



Australian Government  
Department of Education and Training

**Students***First*

# Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group

*Action Now: Classroom Ready  
Teachers*

Australian Government Response



February 2015

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## Background to the Report

The Australian Government knows that having well trained and knowledgeable teachers provides the foundation for a strong, high quality education system in Australia. Quality teaching is one of the keys to driving student outcomes. Broadly Australia has a high quality teaching workforce, however there continues to be room for improvement. It is for this reason the Government made improving teacher quality a key component of our *Students First* policy.

As a first step to ensuring excellence in teaching, Minister Pyne established the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) in 2014 to provide advice on changes needed to the training of our teachers. In 2014, teacher education in Australia involved around 450 courses across 48 institutions, training some 80,000 teachers. The Australian Government is the primary funder of the courses that train our teachers and in 2014 spent over \$600 million on teacher education. It is important to make sure that this funding is well spent, particularly in terms of the quality of teaching graduates produced.

The Government thanks the Advisory Group Chair, Professor Greg Craven, and the Advisory Group members Professor Kim Beswick, Mr John Fleming, Mr Trevor Fletcher, Ms Michelle Green, Dr Ben Jensen, Professor Eeva Leinonen and Professor Field Rickards, for their expertise and contribution to this important work.

The work of the Advisory Group involved significant consultation. Over 175 public submissions were received and over 30 consultations were held with key stakeholders including: teacher employers; universities; teacher regulatory authorities; peak education bodies and unions; principals' associations; parent groups; and relevant education experts. This has resulted in a comprehensive report capturing a broad range of viewpoints and evidence.

The Government welcomes the *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* Report developed by the Advisory Group. The Report confirms concerns identified in the long history of Commonwealth and state inquiries into the training of our teachers and shows that there is considerable variation in the quality of courses. This is not fair on our schools, students or aspiring teachers. The Government has a responsibility to provide national leadership to lift the quality and consistency of these courses in Australia.

The Report proposes significant improvement in both the content and delivery of teacher education courses. The Government believes the recommendations are practical and achievable, with the potential to make a real impact on the quality of teaching and student outcomes in Australian schools.

## The Australian Government's Response to the Report

The Australian Government is well positioned to take action to improve the training of teachers through the work of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and with the foundation of nationally agreed standards for teaching in place. Importantly, states and territories

have already shown a shared commitment to driving this improvement and a number have introduced policy directions targeting teacher education and the quality of teaching in schools. This Australian Government response acknowledges state and territory work under way and seeks to complement this through targeted actions. By working together we can build on efforts to date to help Australia's teachers be their best.

The Government looks forward to working cooperatively with state and territory education ministers, non-government schools, universities and other key stakeholders to build and support the outstanding teaching workforce that Australian students deserve.

The Government's response to the Report addresses the five themes of:

- stronger quality assurance of teacher education courses
- rigorous selection for entry to teacher education courses
- improved and structured practical experience for teacher education students
- robust assessment of graduates to ensure classroom readiness
- national research and workforce planning capabilities.

By responding to these themes with swift and decisive action, the Government will seek to make a real difference to the training of our teachers and work to make sure the teaching profession has the confidence and respect of the Australian community.

## **Stronger quality assurance of teacher education courses**

### **Advisory Group recommendations**

The Advisory Group is clear in its view that high standards for initial teacher education, achieved through strong course accreditation, is essential to producing great teachers for Australian schools.

The Report shows that the accreditation of courses is currently not sufficiently rigorous or evidence-based. This means that the system is missing the thorough checks needed to ensure consistency of quality across all courses, and in turn allows universities to produce teachers with varying levels of preparation.

The Report calls for a revision of the accreditation of courses to make sure they are consistently of a high standard, producing graduates with the skills and knowledge to drive student outcomes. Importantly, this includes ensuring that graduates have the ability to collect and analyse data to assess the learning needs of different students, to effectively engage with parents about the progress of their children, and a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of teaching literacy and numeracy.

The Advisory Group also proposes that a new national regulator for initial teacher education should be established to deliver stronger quality assurance.

## **Australian Government response**

Better quality assurance of teacher education courses is essential to ensure every course is preparing new teachers with the skills they need to make a positive impact on student learning. The Australian Government is concerned that the Advisory Group found that while there are examples of excellent practice, pockets of poor practice in teacher education remain.

The Government notes the Report recommendation for a new national regulator of teacher education courses, but does not believe establishing a new body will necessarily deliver better quality assurance nationally. Instead, the Government will utilise the expertise of existing bodies to achieve this outcome. AITSL will be given greater responsibility for driving improvement in the quality of initial teacher education and will work with state and territory teacher regulatory authorities to increase the rigour of assessment of courses for accreditation.

Additionally, a closer working relationship between AITSL and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) will be established to make sure the two complement each other and together address any courses identified as a concern.

To drive high expectations of teaching and lift confidence in the preparation of all new teachers, the Government will instruct AITSL to develop explicit instructions and supporting information that make clear exactly what universities need to provide to gain course accreditation. This information will need to include why each course has been designed the way it has and provide the evidence that this will ensure their teacher education students possess the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the classroom. Particular attention must be given to the skills needed for data collection and analysis in student assessment, engaging with parents and teaching literacy, especially phonemic awareness and phonics, and numeracy.

AITSL will work collaboratively with state accreditation panels to assist in the improvement of their assessment of courses. This will include enhancing the expertise of panels to ensure they have the skills and knowledge required to make these assessments. Improved accreditation processes will require universities to provide better quality information for course accreditation that focuses on impact on learning, rather than more information.

Initially, universities will be granted with provisional course accreditation. To move from provisional to full course accreditation, universities will need to clearly show that their graduates are classroom ready, how their graduates are having a positive impact on student learning, and that employers are satisfied with the graduates they produce.

AITSL will also continue to monitor and revise the professional accreditation standards to ensure they are having the desired impact on course quality.

## **Rigorous selection for entry to teacher education courses**

### **Advisory Group recommendations**

The Report makes it clear that people entering initial teacher education should be high quality candidates who should be selected based on their potential to become effective teachers.

The Report identifies a number of shortcomings in the way many universities currently select future teachers. Many entrants are not assessed to determine whether they have the qualities and academic skills needed to become a successful teacher. Significant time and money may therefore be invested in people who are not capable of providing the outcomes our school students deserve.

In order to ensure universities are selecting the best people into teacher education, the Advisory Group suggests assessing a broader range of characteristics shown by research to predict future success in the profession, including high level literacy and numeracy skills. The Advisory Group also recommends a more transparent process requiring universities to publish selection processes for initial teacher education programs to demonstrate they are selecting those best suited to the teaching profession.

### **Australian Government response**

In order to get the right people teaching in our schools we need to make sure the right candidates are selected for entry to initial teacher education courses. The Australian Government acknowledges that effective teachers possess a range of attributes that include both academic ability and the personal characteristics needed to engage students.

The Government does not propose any single approach such as an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) cut-off for entry to teaching. It is acknowledged that some states are moving to identify specific academic requirements combined with the personal qualities necessary for teaching, as part of a focus on improving selection processes. The Government supports refined selection processes for entry to teaching. To ensure all universities are adopting a more sophisticated approach to selection, the Government will instruct AITSL to develop and set clear expectations of universities in making sure that those going into teaching have the right mix of academic and personal qualities that give them the best chance of becoming effective teachers.

AITSL will do this by identifying best practice in selection and developing specific criteria to assist universities in selecting the right people. This will make clear the academic capabilities expected of teachers, as well as examples of tools that can be used to examine the personal attributes of teaching candidates against those important for teaching. This will also help make sure university and school resources are directed to those best suited to a teaching career.

The Government agrees with the Advisory Group recommendation that more comprehensive selection processes should be adopted and published by every university delivering teacher education. Any alternative arrangements for entry will also need to be made clear. This greater transparency of selection information will assist aspiring teachers and the broader community to clearly understand course requirements and what is needed to successfully enter the teaching profession.

Importantly, teachers must possess strong personal literacy and numeracy skills to foster the development of these skills in their students. The Government will therefore work with universities to make available a national literacy and numeracy test for teacher education students graduating from 2015. From 2016, all teacher education students will be required to pass the test before they graduate.

## Improved and structured practical experience for teacher education students

### Advisory Group recommendations

The Report makes it clear that practical in-class experience should give teacher education students the opportunity to connect what they learn at university with real world practice. However, it shows that there is a high degree of variability in the quality of practical experience available. The quality of the placement is influenced by the relationship between universities and schools, as well as the supervising teachers selected to guide and assess teacher education students and how well these teachers are prepared for the role.

To ensure new teachers are entering classrooms with sufficient practical skills, the Advisory Group recommends ensuring experiences of appropriate timing, length and frequency are available to all teacher education students. Placements must be supported by highly-skilled supervising teachers who are able to demonstrate and assess what is needed to be an effective teacher. The Advisory Group strongly states that better partnerships between universities and schools are needed to deliver high quality practical experience.

### Australian Government response

The Australian Government agrees that timely, high quality, structured and supported practical experience is critical for teacher education students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be effective teachers. The Government believes this experience should be provided to students as early in their initial teacher education training as possible. It is through practical experience that new teachers build confidence in managing a classroom and catering to different student learning needs.

Reports of poorly delivered practical experience are of great concern. The Government is also aware of excellence in practical experience in many Australian schools, achieved through close partnerships between universities and schools. This focus on high quality practical experience should be embedded in every teacher education course.

The Government will instruct AITSL to establish and publish the essential requirements for practical experience, identify best practice examples in Australia, and model partnership agreements and other supporting materials for universities. This work will be developed in partnership with universities, schools and education authorities. This will ensure universities and schools support the connection of theory and practice, and successfully manage practical experience placements.

AITSL will also outline clear expectations for the supervision and assessment of teachers undertaking practical experience. This will assist universities and schools to identify and prepare highly skilled teachers to supervise practical experience, and to undertake rigorous, continuous and consistent assessment of teacher education students for classroom readiness.

Australian Government funding provided to universities for the training of teachers includes the delivery of practical experience. As this is a shared cost between universities and schools, it is important for universities to work collaboratively with school systems and schools to make sure this funding is used to support effective practical experience placements.

## Robust assessment of graduates to ensure classroom readiness

### Advisory Group recommendations

The Advisory Group noted a gap between the knowledge and skills universities are preparing their teaching graduates with and those that are needed for new teachers to thrive in the classroom. The Report also highlights that currently there is no guarantee, even with the achievement of an approved qualification, that graduate teachers are really classroom ready.

In order to increase the classroom readiness of Australian teachers, the Advisory Group suggests that consistent, rigorous assessment of all teacher education students must be put in place, supported by universities, employers and schools. It further proposes that the classroom readiness of beginning teachers be supported through effective induction processes upon entry to the profession. The Advisory Group also recommends that all primary teachers should graduate with at least one subject specialisation, prioritising science, mathematics or a language.

### Australian Government response

Robust assessment of teacher education students is vital to giving schools and families the confidence that graduates are classroom ready. The Australian Government accepts the Advisory Group's finding that while there are a number of universities undertaking comprehensive and student-focused assessment, the rigour of assessment varies across universities. The Government will instruct AITSL to develop a framework for the robust and consistent assessment of teacher education students throughout the duration of their course.

AITSL will be asked to set clear expectations that assessment must be continuous, based on the Graduate level of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, and focused on school student learning. AITSL will also guide universities and schools in how teacher education students should be supported including what they should collect as evidence of their classroom readiness. This will help teaching graduates demonstrate to prospective employers that they have the knowledge and skills essential for teaching. AITSL will also work closely with states and territories and non-government schools to develop a nationally consistent approach to the induction and support of beginning teachers to make sure they reach their full potential once they enter the profession.

Classroom readiness includes the ability for new teachers to effectively teach core subject areas, such as literacy, mathematics and science. The Government agrees with the Advisory Group that greater emphasis must be given to core subjects of literacy and numeracy. In the early years of student learning literacy will require a particular focus on phonics and phonemic awareness. We will instruct AITSL to use course accreditation arrangements to require universities to make sure that every new primary teacher graduates with a subject specialisation. Primary teachers with a subject specialisation will complement the teachers they work with by sharing their expertise and skills. This does not mean primary teachers will teach only in their area of specialisation, but rather that their expertise will be available within the school to assist other teachers with the knowledge and expertise to teach the subject effectively.



## National research and workforce planning capabilities

### Advisory Group recommendations

The Advisory Group noted a lack of reliable research relating to initial teacher education and teaching practices in general. This has led to claims that many of the teaching practices currently used in schools are not informed by evidence. It also means that there is insufficient research available for universities to make sure their teacher education courses are the best possible. The Advisory Group also recommends a review of the Graduate level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to make sure they capture what beginning teachers need to know and be able to do from their first day in the classroom.

The Report also notes the limited information available concerning teaching workforce data, which is described as scarce, incomplete and not used effectively by universities and employers for workforce planning. The Report is clear in the need for solid workforce data to allow us to better manage the teaching profession and plan effectively for the future.

### Australian Government response

To give Australian students the greatest chance of success, they must receive world-class teaching. The Australian Government accepts the Advisory Group finding that currently there is not enough information to properly understand what the most effective teaching practices are and what teacher education approaches best prepare new teachers for the classroom. The Government will instruct AITSL, led by Professor John Hattie, to establish a national focus on research into teacher education in Australia to address this.

AITSL will use this research focus to drive high standards and innovation in the preparation of teachers in Australia. As part of this work, AITSL will build in mechanisms for ongoing improvement and monitoring the effectiveness of the overhauled course accreditation arrangements. The Government will also instruct AITSL to conduct a review of the Graduate level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to make sure they reflect the knowledge, skills and capabilities required of beginning teachers.

The Government also agrees that there is a need for better national data to support workforce planning. The Government will work collaboratively with states and territories and their teacher regulatory authorities to build on existing data sources, such as the Staff in Australia's Schools Survey and the National Teaching Workforce Dataset. AITSL will be tasked with coordinating these efforts to enable universities and teacher employers to better manage workforce needs.

## Next steps

The Government will immediately instruct AITSL to commence work to progress a number of the Advisory Group recommendations. This includes overhauling course accreditation; identifying best practice approaches for the selection of entrants to teacher education; establishing the essential

elements of effective practical experience, including a national assessment framework; and establishing a research focus on the effectiveness and impact of teacher education.

The Government recognises that state and territory governments and non-government schools are the employers of teachers and will engage closely with them in the implementation of the Advisory Group recommendations. Similarly, the Government will work closely with universities as the providers of teacher education courses to ensure the recommendations are informed by best practice and do not result in additional regulatory burden. It is our intention that the majority of the Advisory Group recommendations will be developed and delivered within the next two years.

The *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* Report provides an excellent blueprint for the reform of initial teacher education. Through the implementation of the areas outlined in this Australian Government response, initial teacher education will be strengthened and ensure high quality graduates who are comprehensively trained in all aspects of classroom teaching. Australia will have a more rigorous accreditation process for ensuring excellent initial teacher education courses with transparent information and data which demonstrates this. Courses that produce high quality teachers will in turn increase public confidence in Australia's teaching workforce.

The Australian Government looks forward to working with the states and territories, non-government schools, teacher regulatory authorities and universities in enhancing excellent teaching in Australian schools to deliver a world class education for all our students.