment, and the opportunity to participate in regular employer-funded professional development. It is important in this regard to recognise the importance of beginning teachers having access to secure employment. A major stumbling-block to ongoing professional education for many beginning teachers is the tenuous nature of the contract employment they are offered in their first few years of teaching.
- 3.4 The notion of an ongoing process of professional education for teachers beginning at pre-service, carrying on to induction and occurring throughout their teaching career, requires close working relationships between schools and university education faculties. The most common meeting-point for schools and universities is the school experience practicum which teacher education students are required to undertake. The relationship however, should extend far beyond this and encourage an ongoing dialogue and interchange between staff in universities and schools eg through current school teachers being employed for sessional work in award courses in universities, the exchange placement of university staff in schools and school staff in universities, school-based cooperative research, university-school partnerships in professional development, the use of practising teacher expertise in the development and implementation of programs conducted within universities, the delivery of university award courses at school sites and university participation in school-based induction programs. This would help to ensure that pre-service courses are seen as relevant and current by both the students themselves and the institutions where most of these students will end up teaching.

4. School-based Practicum

- 4.1 Pre-service education must remain fundamentally the responsibility of the universities. The AEU does not support the school-based 'apprenticeship' models operating in the UK and New Zealand. The teaching practicum however, is pivotal to the quality of teacher education courses. The practicum gives teacher education students the opportunity to know what it is like to manage a classroom, to make learning exciting and to ensure that students actually do learn. The AEU supports an appropriate course balance between theory and practical teaching experience which provides student teachers with as much supervised practical experience as possible. The existing minimums for required practical experience eg 45 days in Dip. Ed., should not in any way be reduced. If it is feasible to increase them, within the parameters of the Practice Teaching Award and the availability of teacher supervisors in schools, then this should be considered. In general, there should be a greater integration of theory and practice so that student teacher experience in schools grounds the coursework theory and feeds into all components of the course.
- 4.2 There should be close collaboration between schools and universities in the planning, conduct and evaluation of the practicum. Student teachers benefit most from their school experience when there is a real partnership between supervising classroom teachers and education academics. The AEU views with concern the financial constraints imposed on the universities and their negative impact on the capacity of university personnel to visit teacher education students and their school supervisors during the practicum. Evidence has been given to the AEU, by university and school

representatives, of cutbacks in school visiting programs by university personnel, to the overall detriment of teacher education courses. We strongly support education faculties in their approaches to improve funding levels for teacher education. The AEU is adamantly opposed however, to any attempt to compensate universities for their Federal Government cutbacks by removing from teachers their already inadequate levels of Award remuneration for the responsibilities of practice teaching supervision.

- 4.3 One of the major difficulties with the practicum at present is the growing shortage of student teacher placements, specifically within secondary schools. 2004 has been described as the most difficult year university placement officers have experienced. One university, with a large number of student teachers, has reported that only 37% of schools they sent requests to indicated that they were willing to provide teaching rounds for their Dip. Ed. students. This was down from 41% in 2003. Another university has said that they still have six students unplaced from the first teaching round, which is seen as the easiest to find places, and is gravely concerned about what will happen in the second and third rounds when teachers are generally less willing to take students. There are presently around 2300 secondary teacher education students requiring at least 45 days school experience. This translates into something like 7,000 placements to be fitted into the 550 secondary and primary-secondary schools in Victoria, 310 in the government sector.
- 4.4 As a result of representations on this matter to the union through a joint working party with university education faculties, the AEU, together with the VIEU in non-government schools, conducted a survey of all secondary colleges in August 2002. Over one third of all government schools responded to the survey indicating that, on average, they took 15 student teachers a year. The teaching areas which were most difficult to cover were LOTE (25%) and Psychology (23.6%) followed by SOSE, Science and Maths. When asked what could be done to increase the number of student teacher placements the most common response by far was 'increase the levels of payment to teacher supervisors' (which have not been increased for 12 years). Next was doing something about teacher workload. There were a variety of suggestions about how universities could improve the situation. The most common were: changing the timing of school experience (so that not all student teachers were looking for placements at the same time), using different types of placements (eg over a longer period of time), better preparing students, giving schools more notice and having a better subject mix. So far none of these issues has been satisfactorily addressed.
- 4.5 Schools in rural areas indicated that they were willing and able to take more student teachers and called on universities to encourage students to take up rural placements. While some schools already offered students assistance with accommodation and travel, they wanted more resources provided for this purpose. The State Government's proposals to provide a subsidy of \$900 per student teacher for a three week placement in a remote location and a travel-only subsidy for placement in other hard-to-staff locations, beginning in the second half of 2004, are welcome steps in this direction.
- 4.6 The AEU has no preferred model for the teacher practicum. The range of different models presently operating – block placements, one day per week extended placements, 'internships' - all have their own pluses and minuses. Each of these models can operate within the Australian Higher Education Practice Teaching Award using, where appropriate, the flexibilities available within the Award. The AEU has signed Memos of Understanding with two universities covering innovative approaches to the practicum. The Memo between Melbourne University and the AEU relates to the B.Teach. internship program. The union believes that internships should operate within a set of agreed guidelines which prevent the exploitation of student teachers and recognise the role of the supervising or 'mentoring' teacher. The Memo with Melbourne University covers matters such as the status of

the intern, the length of the placement, face-to-face teaching hours, replacement classes and the role and payment of the mentor.

5. Graduate Outcomes

- 5.1 It is important to identify and articulate the desirable outcomes for graduates from pre-service teacher education courses. These outcomes should represent the skills, knowledge and other attributes which are deemed necessary for beginning teachers entering the teaching profession. The outcomes should describe what is necessary for effective beginning teaching and a potentially successful teaching career. They should have the confidence of the teaching profession and be consistent with the existing Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) standards for beginning teachers to gain full registration. The graduate outcomes, expressed as professional standards, should shape the content of pre-service courses, the assessment of teacher education students and the evaluation and accreditation of university award courses by HEIs and the VIT.
- 5.2 The legislation setting up the VIT indicates that this body should play the key role in developing standards for Victorian school teachers at different stages of their careers. Universities, as the providers of pre-service courses, also need to be integrally involved in identifying the desirable graduate outcomes from their courses. The process of developing graduate outcomes/standards should involve a genuine consultation process with the profession as a whole, including all relevant stakeholders. The AEU believes that graduate outcomes should start from a vision of what good teaching is and embody the richness and complexity of the teaching role - all that it means to be a competent teaching professional. For example, one important graduate outcome must be knowledge about learning. Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Teaching and Teacher Education at Stanford University, and a leading expert in pre-service teacher education, described an important component of the outcome in this way.

“Since there are many kinds of learning, teachers need to think about what it means to learn different kinds of material for different purposes, how to support different kinds of learning with distinctive teaching strategies, and how to make judgements about which kinds of learning are most necessary in different contexts. Not everything can be learned deeply – that is, with opportunities for extensive application – but some things must be deeply understood as foundations for work that is to follow and as a means for developing specific skills and performances. Other ideas may be understood more superficially to create a map of the domain, but learned so that they connect to concepts that are meaningful.”

The outcomes should also be realistic and encompass the actual teaching role rather than a rhetorical ideal which does not accord with what teachers really do. One of the most comprehensive lists of graduate outcomes was developed by the national Council of Deans of Education, in partnership with other stakeholders, and published in *‘Preparing a Profession – Report of the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Project’*. It contains 54 outcomes or standards under 14 headings ranging from ‘Duty of Care’ and ‘Content Studies’ to ‘Working in Schools and Systems’. The list provides a good overview of the scope of the outcomes which should be addressed in pre-service courses.

The AEU has an interest in a number of specific graduate outcomes.

- 5.3 Understanding and catering for diversity. An essential attribute of a teacher in today’s schools is the capacity to identify, understand and cater for the wide range of learning needs in their classroom. Factors which contribute to this diversity include gender, age, culture, language background, ability, learning styles, impairment, behaviour, social circumstances, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, socio-economic status, isolation etc. Graduates should have the capacity to provide a quality education to a diverse student population in whatever situation they might find themselves throughout their teaching career.

- 5.4 The AEU believes that all graduating teachers should be adequately equipped to meet the needs of indigenous students and to contribute to the process of Reconciliation by ensuring that all students are able to develop a respect and understanding for the unique cultures of Australia's indigenous peoples. The national AEU position on this matter is to ensure that all undergraduate teacher education programs, within an agreed time-frame, build in significant and assessable mandatory indigenous studies units.
- 5.5 Beginning teachers should play an active role in developing and enhancing the curriculum they use. This means having the skills and understandings to adapt curriculum resource material to the learners in their classroom, to constantly improve on the curriculum they use through professional reflection and evaluation and to develop new units of work which improve student learning outcomes. This is an important part of their professional role. Teachers who do not contribute to the development of the curriculum they teach become de-skilled deliverers of packaged learning.
- 5.6 Graduates should have a sound knowledge of the curriculum being implemented in Victorian schools. Graduates and new teachers have expressed concern to the union about the limited information in their courses on the curriculum programs they are expected to implement once they are employed as teachers. The university argument has been that their students need to study the curriculum at a broader and more general level and that they see themselves preparing students in a national and international context. The AEU position is that pre-service students should learn the general through the particular. The curriculum frameworks and programs being implemented in Victorian schools should be used as templates to develop an informed and critical overview of curriculum philosophy and how the curriculum can be organised, sequenced and developed. This is another example of how pre-service theory could be grounded in the school practicum.
- 5.7 Graduates should have an understanding of their role in improving their profession and the educational institution and system in which they work. They should have developed, through their teacher education course, a critical understanding about education and its function and operation in society, the role of teachers and the nature of their work. One of the defining characteristics of 'professionalism' is the capacity of practitioners to bring a critical perspective to their professional role.
- 5.8 It should be a requirement of all teacher education courses that graduates emerge from them as competent, confident and creative users of information technology, with the capacity to integrate it as a learning tool into their curriculum programs. They should have the capacity to manage classrooms that use information technology, evaluate and use a range of software, have experience of assessment and reporting using technology and be able to develop units of work, incorporating technology, in the curriculum areas and Year levels they are qualified to teach.

6. Key Stages of Schooling

- 6.1 Teacher education students should have the broad options of preparation for teaching at either primary or secondary levels. They may also be able to gain a P-12 qualification through some courses. Beginning primary teachers should be able to teach students P-6 and beginning secondary teachers at 7-12. Any attempt to produce graduates who can teach only part of the primary curriculum (eg P-3) or part of the secondary curriculum (eg 7-10) will create significant employment restrictions for the individuals involved and staffing difficulties for most schools. Primary teachers however, should be aware of approaches to curriculum and pedagogy used in secondary schools and secondary teachers aware of approaches used in primary schools. In addition, teacher education courses should incorporate studies which provide students with specific knowledge and skills to cater for the needs of students in the various stages of schooling eg the early years of schooling, the middle years, post-compulsory.

- 6.2 Graduating primary teachers should have the necessary academic grounding and practical experience to be competent to teach the whole primary curriculum i.e. all of the key learning areas, with the exception of LOTE*, in the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF). This should involve an understanding of integrated curriculum methodologies. The problem at present for primary teachers is the expectation that the 38 strands of learning in the CSF will be implemented in their classrooms. The move towards an Essential Learning Framework in the Government's Education Blueprint has the potential to significantly improve this situation. Pre-service courses should be structured to allow for specialisation so that graduates, if they desire, can qualify for tagged positions. Within these parameters, particular emphasis should be given to the teaching of the core areas of literacy and numeracy because of their importance in laying the foundation for the future education of all students. Teacher education graduates should have both an understanding of the wide variety of ways in which learners acquire literacy and numeracy and the skills to identify and assist learners who experience difficulty in these learning areas. They themselves should have high levels of literacy and numeracy.
- 6.3 *The LOTE learning area is of particular concern in both primary and secondary schools because of teacher supply problems. In its submission in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into LOTE provision, the AEU called for a review of pre-service primary teaching courses to actively encourage more primary teachers to have LOTE qualifications when they graduate. We also outlined a range of actions the Department needed to carry out to encourage more teachers to enter and remain in LOTE teaching.
- 6.4 The AEU believes that secondary teachers should be qualified to teach the classes they are allotted. It is of major concern to the union that the AEU State of Our Schools survey of government school principals in 2003 found that there had been an increase in the number of secondary schools reporting that they had teachers teaching programs for which they lacked qualifications. In 2002 54% of schools reported that they had teachers teaching out of their areas of qualification. In 2003 this rose to 68%. In Victoria's rural regions it was 87%. The 2003 survey results indicated that the use of teachers unqualified in the subject area they were teaching was a means of addressing teacher supply problems in hard-to-staff subjects. At present, there is a mismatch between the demand for secondary teachers in various specialist subject areas in schools and the supply of those teachers from pre-service courses. The Department of Education and Training's Teacher Supply and Demand Report (November 2003) indicated that: 90.5% of LOTE vacancies, 68.7% of Maths vacancies and 59.8% of Technology vacancies in schools were difficult to fill. At the same time, 22.6% of all pre-service enrolments were in Studies of Society and Environment (where there is no shortage), 7.6% in Technology, 6.1% in Maths and 4.7% in LOTE. This imbalance between pre-service secondary teacher supply and school demand should be addressed by university selection processes.
- 6.5 Vocational Education and Training (VET) in secondary schools creates a number of problems for teacher education courses. Graduates who are required to teach Dual Recognition or other industry-focused courses generally need recent industrial experience. To meet this requirement, strategies such as the recruitment of people with industry experience into teacher education courses and some sort of structured practicum experience in industry as part of a broadly based teacher education course should be used. It is not however, in the interests of teacher education students or the school system to have narrowly-focused teacher education courses which solely prepare people to be VET specialists. In the vast majority of secondary schools teachers are required to teach at a range of year levels and schools place demands on teachers to be as flexible as possible. The experience of narrowly-trained specialist trade teachers in Victorian secondary schools also makes it clear why teachers who are too specialised have limited career opportunities.

7. Mature Age Entrants and those from other Professions

- 7.1 The AEU supports the Government's efforts to increase teacher supply in curriculum areas in high demand through recruiting mature age entrants. Teaching however, must remain an all graduate profession with all of its members having successfully undertaken an equivalent four years of full-time academic study including a minimum of one year full-time professional studies. If mature age students or members of other professions wish to become teachers they must also fulfil these requirements. If they already have a first degree then they need to undertake a minimum of one year of professional studies in teacher education. Other professions require mature age entrants to meet their minimum qualification requirements and do not allow qualified teachers to practise in their area despite their professional qualifications. There should be however, clearly articulated guidelines for mature age entrants to receive Recognition of Prior Learning, towards an appropriate university award course, for relevant experience and study.
- 7.2 A number of universities have reported that the average age of their final year pre-service students is around 30. This indicates that career change is already a significant factor in university teacher education intakes. One of the most important issues for mature-aged people wishing to make the transition from their existing occupation to teaching, is income support during their training period. The Government's proposal to target hard-to-staff subject areas through offering 30 non-teaching professionals the opportunity to undertake a teacher education course in 2005 while being employed as a trainee teacher under the supervision of an experienced teacher, is supported by the AEU.

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