

Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM
Chair, Quality Initial Teacher Education Review
Attn: Quality Initial Teacher Education
Review Secretariat C50MA8
Department of Education, Skills and Employment
GPO Box 9880, Canberra, ACT 2601

16 July 2021

Dear Ms Paul,

Thank you for the invitation to make submissions to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review 2021*. I am writing to provide a submission on behalf of the NSW Productivity Commission.

Improving the quality of teaching is crucial for driving improvements in productivity. Improvements in teaching quality result in better student outcomes, flowing to a more productive future workforce, and higher lifetime earnings for our children.

In my recent *2021 Productivity White Paper*, I highlighted lengthy pre-service training requirements can discourage high-quality candidates from entering the profession. To help broaden the supply of high-quality teachers and address teacher shortages in critical areas, I recommended reviewing the current requirement for the 2-year Master of Education. I also recommended accelerated, employment-based pathways to bring high-potential candidates into the profession (Recommendation 2.2).

I am pleased that the NSW Government is already actioning some of my recommendations. A new initiative will enable high-quality candidates with relevant skills and discipline knowledge (for example, university lecturers) to begin teaching and earning income in New South Wales in as little as six months, as they complete their teaching qualification.

While many of the *White Paper's* recommendations are targeted at the NSW school system and focus on matters of state jurisdiction, initial teacher education is regulated at the national level. I therefore highlight the Commission's recommendations on initial teacher education for your attention.

The NSW Productivity Commission's purpose is to advise government on how to improve productivity, but I note that neither the *White Paper* nor my submission represent NSW Government policy.

Throughout this submission, I reference relevant sections of the *White Paper* for context and evidence. However, to better understand the recommendations and context in which the NSW Productivity Commission's recommendations are made, the *White Paper* can be downloaded from: <https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/white-paper>.

I am happy for my submission to be published and attributed to me or the NSW Productivity Commission and/or referenced in the Review's final report.

If you have any questions regarding my submission or would like to discuss any of the matters raised in it further, please get in touch.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Achterstraat". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Peter Achterstraat AM
NSW Productivity Commissioner

NSW Productivity Commission Submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

July 2021

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Introduction

The NSW Productivity Commission’s *Productivity Commission White Paper 2021: Rebooting the Economy* (*‘White Paper’*) proposes a range of bold options for improving productivity across the NSW economy. Some of the findings and recommendations of the *White Paper* relate directly to initial teacher education (‘ITE’). These are the focus of this submission to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (‘Review’).

The NSW Productivity Commission’s purpose is to advise on options for improving productivity in New South Wales. Neither the *White Paper* nor this submission represent NSW Government policy.

PART A - Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates

Focusing on high-quality candidates rather than length of training

The *White Paper* questions the strength of the evidence underlying the national shift to longer ITE courses. The evidence suggests efforts to raise teaching quality should prioritise attracting high-potential candidates over length of training:¹

The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group's 2014 report, Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers, drove introduction of the two-year master's degree requirement for ITE. There was widespread concern that teachers were not adequately equipped to address diverse learning needs, did not have sufficient knowledge of teaching theory, and were not equipped to teach numeracy and literacy. The report called for universities to teach aspiring teachers more curriculum and theories of teaching. It led to longer training for new teachers.

It sounds plausible that studying education for longer would increase the skills and knowledge of graduates and improve graduate teacher outcomes. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that gains from longer teaching pathways are minimal or even nil.

Australian and international evidence on higher accreditation requirements, including teacher certification, shows a mixed to weak relationship with improved student outcomes (Commonwealth Productivity Commission, 2012c). The bulk of empirical evidence, including randomised controlled trials, finds teacher certification bears little relationship to teacher effectiveness, as measured by impacts on student achievement (Decker, Mayer, and Glazerman, 2004; Gordon, Kane, and Staiger, 2006; Kane, Rockoff and Staiger, 2006; Ladd and Sorensen, 2015; Ryan, 2017).

...

Efforts to improve standards by lengthening ITE have conflated credentials with quality.

Research suggests that rather than focusing on pre-service training time, the quest for teacher effectiveness should prioritise two stronger indicators: training quality, and candidate attributes such as subject matter expertise and academic strength.

...

The NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) suggests that the cognitive, verbal, literacy and academic abilities of teachers have the greatest impact on student learning outcomes. International research also points to the importance of subject-matter knowledge for teaching effectiveness, particularly for subjects like maths (Goldhaber and Brewer, 1997).

A series of gold standard randomised controlled experiments confirm that qualified teachers are equalled or outperformed by unqualified teachers who have stronger academic backgrounds:

¹ NSW Productivity Commission White Paper 2021, p. 58-59.

- *Decker, Mayer, and Glazer (2004) found that for students in years 1 to 5, the unqualified group produced similar results in reading and better results in maths by 0.15 standard deviations. That is the equivalent of one month of additional instruction over a school year.*
- *Clark and her colleagues looked at middle school and high school maths teachers. They too found the unqualified group produced better results (Clark et al., 2013). In another study, Clark and fellow researchers focused on US elementary grades,8 and again found that unqualified teachers outperformed qualified ones in reading instruction, achieving the equivalent of 1.3 months extra instruction over a year (Clark and Isenberg, 2020).*

US research has also found that although traditional cognitive measures (such as academic scores) can predict teacher performance, non-cognitive measures (including personality traits) also play a significant role (Rockoff et al., 2008). Some Australian ITE courses have begun to integrate these findings:

- *The University of Notre Dame interviews each student and assesses a personal statement.*
- *The University of Melbourne has created a Teacher Capability Assessment Tool to predict a candidate's teaching potential.*

The *White Paper* raises the further issue that lengthy pre-service training, while intended to ensure teachers are 'classroom ready', paradoxically raises the cost of identifying excellent future teachers:²

It is... difficult to know in advance who will thrive as a teacher. Getting high-potential candidates into the classroom more quickly gives them the opportunity to discover more cheaply and quickly whether teaching will be right for them. It reduces the cost to the individual and the taxpayer of working out whether teaching is a suitable career

Longer ITE courses discourage high-quality candidates

The *White Paper* explains that long pre-service initial teacher education courses act to discourage high-potential candidates and mid-career professionals from entering teaching:³

If longer training and higher credentials do not improve teaching quality, we might hope they have other benefits. It is plausible, for example, that more credentials could signal a higher status for the teaching profession. That could attract higher-quality candidates into teaching.

Unfortunately, practice has not borne this out. In fact, the additional year of qualification needed to teach discourages potential high-quality teachers from joining the teaching profession.

....

Longer pathways increase the cost— and the risk—of becoming a teacher, particularly if you come to the profession later in life. Longer university courses cost aspiring teachers more

² Ibid, p. 60.

³ Ibid, p. 59.

(and taxpayers pay more too). And the extra time spent training could have been spent earning income, gaining practical experience, and teaching school students.

- *Some teachers realise that they are poorly suited to teaching only upon entering the classroom. Extra university training delays this discovery, raises its cost, and reduces the time available to pursue more suitable careers.*
- *Longer pathways into teaching are even more costly for two important groups of potential candidates: high-performing graduates and mid-career professionals. Because high performers have more options and a greater lifetime earning potential, they sacrifice more income for each year they spend out of the workforce. Mid-career changers have fewer working years left and often have families to support. This too raises the cost of each extra year out of the workforce,*

Unless addressed, onerous ITE requirements will continue to deter high-performing teaching candidates.

The *White Paper* canvasses several options for making ITE less onerous and widening the pool of high-potential candidates for teaching careers. These options are addressed in the following sections.

Opening employment-based pathways

A key recommendation in the *White Paper* is for a systematic implementation of employment-based pathways as an effective means of lowering the barriers to high-quality candidates entering teaching:⁴

Singapore has a highly successful competitive program to attract academically strong mid-career professionals into teaching. Candidates do not need an education-related qualification. The application process includes rigorous screening. If candidates successfully complete initial screening, they spend time in schools as untrained contract teachers for up to a year. They are then assessed on suitability for teaching and may progress to a teaching diploma while continuing their work in the classroom.

The Teach For Australia (TFA) program is an Australian example of an employment-based teacher training pathway to address teaching shortages. Since 2008 the program has placed high-achieving teacher candidates into hard-to-fill positions in disadvantaged schools across Victoria, the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and Tasmania. Following a fast-tracked course in teaching and simultaneous two-year placement, participants obtain a Master of Teaching degree and are fully qualified to teach. The program has succeeded attracting high-quality graduates, with participants outperforming other graduate teachers by the end of the program (Dandolo Partners, 2017).

Significant demand is present for these pathways. In 2021, TFA has 171 candidates enrolled across Australia. It turns down almost as many quality candidates for lack of additional funding.

⁴ Ibid, p. 62.

Given the NSW teacher supply challenge, and the costs of comparable pathways, the State should expand such employment-based pathways as fast as practicable to meet demand from these high-performing candidates. These pathways should have an initial focus on STEM graduates to address urgent shortages. The only limit on expansion should be the ability to scale successfully and to attract, place and retain high-quality candidates.

Following recommendations in the Commission's *White Paper* and earlier *Green Paper*, the NSW Government announced two important initiatives for the development of accelerated or employment-based pathways into teaching in New South Wales:

- A \$400,000 investment to develop a new model to encourage professionals to make a mid-career transition into teaching.⁵
- New pathways into teaching for professionals with experience in relevant subject areas or with experience teaching in the higher education system.⁶

While the *White Paper* is focused on the NSW context, the Review could consider the potential for similar or complementary measures at the national level.

Reviewing the requirement for a 2-year Master of Teaching

Another key recommendation from the *White Paper*, regarding ITE, is that:⁷

It is time to review the costs and benefits of the requirement for a two-year Master of Teaching, particularly for secondary teachers where subject-matter qualifications count more, and in subjects like STEM where supply issues are most acute.

Where longer ITE is not found to improve student outcomes or where it adversely impacts teaching shortages and thus teaching quality, the requirement should be shortened back to a Graduate Diploma.

Accelerating or compressing ITE courses

The *White Paper* also flags some 'partial solutions' to the barriers created by lengthy ITE courses. One such solution is 'to compress initial teacher education into faster intensive courses':⁸

The University of Newcastle employs a trimester system, so that teachers can complete their postgraduate degree in one and a half years instead of two.

This gets new teachers into the classroom more quickly. But it still requires aspiring teachers and to pay for and complete a two-year full-time equivalent study load, which acts as a considerable barrier to teaching. It also requires the taxpayer to subsidise an extra year of full-time equivalent study, without demonstrable benefits.

⁵ NSW Department of Education, (2020) 'New pathway into teaching for professionals' Retrieved from: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/new-pathway-into-teaching-for-professionals>

⁶ NSW Department of Education, (2021) 'Mid-career barriers to teaching torn down' Retrieved from: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/mid-career-barriers-to-teaching-torn-down>

⁷ *White Paper*, p. 60.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Implementing and using conditional accreditation

Another ‘partial solution’ is more widespread use of conditional accreditation schemes, which lower barriers to entry by getting new teachers into the classroom and earning income faster:⁹

New South Wales is unique amongst Australian jurisdictions in letting aspiring teachers become ‘conditionally accredited’ in their final year of ITE. Conditional accreditation gives aspiring NSW teachers the ability to enter the classroom and earn an income faster, potentially reducing barriers to entering the profession. While conditional accreditation is widely used in New South Wales, stakeholders indicate its use today is largely ad hoc, left to the initiative of individual teachers and schools.

As the largest employer of teachers in New South Wales, the NSW Government could use ‘conditional accreditation’ systematically, to get high-performing candidates into the classroom faster. It could be used to address shortages more quickly, for example, in STEM subjects and in regional areas. The option to teach full- or part-time while completing the final stages of a teaching qualification could be used to reduce the uncertainty and opportunity cost of becoming a teacher.

The ITE review could consider the potential costs and benefits of a wider and more systematic implementation of conditional accreditation, as well as potential mechanisms for achieving this.

PART B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

Training teachers for continuous improvement

A key point made by the *White Paper* is that there has been a strong policy focus on using ITE to improve the teaching quality of new teachers, but less focus on evidence-based methods that can continuously improve teaching practice across the much larger cohort of already-serving teachers.

The *White Paper* recommends a much greater focus on implementing rigorous measures of teacher performance that provide all teachers—both new and already-serving—with the feedback they need to continuously improve. These measures include setting SMART goals, and introducing 360-degree feedback, statistical measures of teacher value added, and classroom observations.

Classroom observations, in particular, can play a powerful role in improving teaching practice:¹⁰

Classroom observations typically involve a senior colleague, school leader or peer observing a lesson given by the teacher in their classroom. The Measures of Effective Teaching project involved approximately 3,000 teachers from across the United States over seven years. It found that teachers could be given useful feedback after multiple classroom observations combined with data on student improvement and from student perception surveys. Quality Teaching Rounds are another approach to classroom observations, with a strong track record in New South Wales ...

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 75.

Observations by supervisors are essential. But driving real improvement in teaching practice and student outcomes requires a much more rigorous and consistent system of classroom observations.

New South Wales should implement such a system. It should include both supervisor and peer-to-peer observations. Observations should not just be a formality conducted under artificial conditions and/or restricted to mid- and end-of-year cycle appraisals— or worse, restricted to use as a tool for managing poor performance. They should be implemented as a universal, routine, ongoing practice, focused on generating regular low-stakes constructive feedback, building teachers' skills and confidence, and supporting continuous improvement.

Stakeholders highlighted that not every teacher will have access to classroom observations by experts in their subject area, particularly in small, regional, or remote schools. This problem can be addressed by cross-school classroom observation networks, by access to a central pool of subject-expert teachers, and potentially through remote and online observation. These could all be facilitated by a Centre for Teaching Excellence (Recommendation 2.5).

Because classroom observations are a highly effective, evidence-based form of professional learning, they should form a major component of teachers' professional development (PD) requirements and hours.

For classroom observations to be useful, each school, supervisor, and teacher must have the capacity to conduct them effectively. This requires building the capabilities of observers, both by training them and by providing a standardised assessment tool to improve the quality of observation and reduce bias.

The Review could consider the role ITE could play in training teachers on evidence-based measures that promote continuous improvement, for example, by ensuring new teachers are trained to give and receive high-quality classroom observations.