

**Submission to the Productivity Commission  
Schools Workforce Study**

**Melbourne Graduate School of Education  
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**Background to submission**

In a report by the Business Council of Australia entitled *Teaching Talent: The Best Teachers For Australia's Classrooms (May 2008)* it is stated:

"The quality of teaching is the main driver of successful student learning outcomes. Australia's teaching profession and its schools constitute an infrastructure that is critical to its survival in an increasingly global economy."

The 2009 PISA results confirm that Australia is falling behind the top tier countries, and this can be attributed to decreases in performance of students across the ability range.

In 2008 the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) introduced the new Master of Teaching (early years, primary and secondary streams). The program is designed to develop graduates who have the professional capabilities to meet the needs of individual learners, through the use of data to plan and implement teaching interventions.

The Master of Teaching program is a paradigm shift in the preparation of teachers and aims to break the cycle of the apprenticeship model and the recycling of the practices that were taught to the mentoring teacher. It is a fundamental change to the professional training of teachers. The program embraces the disciplinary knowledge and critical analytical skills of graduate entry students, and integrates masters-level academic study with practical work in collaborating partnership schools. Clinical teaching models are used with university based Clinical Specialists and school based Teaching Fellows working together, mainly in the school setting, to teach the candidates skills and practices underpinned by the core and discipline subjects delivered at the university.

Why did we need a paradigm shift? Simply, traditional approaches are not working. In traditional approaches, there is limited connection between the university lectures and the school experience. The school experience is in short blocks separated by long periods away from school. Teaching is too complex and challenging for this approach. In 2008, only 41% of new teachers in Australia claimed that they were well or very well prepared for their first teaching role.

The Master of Teaching is a significantly different approach to the standard models of teacher preparation. It has an underpinning philosophy that teaching is a clinical practice profession and recognises that teaching is arguably the most complex and challenging profession. Traditional models of teacher education, while recognising the importance of the university/school partnership, have overwhelmingly failed (with some exceptions) to produce teachers with the professional skills to address the needs of individual learners in heterogeneous classrooms.

What do we mean by a clinical practice profession? First, like other clinical professions (doctors, psychologists, audiologists), the program focuses on the individual learner - the learner is at the heart of everything we do. The clinical program prepares candidates: to gather evidence to ascertain what a learner knows now and what they are ready to learn next; to create appropriate learning strategies to take the learner to the next level of knowledge; to use evidence based teaching interventions; and to evaluate the impact of their decisions on the learning of the students. Unlike other clinical practice professions, it is not focused on 'fixing a problem'. The Master of Teaching is developmentally based and is focussed on enhancing learning and the development of each individual.

Second, the Master of Teaching program introduces new thinking to the professional preparation of teachers in Australia and uses clinical teaching models. The program is underpinned by the following: the development of a complex body of knowledge and research which underpins professional practice through the core compulsory subjects; clinical pedagogical models which see students working with university academic and Clinical Specialists three days per week, with teaching practice and professional seminars two days per week in partnership schools with the support of Teaching Fellows. These experts help them make the link between the theory they learn in university and the experience they have in the classroom.

The Master of Teaching includes a strong foundation of curriculum, assessment, learning and teaching from which to build practice. This foundation is integrated into classroom practice every week throughout the course.

## Outcomes

In 2010 the Australian Council for Education Research conducted an external evaluation of the Master of Teaching Primary and Secondary – a key finding was that 90% of graduates felt ‘well or very well’ prepared for their first teaching role, a figure well above what is typically 40% in other teacher education programs. Moreover there is early evidence that the Master of Teaching graduates have higher rates of employment, career commitment and lower attrition.

The program is making a difference in the way in which theory and pedagogical knowledge informs the practices of school communities, and so is having an impact on systems, as well as on individual candidates. Many partnership schools are now working with the MGSE to involve more of their teachers in this model to thus enact whole-school change to the evidence based model.

## Future implications

The Master of Teaching is about reforming the professional preparation of teachers and enhancing the profession of teaching. It has 1000+ enrolments and principals report on graduates having a significant impact on schools’ educational programs.

The clinical approach to teaching develops students’ potential through the use of data on student performance and differentiated instruction. Developing teachers with these professional skills will have a direct impact on teaching and learning, on classroom management and school organisation, and provides a framework for a more differentiated workforce of professional teachers and supporting staff in schools, with concomitant reward structures.

Moreover, the clinical approach has implications for teaching and professional development more generally in vocational, undergraduate and graduate education. The methodology if spread nationally has potential to deliver a substantial increase in teacher quality, with powerful impacts on student achievement, notably for students from low SES backgrounds.

## Productivity Commission questions

This submission addresses two questions.

Q: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional Diploma and Bachelor of Education entry pathways? Do postgraduate studies in education contribute significantly to teacher quality?*

There have been three major syntheses (or meta-analyses) of the traditional approaches to teacher education, asking about the effects of these teacher candidates on their students learning. The average effect-size that can be attributed to teacher education programs is a dismal  $d=.11$  (dismal particularly relative to the average of all other effects on achievement of  $d=.40$ ). In essence, a very minimal impact. Fixing current models is not only expensive and starting from a low base, but probably not going to make a lot of difference. Alternative models are key to the future of how teachers are to be educated.

It is our experience that postgraduate teacher education programs such as the Master of Teaching allow for significant increases in the capabilities expected of teacher candidates, and this can be demonstrated through the definition of a graduate attribute statement that sets the bar significantly higher than that possible for undergraduate candidates.

Postgraduate teacher education recognises that many of the participants have life experience beyond their undergraduate study and are mature adults. It also builds on the analytic thinking that comes with having a university degree, as well as the disciplinary knowledge of previous study. In this sense, postgraduate programs such as the Master of Teaching at Melbourne are a paradigm shift away from the traditional approaches that are clearly not working – programs that typically parachute students into schools with very limited connection between university lectures and the school experience.

The entry point is also important to note, with undergraduate programs often forced to fill their places by lowering entry requirements, sometimes with ATARs in the low 50 range. This provides access to increased numbers of potential teachers, but does so by providing them with the only viable option on the basis of a poor school record. The profession therefore risks becoming one of ‘second choice’. Graduate programs, alternatively, are more frequently ‘opt-in’ and a conscious decision on the basis of previous study and life experiences. The quality of the candidates coming into the profession as graduates is, in our experience, generally higher.

However, the profession currently expects all new teachers to have the same attributes and skills regardless of their mode of preparation, either undergraduate or graduate. The capabilities of graduate Master of Teaching candidates is significantly above those of undergraduates and others prepared through traditional, non-clinical models of teacher education, and the level of preparedness of new teachers is higher when they complete graduate clinical Masters programs.

There is a place for traditional 4-year undergraduate programs, but it fits a school workforce profile that differentiates between the responsibilities of Master Teachers – who are responsible for leading the learning programs of large

groups of individual learners; and Classroom Teachers – who follow the lead of senior staff in designing and developing effective classroom practice.

Traditional programs are cheaper to run than graduate clinical programs – the required resources and partnerships are less intensive and less complex, and their current level of funding is appropriate. Graduate clinical programs, with a strong emphasis on school-university partnerships are more expensive to run and require funding that matches the level of other clinical practice professions, such as nursing.

#### **Recommendation:**

Traditional pathways often suffer from a separation of theory and practice, which leads to low levels of preparedness amongst new teachers. It is our experience that graduate clinical programs that invest significant resources in linking theory and practice through school-university partnerships lead to improved levels of preparedness, enhance teacher quality, and provide a powerful means of transforming practice.

This is a more expensive model of teacher education, and as a graduate clinical program, requires funding that matches that of other clinical practice professions.

**Q:** *How effectively do pre-service training courses (and the national accreditation standards for such courses) meet the current and prospective needs of the education system and teachers? Do courses place sufficient emphasis on practicum?*

It is our experience that many pre-service teacher education programs, including our own previous programs, fail to fully meet many of the needs of education system and practicing classroom teachers.

There must be recognition that teaching is one of the most complex human interface professions.

As a profession teaching must embrace the responsibility of preparing future generations of colleagues as a part of the standard responsibilities of every experienced teacher. The current schedule of low dollar value payments is problematic, increases the cost of program delivery, and is a further reason for many institutions to incorporate only the minimum required number of practicum days.

The teacher education program standards are appropriate for describing some of the requirements for courses, but it is not simply a function of increased time in schools that will see the quality of new teachers increase. Any increase in the amount of time spent in schools must be matched by a formalisation of the partnerships between schools and universities and then invested in, through roles such as Teaching Fellows (who are part of the ethos and linkage with the schools and university), to ensure theory and practice are linked and sequenced. If this is not done, the traditional problems of disconnection and miscommunication will not only remain but widen once the amount of time in school increases.

Theory and practice must be linked, sequenced and connected together with the university taking a leading role in preparing candidates theoretical knowledge, and schools then providing authentic practice experiences. Both must commit to ensuring that the two are logically and rigorously connected to provide a consistent and powerful learning environment. As the title of the recent blue ribbon panel report from the US National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education states, it's *"Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers"*.

#### **Recommendation:**

The ability of pre-service courses to meet the needs of the education system and new teachers varies widely. It is our experience that measures of preparedness are substantially higher in courses that are graduate and clinical.

An emphasis on practicum is a necessary condition, but not the solution to improved quality in pre-service teacher education. Theory and practice must be connected and sequenced through quality partnerships between schools and universities, and both must be funded at a level that match other clinical practice professions.

The quality of teaching in our schools is a major influence on the life chances of school students everywhere and particularly students in low-SES communities. The quality of teaching is, in a large part, a function of the quality of the teacher. This must be a key factor at all stages of the cycle, from determining university entry standards, to the

quality of the university curriculum and practicum experiences, to the induction and support systems new teachers can access, and the feedback and professional learning they receive.

The new National Standards for Teachers provides the mechanism to recognise, develop, reward teachers across their careers. Focussing on areas in isolation or offering simplistic solutions such as merit or performance pay, are certain to fail.

#### **Additional submission**

The MGSE would be appreciate the opportunity to present more detailed evidence to the Commission on the effectiveness of the Master of Teaching, including from the perspective of our partnership schools, and would delighted to provide further information on any of the points raised in this submission through the consultation phase.

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