RESPONSE TO THE
TEACHER EDUCATION EXPERT PANEL
DISCUSSION PAPER

April 2023

University of the Sunshine Coast

Contents

1. Introduction

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) welcomes the Teacher Education Expert Panel (the Panel) Discussion Paper and is pleased to provide a submission to the consultation process.

The area that UniSC believes would have the most significant impact on attracting high quality diverse candidates and ensuring that teaching preparation is evidence-based, practical, and appropriately inducts graduates into the profession is Reform 3: Improving the quality of practice experiences in teaching. As such, our submission commences with comments and recommendations for that reform area, followed by the other three reform areas in what we consider to be the remaining order of priority.

UniSC would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on any aspect of our submission. If this is of interest, please contact Associate Professor Deborah Heck, Dean of the School of Education and Tertiary Access at dheck@usc.edu.au.

1.1   About UniSC

UniSC was founded by its community in 1996 after Sunshine Coast residents campaigned for locally provided tertiary education opportunities. As the first greenfield university to open in Australia since 1975, UniSC has helped unlock the innovation, productivity and potential of its regional communities through the contributions from its 33,000 graduates and 17,500 current students studying a diverse offering of in-demand higher education programs.

Consistent with our mission to improve access to higher education in underserved locations, UniSC has strategically expanded its footprint into more regional communities, encompassing areas from Moreton Bay to the Fraser Coast. The University collaborates closely with all levels of government, regional leaders, industry, and other partners to ensure programs, research and support services align to create greater opportunities in all the areas it operates within.

On the world stage, UniSC is recognised by The Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings as a global leader in climate action, clean water sanitation, life on land, and life below water. This ranking comes alongside the Australian Research Council's recognition of UniSC as a producer of world-class research in 26 speciality areas, including environmental science, medical and health sciences, neuroscience, technology, and psychology.

1.2   Overview of UniSC Initial Teacher Education programs

UniSC's School of Education and Tertiary Access offers initial teacher education (ITE) programs in early childhood, primary and secondary education.

For secondary education, students can elect one of three double degree programs, a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) combined with a Bachelor of Arts, Science or Recreation and Outdoor Environmental Studies. The latter of the three programs is the pathway for students who wish to become secondary health and physical education teachers, with expertise in outdoors and environmental education.

The School also offers an ITE program at the postgraduate level, via a Master of Teaching (Primary) or a Master of Teaching (Secondary) and a professional qualification in Education via a Master of Education. It also offers three Graduate Certificates in Education Research, Steiner Education, or Education. In 2022, the School launched two Diploma in Education programs with full articulation into the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) or the Bachelor of Primary Education as pathways into teaching. The School also offers PhD supervision with students completing postgraduate study able to enter into a PhD program.

ITE continues to be one of UniSC's most popular programs, with strong enrolment growth over the last ten years. In 2022, 12 per cent of UniSC's total student EFTSL were undertaking ITE programs.

UniSC proportion of ITE EFTSL vs total student EFTSL 2012-2022

Legend: ■ UniSC EFTSL ■ ITE EFTSL
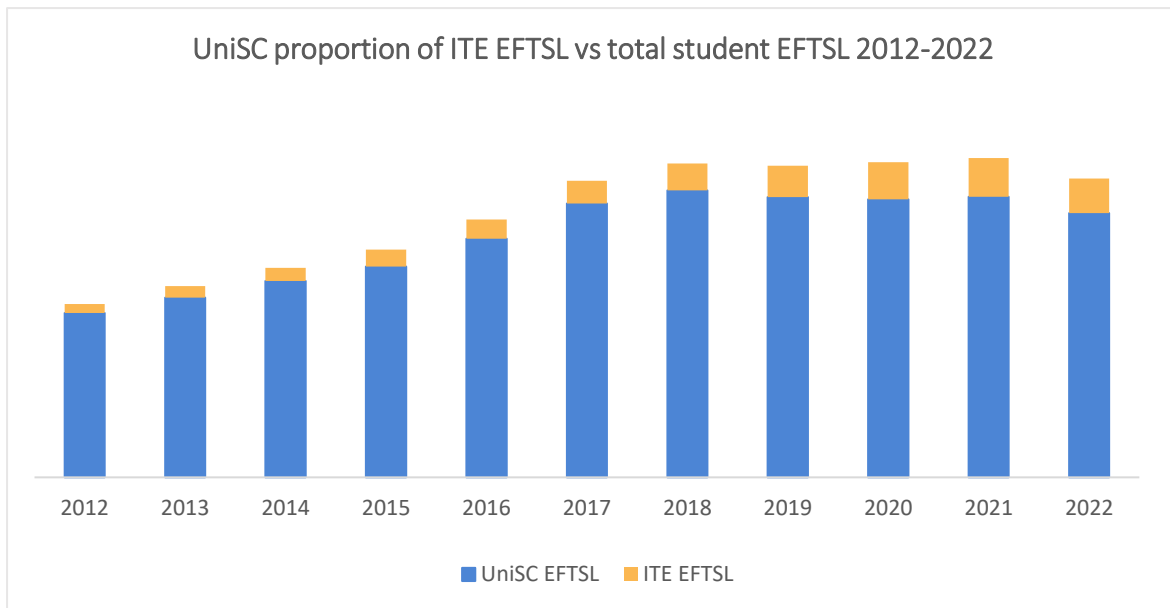
(Source: UniSC data)

We also continue to see consistent ITE enrolment growth across key equity groups, particularly in mature age, first in family and students with a reported disability.

UniSC ITE enrolments by equity group 2018-2022

Categories: Female, First in Family, Disability, Indigenous, <=20

Legend: ■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022
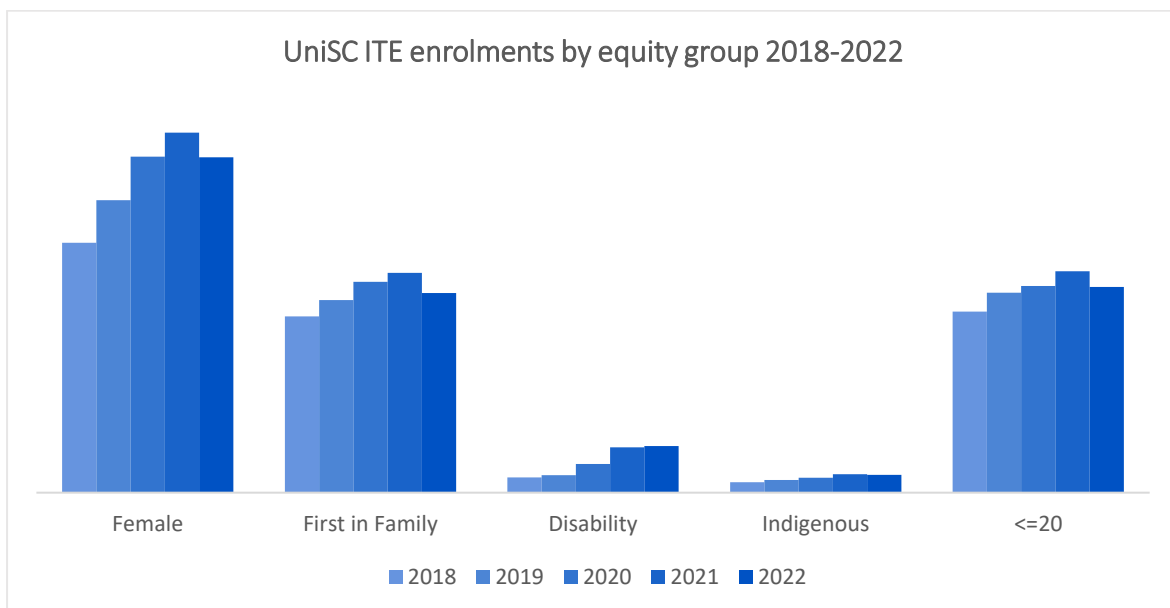
(Source: UniSC data)

2. UniSC responses to the Panel's four reform areas

2.1 Reform 3: Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

The Discussion Paper options are premised on a model of professional experience that requires ITE students to participate in a specified number of school days, typically working with one or two teachers. Based on experiences during Covid-19 and the emerging literature and practice of work-integrated learning (WIL), there are an increasing range of examples to prepare students for work that go beyond the current approaches used in ITE that warrant further exploration[1]. In the interim, the significant financial burden ITE students face in taking up extended placements, particularly in regional locations as part of their programs needs to be addressed before we can expect to see a larger and more diverse cohort of the community considering a teaching career.

A further challenge in this space is the limited scope of contemporary large-scale Australian research on contemporary practice. Much of the identified research is based on small scale, localised experiences shared by universities in academic literature[2] and at conferences. While comparative studies of teacher educator engagement in collaborative partnerships is evident[3], the studies highlight the complexity of these arrangements and the extent of resources required, both human and financial.

Further work is required with employing authorities to identify sustainable models of professional experience placement and the need for mentoring ITE students within teacher awards as part of professional practice requirements. Engaging the profession as part of ongoing workforce preparation will support the achievement of several reform agendas identified in the Discussion Paper. Currently, in Queensland, professional experience placements are sourced by each university, and payments are processed for individual teachers in accordance with an agreement across universities and employment authorities. This model is resource-intensive, and further work is being considered to identify more sustainable long-term approaches to student placement and teacher remuneration. One of the key challenges in this context is the contemporary legislative and regulatory policy framework that impacts the way universities can remunerate teachers and schools and ensure the quality of teacher placements for ITE students.

UniSC endorses the need for Government provision of resources to schools to support the development of mentoring that will benefit both ITE students and beginning teacher graduates as an integrated part of the work of teachers and school leadership teams. We also agree that the Government should support more high-level agreements that provide scope for the shared responsibility for placements between universities and early childhood and school sites to ensure the quality of teacher mentors in schools.

2.1.2 Recommendations

1. *The Government consider further support to address the financial burden ITE students face when undertaking professional placements, including those in regional and remote locations.*
2. *The Government provide transition funding to identify a broader range of approaches to ITE partnerships and WIL, including innovative models and teacher accreditation processes to allow different ways to demonstrate classroom readiness. Further, that any new approaches are documented within Program Standards 5 as part of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Accreditation of ITE programs in Australian Standards and Procedures.*
3. *The Government consider supporting longitudinal research, perhaps via the Australian Research Council, to examine current and future models, processes, and practices for ITE that will inform the development of partnership models and WIL.*

[1] https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12186-020-09257-x
[2] https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v30i3.280
[3] https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1803272

2.2 Reform 2: Strengthen the link between performance and funding of initial teacher education

UniSC agrees with the Panel's characterisation of a high-performing ITE program. However, any university ITE funding model linked to performance requires careful consideration of additional institutional reporting complexity and resourcing. It should also be nuanced (potentially an institution-by-institution approach) rather than standardised in recognition of the different performance metrics of metropolitan and regional ITE programs based on their student profiles. For example, regional universities typically attract a larger share of students with lower ATARs, have higher attrition rates (mostly for reasons outside of the institution's control) and a higher proportion of graduates who take on part-time rather than full-time work. We do not support an 'excellence pool for high-performing ITE programs unless, as per our arguments above, this was a tailored approach rather than a one size fits all model that recognises the different indicators of ITE program success in metropolitan and regional locations.

With respect to public reporting on ITE program performance, UniSC agrees with the Productivity Commission[4] finding that public rating scales do not strongly motivate improvement in the higher education sector. Instead, we suggest that more nuanced data would be available for ITE programs based on analysis of Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) data and this could be used as part of the ongoing cycle of review and improvement through the accreditation process. Again, noting this approach would need to avoid standard measures across the sector and recognise the fundamental differences in regional university ITE program outcomes. Aggregation of current publicly available data into the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) format provides an ongoing record over time that can be used for accreditation purposes and an indication of trends in the sector generally.

We are supportive of transition funding to support ITE quality improvement and argue it should focus on measures that provide uplift for each university and their community and be tracked over time as part of Program Standard 6 within the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) accreditation of ITE programs in Australian standards and procedures.

2.2.1 Recommendations

4. *Any Government funding model linked to ITE program performance must consider institutional reporting impacts and not unfairly disadvantage regional universities delivering ITE programs.*
5. *A nuanced analysis of TPA data be used as part of the ongoing cycle of ITE program review and improvement through the accreditation processes.*
6. *The Government continue to identify trend data and consolidate publicly available data in the ATWD format that should be considered in the context of each university's student cohort.*
7. *The Government deploy transition funding to support ITE quality improvement.*

2.3 Reform 1: Strengthen ITE programs to delivery effective, classroom ready graduates

UniSC agrees that a compact set of foundation studies within teacher education can be mapped using matrix documents with the AITSL accreditation of ITE programs in Australian standards and procedures. However, the cognitive science aspects need to be framed within the context of application in classrooms, which are significantly different to the clinical settings for the trials. Hence, we agree ITE students need to be aware of these approaches based on evidence, however they also need to be able to frame how they will use these different approaches based on their judgement and how to manage the uncertainties in implementation[5]. Identifying compact foundation-level studies will allow each university to develop a program of study that meets the requirements of the cohort and their specific teaching context. It will be important that the amount, or way the foundation studies are incorporated into programs, is determined by program design, and illustrated in mapping, rather than specified in accreditation procedures or guidelines.

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[4] https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/productivity/report/productivity-volume8-education-skills.pdf
[5] https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/evidencereviews/cognitive-science-approaches-in-the-classroom/

UniSC does not support the assessment of foundation studies within the TPA. This final test is not the place to assess foundational studies that should be connected more closely to university coursework prior to undertaking student professional experience.

UniSC agrees that consideration about the authorising environment and ongoing professional development of those accrediting programs and the moderation across jurisdictions is an important part of the process. Developing a representative governance group that reports to the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) on process would give the Minister confidence regarding the consistency of judgements in assessing ITE program accreditation.

2.3.1 Recommendations

8. *The development of a compact teacher education foundation mapped across primary and secondary teacher education programs and applied at undergraduate and postgraduate level.*
9. *Foundation studies are not assessed as part of course components with the Teaching Performance Assessment, being reserved specifically to assess classroom readiness.*
10. *The Government consider a governance structure that supports the ongoing professional development of assessors and reviewers of ITE programs and provide advice to the Minister on the consistency of judgements across jurisdictions.*

2.4 Reform 4: Improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants.

UniSC agrees with the importance of increasing the number of mid-career entrants into teaching to help to address teacher shortages and improve diversity in the teaching profession. We note that UniSC is already contributing to this objective. Of our entire ITE cohort in 2022, 57 per cent were mature age (i.e. over 20 years) and nine per cent were enrolled in a postgraduate program.

We acknowledge the barriers outlined in the Discussion Paper, particularly loss of income, which are consistent with our experiences. In addition, we note the additional barriers faced by ITE equity group students, many of which are similar to the challenges equity group students face across any degree or tertiary preparation program. UniSC argues that to improve mid-career ITE participation and attainment rates it will continue to be important for each university to understand and provide appropriate student supports. These supports could be enhanced with greater government financial assistance to help address the loss of income barrier that mid-career ITE students face.

The majority of universities, including UniSC, have already developed and mapped options for their students to fast-track program completion that does not impact on the volume of learning. UniSC have also developed ways to support students working on Permission to Teach to complete their final placements while being paid as a teacher. Further work could be undertaken to develop programs similar to the *Turn to Teaching Program* offered by the Queensland Government for employers across a range of sectors to broaden the approach for mid-career teachers.

Identifying ways to fast-track programs and include paid internships is another example of alternative models of WIL that should be considered for all teacher education programs, as identified in our response to Reform 3. One of the challenges in this context is the emergence of innovative approaches to program design that require further research to ensure that emerging lessons can be shared and applied across the sector.

2.4.1 Recommendations

11. *The Government considers further support options for mid-career ITE students to reduce the known barriers, particularly loss of income.*
12. *The Government consider how to support expanded partnership arrangements that facilitate paid internship programs in areas of workforce demand.*