



Australian Council of  
Deans of Education Inc.

31 July 2008

Secretariat  
Review of Australian Higher Education  
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The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following comments on the Discussion Paper for the Review of Australian Higher Education.

We have not addressed all aspects of the discussion paper or all questions, leaving more detailed responses to our various universities. Rather, we have addressed questions upon which we believe there is a broad consensus amongst our membership. In some cases our comments apply to Higher Education broadly, but often they apply specifically and unapologetically to the field of Education within Higher Education. Again, we have left the more general matters largely to our respective universities to address.

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## **Questions for Discussion**

### **Chapter 1 Higher education in modern Australia**

1. How adequate is the statement of functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia?

In the current statement on the functions and characteristics the emphasis is either on the higher education sector serving the economy or providing individuals with self-fulfilment. These statements do not address the broader social outcomes that go beyond the individual and to which higher education also contributes. The nation's well being is as dependent on the building of the civil society and on cultural enrichment as it is on the economy. Higher education is critical to each.

The role of the higher education sector in sustaining and renewing the key professions in society should be foregrounded somewhat more. Professional degree programs (for example, Law, Medicine, Education, Architecture, Social Work, Nursing, Psychology) are a major contribution of the higher education sector. Professions are living communities whose practices, knowledge and expertise are continually being scrutinised and renewed through research, scholarship, critical reflection and the dissemination and application of new knowledge. Evidence-based practices in professions are increasingly emphasised. New members of the professions are being encouraged to view themselves as part of a proud tradition of public/civic service with distinctive values and commitments to the public that transcend individual gain. The professions, in a democratic society that aspires to fairness and full participation of its citizens within the public realm, should be focussed on public service and providing access to all groups within the society. University education has a significant role to play in respect of professional commitment

### **Section 3.1 Meeting labour market and industry needs**

2. Are there impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs? What are these impediments and how could they be removed?

Over the past decades there has been an increase in the micro management of universities by the Commonwealth that makes it overly complex to innovate. Apparently simple matters such as the definition of 'a course' (program) can inhibit universities from offering students flexible options. For example, if a university offers two degrees, X and Y, and also a double degree XY, the latter is regarded as a new course for DEEWR reporting purposes. Consequently, if a university has 6 degrees and provides students with the opportunity to enrol in pairs of them as double degrees, the university is regarded as offering 21 courses. Each degree may actually have large enrolments, but with some 'pairs' having quite small enrolments. This leads to accusations of small numbers in courses with implications about inefficiency in what may well be an efficient and flexible process that optimises choice at minimal cost. Similarly, the requirement for all courses to be offered in a given year to be lodged with DEEWR in July of the previous year inhibits the capacity of universities to respond flexibly to opportunities as they arise. Each of the above appear relatively minor and neither is insurmountable, but together the many such 'rules and regulations' make innovation considerably more difficult than it ought be. In short, compliance activities not only make many reluctant to innovate but also absorb the time needed to innovate.

3. What are the appropriate mechanisms at the national and local level for ensuring higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills? What is the role of state and territory governments in this area?

4. How adequate are the mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates? How do pricing and labour market signals impact on student choices?

As a general principle, the ACDE is not persuaded that aligning supply and demand is or should be the role of government even were we convinced that it was practically achievable. Our experience is that governments and employers have shown a remarkable inability to predict their teacher workforce needs (partly because qualified teachers' level of attachment to teaching varies considerably within relatively short time periods due to such matters as external economic conditions (witness Western Australia at present) and perceived teacher morale and working conditions. Problems of supply are often not at the gross level of overall numbers, but are about hard to fill positions and about the limited pool of casual and relief teachers within some regions and school communities.

In the case of initial teacher education, market forces tend not to apply because shortages in particular fields or levels of education do not translate into salary differentials in any obvious way.

Having said this, our experience is that Schools/Faculties of Education regard it as a professional responsibility to address areas of shortage, and do so by positive discrimination in favour of those applying to hard to fill subject areas. They typically, for example, admit students into secondary mathematics, science and IT education with lower tertiary admission cut offs than those that apply to entrants to teacher education in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

The micro management of load engaged in over recent years, however, inhibits such responsiveness. It is difficult to accurately predict from year to year the numbers of quality applicants to particular fields. A teacher education applicant for physics teaching will have roughly half of his/her load in the Science cluster and half in Education, while an applicant to history will have roughly half of his/her load in the Humanities cluster and half in Education. In April during profile negotiations, we might predict that we can attract a certain (smallish) number of physics students and relatively more history students but when the applications come in, find we have more high quality applicants to physics than predicted. To move places to physics teaching, however, would move load from the lower cost Humanities cluster to the higher cost Science cluster and risk sanctions. Similar constraints apply to moving load between campuses to accommodate year-to-year variations in patterns of applications across teaching areas. While the last two years have seen some relaxing of the constraints on over- and under-enrolment, the constraints still exist.

5. Are there particular examples of good practice where you can demonstrate either rapid response to skill shortages or successful initiatives to improve generic skills?
6. How effectively are Australian higher education institutions responding to demographic change, especially in providing lifelong learning to meet the challenge of the ageing population and the need for upgrading of skills and re-training?
7. What is the relevance and applicability of the findings and approaches proposed in the United Kingdom paper, Higher Education at Work, for increasing skills levels in the workforce to Australia?

### **Section 3.2 Opportunities to participate in higher education**

8. Should there be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education?

A national approach would be beneficial because progress in participation and success of people from Indigenous and low SES communities has been uneven across time and across higher education institutions. Competitive pressures between Universities for their share of the established middle-class student clientele with high entry scores increasingly lead them to offer 'excellence'

scholarships and other inducements such as advanced study opportunities to high performing school students. Unfortunately, these inducements may reduce resources available for other initiatives related to Indigenous students and low SES students.

9. If you support a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success how do you see it being structured, resourced, monitored and evaluated?

In relation to improving access of under-represented groups to teaching, the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education recommended the creation by the Commonwealth of a Diversity Fund to enable teacher education programs to provide the necessary support for teacher education entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds:

#### Recommendation 4

- a) the Australian Government establish a Teacher Education Diversity Fund of \$20 million per annum for universities to access, possibly in partnership with other bodies, to develop and implement innovative programs in order to increase the number of applicants and entrants to teacher education from under-represented groups;
- b) the granting of funding from the Teacher Education Diversity Fund for programs targeting disadvantaged groups be conditional on the use of diagnostic testing of students with a view to identifying their individual needs so that they can be provided with the support necessary to succeed (Top of the Class, 2007, p 51).

10. What institutional initiatives have proved successful in increasing low SES or Indigenous participation and success? (Please provide information about outcomes as well as activities.)

Research suggests that students who gain entry to Universities from high schools serving lower SES communities do better than comparable peers (that is, peers with similar ENTER/OP rankings) from high schools serving higher SES communities. One explanation is that the lower SES students have had to be more independent, motivated and self-regulating in their studies and are better adapted to the study requirement of Universities. Nonetheless, the numbers of such students is lower than desirable, and efforts need to be made to build connections between Universities and clusters of high schools serving low SES communities. These outreach programs can be very successful in changing the aspirations and expectations of students and parents.

With regard to the participation and success of Indigenous students, a sense of belonging and social support seems to be an important determinant. The continued support of indigenous units within Universities that provide academic, cultural and social support for indigenous students is recommended.

11. What evidence is available from institutions about the impact on individuals or groups of either failure to gain income support or the inadequacy of income support?

Schools and Faculties of Education have a high proportion (relative to other areas of study) of students from lower SES communities. The typical education student is working at least 20 hours per week and often trying to hold down a fulltime position for at least some period in their degree program. Many are parents who are returning to study. The inadequacy of income support is particularly noticeable during practice teaching placements when fulltime attendance at schools is required. There is no doubt that these income pressures impact on the quality of learning and professional development that can occur during their degree studies.

### **Section 3.3 The student experience of higher education**

12. How can the quality of the student experience within Australia's higher education institutions be monitored nationally? Is there evidence that declining student: staff ratios have impacted on the quality of the student experience?

Research on staff-student ratios in the schooling sector over recent decades has suggested that there isn't a clear-cut linear relationship between the students' learning outcomes and staff-student ratios. Having a staff-student ratio of 1:25 or 1:30 isn't a significant difference in itself. What matters is the opportunity for teachers to spend quality time interacting with students individually and in small groups. It is crucial to create learning contexts where knowledgeable teachers, tutors, and lecturers can interact with students, and students can network with each other and offer support and expertise. Overall staff-student ratios indicate at a gross level the overall financial support received by a Faculty or School, and it is clear that support has been declining. Where academic and teaching staff members are working longer hours on teaching, research, and community engagement, the less likely it is that they can design such quality learning contexts. The other impact of reduced support has been to increase large-group lectures, to reduce tutorial time and increase the numbers of students per tutorial. These unfortunate adaptations to reduced resources undermine the opportunity for individual and small group learning contexts and privilege more surface learning approaches linked to simply passing examinations.

### **Section 3.4 Connecting with other education and training sectors**

13. To what extent should vocational education and training and higher education continue to have distinctive missions and how should these missions be defined?

Consistent with our remarks in relation to research (section 3.5) we are of the view that the distinction in mission between the two sectors is significant and should be maintained.

14. Does the movement between the sectors of students with credit need to be improved? If so, in what ways?

Smooth transitions between the two sectors is desirable, and indeed a great many of those enrolled in Education courses have built their degree studies on TAFE qualifications. These include teachers and those from other service fields who study education and human development, work, community and organisational learning and leadership. It is our experience, however, that competency based assessment in the VET sector is not generally a good preparation for higher education and that many students entering higher education from competency based courses find themselves to be insufficiently prepared and the transition quite difficult. There is also the practical issue that where places are limited, students with competency-based qualifications do not have 'grades' which enable them to be compared with other students for the purposes of ranking and selection.

15. To what extent should relative provision between the sectors be planned or demand driven. What are the effects of current differences on funding, governance and regulation in limiting planning or influencing choice between the sectors?
16. Can institutions provide examples of good practices which have led to movement between the sectors with high levels of credit and good learning outcomes?

### **Section 3.5 Higher education's role in the national innovation system**

17. By what mechanisms should research activities in Australian universities be supported?
18. On what principles and for what purposes should research activity be concentrated in particular universities or types of universities?

19. Do you believe there is a place in Australia's higher education system for universities that are predominantly 'teaching only' universities? If so, why?

We do not consider a "teaching-only" institution to be a university. Universities are places of scholarship, inquiry and research and we would oppose the title of "university" being applied to teaching only institutions.

There are three considerations

- a) In principle, we argue that effective university teachers are intellectuals with a passion for their discipline or profession whose motivation and engagement in teaching is sustained through ongoing scholarship and inquiry. Separating teaching from research in principle at the higher education level would lead to second rate institutions with limited attraction to students and staff.
- b) Pragmatically, we are concerned that Faculties and Schools of Education would disproportionately be located in teaching only institutions - whatever these might be called. Education is vital as a discipline and professional area in regional Universities and campuses in outer suburban areas, and it is these Universities and campuses that are most likely to be designated "teaching only" . If this were to occur, it would sever the connection between research and teaching and (re)create a two-tiered system that would very likely in the longer term undermine the status and reputation of the teaching profession.
- c) Strategically, we suggest that educational research - including research on teaching and learning processes from preschool to university - should be a high priority of the government. The implementation of such a strategic priority cannot be achieved if a significant portion of the tertiary education scholarly workforce is designated "teaching only".

### **Section 3.6 Australia's higher education sector in the international arena**

20. Are there any unintended consequences of the current approach to internationalisation of higher education in Australia?
21. What is an appropriate role for government in assisting the Australian higher education system to internationalise? On what principles should this role rest and what purposes should it serve?
22. Can you provide any examples of good practice in encouraging local students to undertake study in other countries?

### **Section 3.7 Higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital**

23. How would you define knowledge transfer and community engagement in an Australian context?
24. Do you believe that knowledge transfer and community engagement are legitimate and appropriate roles for contemporary higher education institutions? If so, how do you see this additional role for the higher education sector blending with its traditional roles and are there limits to these additional roles?
25. If you think that knowledge transfer and community engagement are appropriate roles for higher education institutions, how do you believe these functions should be funded?

These questions appear odd from our perspective and possibly reflect the narrow framing of the role and functions of the higher education sector in the discussion document. As we noted in relation to Question 1, the role of the higher education sector in sustaining and renewing the key professions in society needs to be foregrounded and emphasised more in any future statement on higher education. Professional degree programs necessarily involve knowledge transmission and community engagement. Professions are communities that include staff at Universities, practicing

professionals and both novice and well-established leaders who embody in varying degrees the values and commitments that define the profession. The practices, knowledge and expertise of any professional community are continually being scrutinised and renewed through research, scholarship, critical reflection and the dissemination and application of new knowledge.

Thus the processes of knowledge transfer and community engagement are well established and thriving aspects of Faculties and Schools of Education. The development of innovative professional practices and approaches to policy, curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment are core aspects of the work of education scholars within the higher education sector. Community engagement - with principals, teachers, students and parents - is central to the whole process of innovation in education. Faculties and Schools of Education also increasingly offer course and undertake research in work, community and organizational learning and leadership and other aspects of learning and development that speak directly to and with the public sector, industry and community groups. Members of the community are often involved as active partners and co-researchers in research projects, and knowledge transfer itself is not just distant "dissemination" in a technical sense, but rather involves actively engaging with professional communities and the general public in new practices and formats of learning, and development.

### **Section 3.8 Resourcing the system**

26. What incentives or unintended consequences are there in the current arrangements for higher education funding?

The current funding model in relation to student places reflects historical settlements rather than the needed costs of providing courses. The House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education recommended that the Australian Government "review the mechanism for determining the level of funding that the Australian Government contributes towards student places in different disciplines and develop an alternative mechanism which more accurately reflects the real costs of delivering those places" (*Top of the Class*, 2007, Recommendation 11, p 113). The Review of HESA undertaken in 2006/7 should have done this, but asking departments how much they spend does not address this issue since we generally spend according to what we earn. Thus, the cost of delivering courses generally reflects the income provided for those courses. Different 'standards of living' have become entrenched in universities. It is not obvious how to address this issue, but it does need to be addressed.

27. To what extent are the current funding models adequate to secure the future of Australia's higher education sector? If there are better models, what are they?

28. Are the current institutional arrangements for determining relative funding between higher education institutions appropriate? If not, what changes should be considered?

ACDE believes that the funding for the Education cluster is insufficient to deliver even basic requirements let alone to support the level of innovation and the diversity of forms of teacher education Australia has a right to expect. The ACDE provided evidence to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education that after the cost of placement was removed, the income to a teacher education place was generally less than to a Humanities place even though Education must provide the full complement of campus based units in order to gain funding.

Even leaving aside the cost of the practicum requirements, the ACDE considers that funding commensurate with Nursing (or with Foreign Languages, Visual and Performing Arts with the addition of placement funding) is more appropriate. A significant proportion of any teacher education course involves curriculum 'methods' (what and how to teach and assess in specific areas of the school curriculum). Education thus needs to fund the infrastructure, equipment, materials

and technical support for science education laboratories, visual and performance arts spaces including music, and sporting, physical education and human movement education laboratories/facilities. In addition, Education must fund mathematics curriculum materials, wireless laptops and a wide range of educational software across the age span from early childhood to senior secondary across all curriculum areas. Also smaller laboratory class sizes often are needed for practical laboratory sessions because of pedagogical considerations and OHS regulations. Teaching costs are therefore similar at least to disciplines such as Visual Arts and Languages.

In the recent past, there has been a considerable increase in what Universities are expected to provide. This includes greater attention to quality outcomes with a commensurate increase in the direct costs associated with teaching and the cost of administrative work associated with both teaching and compliance and reporting requirements. Most of these changes are not unwelcome -- indeed they are improvements on past practices -- but we should not underestimate the labour and other costs involved. While they generally apply across the sector, some apply particularly, although not necessarily exclusively, to Education. For example: child protection legislative requirements including managing and monitoring police checks, state accreditation processes, provision of an increased minimum number of days of placement and escalation of the cost of making placements due to difficulty in finding places.

In 2007, the Report of the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education, Top of the Class, described teacher education as badly under funded. and recommended that the Commonwealth

from 2008, increase the Commonwealth Contribution Amount for an Equivalent Full-Time Student Load in the Education cluster (to) the same level as that applying to the Foreign Languages, Visual and Performing Arts cluster [Recommendation 11, p 113]

commission an examination of the cost of providing practicum and increase the amount of the loading for practicum to fully reflect its costs [Recommendation 12, p 117]

Neither has occurred. Indeed, at the same time that expectations have increased, relative to the sector as a whole, CSP income to the field of Education has decreased.

By way of explanation, we bring to the attention of the Review the detrimental consequences for teacher education of successive policy and funding decisions relating partly but not only to its designation as a "National Priority". Prior to the introduction of the Higher Education Support Act (2004), Education was in the same funding cluster as the Social Studies and Behavioural Sciences (SS&BS). As a result of its designation as a national priority under HESA it now earns only 92% of the income of the rest of the SS&BS cluster (see over page). This seriously compromises the capacity to achieve what is needed in Teacher Education in order to contribute to the Education Revolution.

## Overview of funding decisions

<p><b>1988-2003</b></p> <p>Under the Relative Funding Model:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education is in the same funding cluster as the Social Studies &amp; Behavioural Sciences.</li> <li>• Undergraduate teacher education places receive 100% of the funding of the SS&amp;BS cluster (RFM weight 1.3)</li> <li>• Graduate entry teacher education places receive 108% of the funding for the cluster (weight 1.4), the latter helping to address the considerable additional costs of the shorter duration intensive graduate entry courses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2004</b></p> <p>Following HESA:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (and Nursing) is precluded from charging the variable student contribution.</li> <li>• Undergraduate <u>and</u> graduate entry Education places earn 98% of the SS&amp;BS cluster.</li> <li>• The 98% is <u>inclusive</u> of a special 'practical component' to assist the funding of school placements (\$717 in 2007), the partial compensation to Education for restricting it from generating additional income through the variable student contribution.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2007</b></p> <p><i>Top of the Class</i>, tabled:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommends that the Commonwealth fund Education at level of Foreign Language, Visual and Performing Arts (FLV&amp;PA, cluster weight 1.6) or 122% of SS&amp;BS cluster</li> <li>• Recommends commissioning an examination of the cost of providing practicum and increasing the amount of the loading for practicum to fully reflect its costs.</li> <li>• Recommends commissioning evaluation of the impact on teacher education courses of fixing the student contribution rate rather than allowing the variable student contribution</li> </ul>
<p><b>2008</b></p> <p><i>Top of Class</i> ignored in review of HESA:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education is placed back into the SS&amp;BS cluster, effectively removing the loading for practicum (ie Education received an effective funding increase from Commonwealth of \$109 per EFTSU compared with \$840 for the rest of SS&amp;BS)</li> <li>• Still precluded from charging variable HECS so student contribution for Education is \$1018 less than for the rest of SS&amp;BS</li> <li>• <b>The income for Education is only 92% of the rest of the SS&amp;BS cluster compared with 100% for undergraduate and 108% for graduate entry in 2003. (It is only 81% of the funding of FLV&amp;PA cluster recommended by <i>Top of the Class</i>.)</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>2008</b></p> <p>The 2007 budget created a Placement Fund for 4 years ONLY which:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides \$395 per EFTSL to pre-service teacher education courses meeting certain criteria vis a vis the number of days of placement and numeracy and literacy. NOTE: This fund is NOT ongoing, only four years is provided for in the forward estimates.</li> <li>• Only results in 95% of the funding for the rest of the SS&amp;BS cluster for eligible courses and the cost of implementing the measures will often be greater than the income. Results in 84% of funding for FLV&amp;PA.</li> <li>• <b>Continues the funding shortfall (that is, 92% of 2003 figure)</b> for further teacher and leadership education, VET and adult learning since <u>all</u> Education courses are restricted from the variable student contribution but <u>only</u> pre-service teacher education courses can apply for the \$395.</li> </ul>