

Response from the Queensland College of Teachers to the Schools Workforce Productivity Commission Draft Research Report

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) wishes to commend the Schools Workforce Productivity Commission Draft Research Report for the comprehensive analysis of the schools workforce and the issues which currently, or will in the future, affect this area. We accept the invitation to comment on certain areas of the Draft Report that are of particular relevance to the QCT.

The QCT has a key interest in teacher quality as it is responsible for setting standards for entry to the teaching profession and ongoing teacher registration in Queensland. As part of this, the QCT approves and monitors all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs delivered in Queensland by 10 higher education providers.

Length of graduate-entry teacher education programs

Under the national system for the accreditation of ITE programs, endorsed by MCEECDYA in April 2011, all graduate entry ITE programs are required to be of two years full-time equivalent duration. The Productivity Commission recommended (5.2) that this should not be mandatory for reasons of cost effectiveness and lack of evidence. In response, the QCT believes that the critical concern must be teacher quality and that there is sufficient evidence that to achieve quality outcomes requires more than a one-year ITE program.

The MCEECDYA decision was made on the basis that two years of study is required to provide sufficient opportunity for preservice teachers to acquire the professional knowledge and skills necessary to meet the National Professional Standards for Teachers. This decision received widespread support from deans of education and other stakeholders across jurisdictions.

Two-year graduate ITE programs are becoming common in many other countries that lead the world in both best practice in teacher education as well as student outcomes. In Finland, one of the highest performing education systems, all teacher preparation for entry to the profession has for many years been Masters level qualifications. In such countries there is an explicit focus on quality, the achievement of which requires attention to a range of areas and cannot be separated from the need for longer, more adequate teacher preparation.

The decision to move to two-year graduate ITE programs is also supported by the *Review of Teacher Education and School Induction* (Caldwell and Sutton, 2010) which was commissioned by the Queensland Government. The Review produced a suite of 65 recommendations, focused on strengthening many aspects of teacher preparation and induction, as a result of extensive research into international best practice in teacher education and consultation with a wide range of relevant stakeholders. A key recommendation was that graduate programs be of at least two years duration. The recommendations are inter-related and intended to be implemented in a holistic rather than piecemeal way. Achieving the required strengthening of a range of teacher education areas simply could not be achieved in a one-year program.

Caldwell and Sutton (2010) use multiple sources of evidence to support their conclusions, for example (p 61), the work of Loudon et al (2010, p 10), which found knowledge of literacy and mathematics teaching was substantially greater for students who had completed a Master of Teaching than for students in other kinds of programs.

In a survey project commissioned by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (2008) a key finding was that the longer preservice teacher education programs produced graduates who felt more prepared for teaching. In the report's summary of significant relationships (p 8), four of

the six themes were found to have a relationship with the length of the preservice program. These were the *Pedagogy Scale*, *Knowing Students Scale*, *Ongoing Learning*, *Collegiality and Engagement Scale*, and the *Legal and Ethical Scale*. The more positive responses came from the graduates of the two-year graduate-entry and four-year (undergraduate-entry) programs. Graduates of the one-year graduate programs had the lowest levels of agreement. This is a strong indication that the length of their university preparation has a direct impact on how well prepared a new entrant to the profession feels.

We acknowledge there are limited data available to compare different teacher preparation programs. Until such time as two-year programs become the norm, it will be difficult to obtain more extensive data about the effectiveness of these programs. We support Recommendation 5.1 of the Productivity Commission Report about the need for a major longitudinal study of teacher education graduates.

In Queensland, education stakeholders have also concluded that quality teacher preparation is difficult to achieve through a one-year program. As required under the QCT program approval processes, ITE programs are reviewed following completion of their first full offering. Review processes involve consultation with relevant parties such as school principals and supervising teachers. Issues identified in regard to one-year graduate programs have included graduates' (relatively poorer) ability to teach reading, knowledge across the key learning areas and understandings related to the diverse backgrounds of students (including Indigenous learners) and those with special needs.

Two-year graduate programs provide opportunities to address in greater depth a range of areas identified as priorities by governments, teacher employers and school communities such as skills in diagnosis and assessment, behaviour management, working with students with special needs, engaging with parents, teaching Indigenous students and development of literacy and numeracy.

The Queensland Review (eg pp 54-55) found, in accord with the Productivity Commission, considerable evidence to support the need for high quality practical experience and enhanced university-school partnerships.

The theme of the need for longer programs in order to accommodate more extensive practical experience is reflected in a mapping of ITE programs (Ingvarson et al, 2004, 31), which found there was a strong feeling that a 'one-year course placed great pressure on the system and thorough development of teaching skills'.

In Australia, as noted by the Productivity Commission (p68), the Melbourne University's Masters of Teaching program is demonstrating its graduates have enhanced levels of preparedness for teaching. One of its key features is extended clinical practice in schools – a feature which is not possible in shorter programs.

It is possible within two-year graduate programs to include a greater amount and more effective classroom practical experience. In a one-year program it is generally impossible to include an extended authentic culminating professional experience such as an internship that provides a supported transition to the role of teacher with the guidance of a mentor.

It is for these reasons, focused on quality enhancement, that the MCEECDYA decision that graduate ITE program be of two-year full time equivalent duration should continue to be supported.

Literacy, numeracy and science tests

Queensland is in the final stages of implementing a pre-registration test in literacy, numeracy and science content and pedagogy for aspiring Primary teachers (includes middle years of schooling, special education and early childhood teachers).

The test was a key recommendation of a review of primary school education in Queensland commissioned by the Queensland government in 2008 (Masters, 2009).

The QCT considers there are a number of factors which do not support the key point (p 61) of the Productivity Commission that such tests be left as an option for individual school operators as part of employment selection processes.

Employers of teachers range from the state government and Catholic education systems to a large number of Independent schools of varying size and nature. If some employers chose not to administer the test, the desired final quality check of all graduates would not be achieved. Further, administration by a diverse range of employers could raise issues of consistency, confidentiality, equity and rigour.

Administration by an independent single entity is essential for transparency and consistency. As teacher registration is a requirement prior to employment, administration by a teacher registration body is appropriate and provides the necessary independence from any one sector or system.

Conclusion

The QCT appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report and trusts that the information we have provided will assist in development of the final recommendations.

References

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