

# National system for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs proposal for consultation

## Submission from Australian Council of Deans of Education (September 2010)

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### Introduction

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) supports a national approach to accreditation and also supports a move away from input models for judging the effectiveness of teacher education programs (e.g. examining and judging the entry requirements and the curriculum of teacher education) to an **outcomes focus** where the capabilities expected of entrants to the profession (what graduates know and are able to do) are used to inform accreditation of programs and ongoing improvement within the program. However, tensions between these two approaches are evident in the document. We urge clarification of input and outcomes foci and related procedures so that they do not contradict each other and so that the espoused principles can be realised in practice. We support the following:

Accreditation criteria should focus more on the outcomes of teacher education programs than on inputs, curriculum and processes. A focus on the latter elements runs the risk of consolidating conventional wisdom about how best to prepare teachers, thereby leading to greater uniformity of programs and reducing the scope for innovation. In any event it is what [pre-service] teachers learn and can do that should be the policy focus. How they get to that point is better left to the teacher education programs and other programs for teacher preparation. (OECD, 2005, p.1130).

ACDE supports an accreditation system that moves from a focus on 'inputs' to 'outcomes' as a means of encouraging **diversity in pre-service teacher education**. This is important as the student population and their school communities become increasingly diverse and teachers' work becomes increasingly complex involving careful professional judgment in a range of educational settings. A one-size-fits-all model for teacher education will not contribute to enhanced learning for all students.

We urge reconsideration of some of the **terminology** used in the document to reflect **contemporary notions of teachers' work and learning to teach**. 'Supervised practice teaching' assumes that the only thing that occurs in the in-schools component of teacher education is 'practicing teaching'. This is clearly an outmoded approach to learning to teach that is not supported by the research literature. Similarly, 'practicum' is usually now referred to as 'professional experience' or something similar, to reflect the range of settings and learnings that occur in teacher education. Moreover, terms like 'students' when referring to 'preservice teachers' along with 'lessons' and 'supervising teachers' all reflect outmoded terms and understandings of teachers' work and learning to teach.

### ***1. The appropriateness of the proposed principles for a national system for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs?***

In the literature, there are usually two clear **purposes for accreditation: accountability and ongoing improvement**. The first purpose is to assure the public and the profession that graduates from teacher education programs are professionally qualified and competent. In this way, accreditation enhances teacher professionalism and raises the status of the teaching profession. Second, accreditation should support processes for evaluation and ongoing improvement, both through internal evaluation, self-study, and research, as well as analysis of one's program in relation to available research on effective practice and professional preparation. It is important that these purposes are clear in any accreditation system and that the specific processes adopted to achieve these purposes encourage and support innovation and diversity by teacher education providers. We support an accreditation system that recognises teacher education providers are continuously striving to improve their programs and encourage a system of accreditation that utilises the processes and outcomes of internal ongoing improvement as part of formal and external accreditation. In this way, individual programs and institutions can ensure that they both maintain their unique missions and goals relevant to their local contexts and school

partnerships as well as assure the public, as part of a wider system of accountability, that they are preparing effective beginning teachers.

ACDE supports the notion that a nationally consistent system will help ensure that Australian pre-service teacher education programs and related teacher registration have **international currency and credibility**. This is important for preparing Australians as 'global teachers' (both in the context of increasingly diverse domestic communities as well as in the context of the 'travelling teacher' or the 'teacher as cosmopolitan') and for attracting pre-service teachers from other countries.

Critical to the success of any move to an outcomes-focussed system is the establishment of research-informed **professional standards for beginning teaching**. Therefore, we support the development of national professional standards and their alignment with the processes for accreditation of teacher education programs and with teacher registration processes. However, as outlined in our earlier submission in relation to the draft national professional standards for teachers, capturing the complexity of teachers' work in a set of standards is challenging and ongoing work that should not be rushed and simplified for political expediency.

ACDE stresses the importance of drawing on contemporary **research** in any accreditation process. The Principles should reflect the importance of using research to inform the design and delivery of the teacher education programs. For example, a statement in the Principles could be like that of the Ontario College of Teachers: "**Programs seeking to be accredited must be consistent with and reflect current research on teacher education**". In addition, research should be the cornerstone in evaluating programs and in providing evidence of their success and quality in any re-accreditation process. Moreover, the contribution of research to the development of new knowledge about teacher education and learning to teach should be promoted as an important outcome of any accreditation system.

While professional standards for teaching and program standards, as well as the related accreditation and registration processes, must be firmly grounded in the research-based body of knowledge linked to effective teaching and teacher education programs, this body of knowledge will change over time as new research becomes available. Any body of knowledge is only ever a snapshot in time. Therefore, both the professional standards and the programs standards, while providing the framework for accreditation and registration in particular a moment, must be seen as evolving and changing. Researchers should be encouraged, engaged and supported to conduct **ongoing rigorous and large scale investigations to inform this knowledge base**. Currently, the knowledge base is limited (e.g. Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser & McIntyre, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) with little systematic research in the Australian context because the funding base for this has historically been low. However, even though knowledge is fluid, it will be important to establish boundaries of time for the currency of professional standards, program standards and accreditation processes to provide some stability for programs and so that opportunities for deep engagement with particular missions and associated goals can be realised.

ACDE strongly supports the '**Flexibility and Innovation**' principle and stresses the need to ensure that the details of the program standards as well as the supporting materials ensure diversity of programs and support the capacity of institutions to name a mission and vision for its teacher education programs and be judged in relation to these self-determined goals and aims. If there are to be strong partnerships as suggested in the document, institutions need to be able to respond to the unique needs of communities and districts. We encourage a system that supports the close relationships of teacher education providers, employing bodies, the profession and other key stakeholders that are currently evident in local contexts.

The opportunity for teacher education providers to **provide evidence of effectiveness in a range of self determined ways** will be critical. It will be important to resist requiring simplistic and easy to measure indicators of effectiveness like grades, practicum results, surveys etc (all proxies for judging effective beginning teaching) and to support institutions in creating their own research and evaluation agendas in relation to their programs. Institutions should be able to provide their research findings as

part of the evidence of effectiveness of their programs (such as for example the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) in the US; see <http://www.teac.org/>). This is discussed further in section 3/4. Moreover, much attention needs to be given to ways of authentically assessing graduates against professional standards; this will also be discussed further in a later section.

***2. When considering the inter-related nature of the proposed national graduate teacher standards and the program standards, any critically important area in the preparation of teachers that requires further attention by these standards?***

ACDE supports a comprehensive accreditation system with alignment between professional standards for graduates of accredited pre-service teacher education programs, core requirements which programs must meet in order to be accredited, and processes for assessing evidence of success designed and presented by institutions. In addition, ACDE supports accreditation processes that are clearly **linked to teacher registration**; that is, the graduates from accredited pre-service teacher education programs are registrable and ready for employment. Moreover, it is important that accreditation and registration processes take into account induction and continuing professional learning.

In keeping with an accreditation process that focuses on professional standards and outcomes and that creates opportunities for teacher education providers to design and deliver programs which align with their particular mission and goals while preparing graduates able to demonstrate nationally agreed professional standards for graduating teachers, we **caution over prescription in relation to Program Standards**. To encourage the range of knowledge, skills and experiences that prospective teachers bring to teacher education, we urge avoidance of a 'lowest common denominator' type of approach. Perhaps it might be useful to consider a small set of core requirements and provide the opportunity for programs to justify their entry requirements, program structure and content and delivery, in line with their mission and what they know in conjunction with the profession about effective teaching and teacher education. As a discipline of study, teacher education research in Australia is contributing to an increasing knowledge base about learning to teach. Providers should be encouraged to professionally justify their programs drawing on relevant research as well as collective agreement with the profession about what a good teacher knows and is able to do, and then to provide evidence of a program's effectiveness through a process where graduates demonstrate knowledge and practice in relation to the professional standards for teaching.

Specifically, in relation to the detail in the consultation paper, we urge some rethinking in relation to the suggested **program entry requirements**. First, setting any sort of entry requirements must avoid an assumption of uniformity of entrants and a standard model for teacher education. In the consultation paper, the requirement for senior secondary English and Mathematics study, in addition to begging questions such as 'Which Mathematics?' and 'Which English?', does not address the issue of ensuring that entrants to teaching have adequate numeracy and literacy standards. Moreover, this requirement as it is currently stated is only relevant for school leavers. This needs substantial rethinking. In addition, the requirement for an IELTS score of 7.5 does not address the issue of cultural competence which is needed for teaching. We also ask what the 7.5 refers to – all bands?

The ongoing Bologna processes in Europe suggest that more countries in that part of the world will move to consecutive models of teacher education comprising a Bachelor's and Master's degree structure, with the Master's component providing teachers' professional education. The suggestion for **2-year graduate entry pre-service teacher education programs** in Australia aligns with these European moves. However, there is no rationale in the document for 'Graduate entry programs [to be] the equivalent of at least two years full time structured learning and [to be] delivered over 18 calendar months'. This configuration seems somewhat arbitrary given the lack of rationale and seeming lack of consideration of the diverse cohorts electing to enter teacher education. For example, we believe that career changers are a great asset to the profession and should be encouraged through a range of appropriate preparation pathways that take into consideration their broad and deep prior knowledge and experiences. Careful analysis of the impact on the profession of what is being proposed, is needed. Therefore, while we endorse the importance of quality graduate entry pre-service teacher education

(and caution that the length of a program does not guarantee quality), we argue for flexible pathways and believe that discussions need to be held at policy levels about the relative value of concurrent or consecutive models of teacher education and also about the most desirable configuration for consecutive models. Currently available research as well as funded longitudinal studies would inform this debate. Moreover, this needs consideration within the context of the ALTC standards setting project, particularly the alignment of professional standards and professional accreditation with academic standards and AUQA/TEQSA assessments. Given our stance in relation to encouraging a diverse range of teacher education approaches and attracting a diverse cohort of entrants to the profession, we must not neglect 4-year undergraduate concurrent teacher education programs as effective pathways to teaching.

Effective teacher preparation is a process shared by teacher educators and professional practitioners in the field, and preparation for those roles in relation to the professional knowledge base about learning to teach, is essential. However, the proposal for supervising or mentor teachers to undertake a nationally recognised training program in order to assess graduates against the graduate teacher standards, needs careful thought. While having obvious cost and resource implications that need consideration, any development of knowledge and skills in relation to learning to teach should be co-developed within the context of partnerships and shared goals of the institutions and the school and other educational settings in which they work.

While we argue that *time* does not necessarily equal *quality* when considering the **practicum** or professional experience, we support the notion of a **minimum requirement**. However, we stress that the emphasis should be on developing professional knowledge and practice and on demonstrating professional standards, and thus on what makes teacher education distinctive as a discipline. In addition, the notion of 'a day' needs some flexibility.

We also urge further thinking and clarification in relation to the '**discipline studies**' referred to in Program Standard 4. How is it envisaged these will be studied? What will be studied? We caution any assumption that study in a discipline designed to prepare the discipline expert for a field outside teaching is necessarily relevant for those preparing to teach.

**3. Suggestions for any strengthening of the proposed accreditation processes and issues that require further consideration and elaboration, possibly in the proposed support materials?**

**4. Taking account of MCEECDYA's decision for a distributed national approach to a system for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs, comments on the allocation, inclusiveness or suitability of the proposed roles and responsibilities?**

ACDE supports the proposal to accredit programs, not institutions (cf NCATE in the US). We agree with the need to avoid duplication of process and support a national approach to program approval and quality assurance whereby each state operationalises the system. In addition, we highlight the need for **alignment with AUQA/ TEQSA** processes of quality assurance in Australian higher education.

Not yet well developed in the document are **guidelines and procedures for providing evidence** in relation to the professional standards and program standards, and the procedures for judging that evidence. These will be critical to realising the principles of the proposed accreditation system, and we urge substantive and deep **consultation** as these are developed with procedures for trialling, evaluating and reworking prior to any universal adoption. Of note is the need to come to terms with what it means to authentically assess graduates' professional knowledge and practice in the workplace; that is, **assessing graduates in relation to the professional standards**. There are examples of such assessments that have been developed and subjected to rigorous validity and reliability studies (e.g. Performance Assessment for California Teachers – PACT, see <http://www.pacttpa.org>; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Pecheone & Chung, 2006).

In relation to the length of the review cycle, ACDE stresses the need to ensure that there is sufficient time to review, redesign, implement, and evaluate a program, including **time to embed deep changes and review the outcomes**, before the review cycle starts again. Frequent internal course review processes result in an almost 'continuous process of change' and few students get to benefit from changes before further changes occur.

In the documentation, it is unclear who covers the **cost of the accreditation activities**. For this system to operate effectively, injection of public funding for the training of accreditation panel members, training of supervising/mentor teachers, site visits and other accreditation meetings etc, will be required. We do not support a system like that of the expensive and voluntary NCATE process which is funded mainly through accreditation fees paid by accredited institutions and member organisations.

ACDE highlights some tension between the adoption of the proposed accreditation processes incorporating a focus on standards-based outcomes and evidence of performance, with the current promotion and support of **alternative pathways into teaching** that allow un- and under-qualified teachers to begin teaching while completing an accredited teacher education program. This challenges purposes associated with accreditation such as quality, status and accountability to the public.

ACDE stresses again the importance of this accreditation system that focuses on outcomes and that provides the opportunity for institutions to design and deliver programs in line with their mission and to meet the needs of their partnerships arrangements with local education communities. Then the onus is on the institution to provide evidence that they have achieved their planned outcomes and that they are preparing effective beginning teachers as assessed in relation to agreed professional standards for teaching. Consideration could be given to the US **Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)** <http://www.teac.org/> processes for deciding on **suitable evidence and judging that evidence** as an example of a way to do this. Four principles guide TEAC's accreditation process:

1. It leads to program improvement, which is a continuous process in which each step helps define the next one and moves it forward.
1. It is inquiry driven, starting from the faculty's own questions and curiosity about the program's accomplishments.
2. It examines the trustworthiness and adequacy of the evidence the faculty relies on to support its claims about its students, and it examines the effectiveness of the system the faculty has in place to control and monitor the program's quality.
3. It is frugal, not burdening the program and institution with unnecessary activities or costs in paperwork, personnel, time, and money.

These translate into three broad areas of quality principles and standards for teacher education programs:

QUALITY PRINCIPLE I: Evidence of candidate learning

QUALITY PRINCIPLE II: Evidence of faculty learning and inquiry

QUALITY PRINCIPLE III: Evidence of institutional commitment and capacity for program quality

In the TEAC system, programs are assessed on the extent to which they live up to their own claims for preparing effective teachers and their own stated goals. All TEAC accredited programs are required to provide:

1. Credible evidence of their common claim that their graduates are competent;
2. Evidence that the means by which they establish the evidence is valid;
3. Evidence that program decisions are based on evidence; and
4. Evidence that the institution is committed to the program.

Programs that seek TEAC accreditation prepare a 'research monograph' in which they present evidence that they are meeting the principles, using multiple measures. It may be possible to draw on some of these features in an Australian system of accreditation.

ACDE recommends a clear **differentiation between the processes for initial accreditation and for renewal of accreditation**. We recommend mandated site visits for renewal of accreditation but that they be optional for a new program. Site visits could involve interviews with members of staff, current students in the program, and teachers in schools who are involved in the practicum. Submissions could

also be invited from stakeholders. We offer a caution in relation to the amount of paperwork required for any review (cf the extensive 'exhibit rooms' in north America). These procedures have clear cost implications and will have to be funded outside the regular cluster funding to universities if they are to proceed.

ACDE highlights the need to **evaluate and review** the professional standards for teaching, the program standards and the **accreditation processes** to ensure that they reflect current research and state of the art educational practice.

### **5. Any particularly significant matters that may require further consideration of the proposed implementation timeline?**

We urge timelines that ensure transparency and thorough consultation with time for teachers educators and the profession to co-develop the support materials. This is an opportunity for Australia to be a leader in the field of accreditation by drawing on research and professionally informed processes to create an environment whereby diverse teacher education programs can grow and flourish in order to prepare highly effective beginning teachers able to address the learning needs of all Australian students.

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