

Submission to

THE RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION INQUIRY

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

from the

Australian Council of Deans of Education

19 October 1999

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) is the national peak organisation representing the deans of faculties of education and heads of schools of education in Australian universities. It was formed in 1991 after the creation of the 'unified national system' of universities, arising from organisations that had represented the principals of teachers colleges (CAEs) and university professors of education.

The ACDE's primary concerns are with:

- the initial and continuing professional education of teachers and other educationalists in early childhood, school, tertiary and further education;
- research and consultancies to support policy and practice to enhance the quality of education at all levels in Australia and internationally;
- research, scholarship and general education to further the understanding of education in its social and intellectual context.

The ACDE has broad interests in social justice, democratic practices, and the social and cultural development of individuals and communities.

The ACDE therefore has pleasure in making this submission.

Many of the initiatives discussed involve faculties of education. Often faculties are already taking action, but collaboration and support is needed from other parties for sustained, effective developments.

1. Ensuring the necessary quality and number of teachers in rural and remote schools

Teacher supply and demand projections prepared for the Australian Council of Deans of Education indicate that there will be increasing difficulties in staffing many rural and remote schools. (A copy of last year's report, Preston 1998, is enclosed with the hard copy of this submission; the 1999 report, which is currently being finalised, will be sent to the HREOC as soon as it is published in about a month.)

The expected national shortfall over much of the coming period is in the order of around two per cent of the total teaching service. This will translate into very severe problems for many rural and remote schools unless initiatives are taken to prevent or ameliorate the shortages. Such initiatives are directed to:

- attracting to teaching careers young and mature people from rural and remote locations;
- preparing graduates of initial teacher education programs for effective and satisfying teaching in rural and remote schools;

- providing professional and personal support for teachers in rural and remote locations to attract and retain them, and to enhance the quality of their teaching.

Many of the initiatives recommended in this section would also enhance access to post-compulsory and higher education for people in rural and remote locations, and enhance the general quality of schooling in those locations.

Attracting to teaching people from rural and remote locations

People who come from rural and remote communities are often more willing than others to take up and remain in teaching positions in rural and remote communities, and they are often particularly effective teachers in those communities. This can be the case for Indigenous and for non-Indigenous individuals and communities. Therefore, there need to be strategies to increase the number of successful initial teacher education students from rural and remote areas. There is, of course, a time delay between the initial attraction of potential initial teacher education students and the taking up of teaching positions by those who have completed a teacher education program. However, as the age structure of the teacher workforce in Australia indicates growing demand for new recruits for more than ten years, such longer term initiatives are necessary.

Initiatives to attract to teaching careers people from rural and remote communities can also play a part in improving the general access to higher education of people in those communities.

Such initiatives may include:

- Scholarships and other financial support provided by the Commonwealth and/or school authorities. This is necessary in recognition of the costs of living away from home while studying, and the low incomes of many families in rural and remote communities, as well as providing incentive for meeting a labour market shortfall.
- Support for entry into a teaching career by mature and experienced people from rural and remote communities. This might include:
 - appropriate allowances to cover the extra expenses of people with local community and family responsibilities (provided by school authorities or the Commonwealth);
 - flexible course delivery that does not compromise standards - given the financial stringency of most faculties of education (see below), this might need external financial or practical support from, for example, school authorities or the Commonwealth;
 - practical encouragement for employers to provide leave for distance mode students to attend residential activities, practicums and other course activities which need to be carried out in normal working hours.
- Support for initial teacher education programs developed to meet the needs of Indigenous students and provided in the community context, such as the University of New England's CITEP program and James Cook University's RATEP program. Such programs are expensive to run well, and thus support and assistance from outside the faculties of education are generally necessary for their long term viability.
- Active promotion of teaching as a career, and practical guidance in schools, other educational institutions and among the general community in rural and remote locations. This should include readily accessible information about initial teacher education programs provided in flexible modes and about programs that have a special focus on rural and remote education, and information about financial and other assistance.
- Local provision of bridging and orientation courses for potential teacher education students who do not have appropriate formal qualifications or who have not participated in formal education for some time. These could be provided in schools

and TAFE institutions, and should involve minimal costs for participants. This recognises the historical low education participation rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in rural and remote locations, as well as being a generally effective (though delayed in time) means of responding to a labour market shortfall.

- Expansion of outreach programs involving universities and schools (and their communities) in rural and remote areas that address the cultural barriers to university entrance and assist the transition between school and university, and the provision of ongoing, appropriate support for students from rural and remote locations. Ramsay et al (1998) analysed the features and outcomes of university access and equity programs with a particular consideration of geographically isolated students. They concluded that outreach programs where long-term and substantial relationships are developed between the university and relevant schools are particularly effective.

Quick fixes are counter-productive

It is very important that school authorities do not resort to the quick fixes of recruiting teachers without adequate professional preparation.

The overwhelming findings from research into the outcomes of 'alternative' teacher preparation programs that do not provide the equivalent of regular initial teacher education programs, are that the teachers' competency is severely lacking, their students learn less, and they leave teaching at a much higher rate than adequately prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond 1999, pp. 18 - 20). If people without adequate professional preparation are taken on, substantial and effective effort must be made to ensure that they participate in all necessary professional education programs to become fully qualified, and that the quality of education of the school students they might be assisting is in no way jeopardised.

It should be noted that, as it is, Northern Territory and New South Wales school authorities accept only three years of preservice teacher education as 'fully qualified' for new primary teachers. While most recent recruits have four year qualifications, in hard-to-staff situations those with only three year qualifications are being recruited with no requirement that they upgrade to four-year status. Elsewhere in Australia, three years of initial teacher education is not considered an adequate standard. School and teacher registration authorities generally believe that the equivalent of at least four years of university-level initial teacher education is a necessary prerequisite for effective teaching. If less than fully qualified teachers are employed on an emergency basis, then usually their upgrading to fully qualified (four year) status is monitored and expedited, and their employment is conditional on a commitment to upgrade. Research and experience from the United States and many other countries indicates the value of even longer programs. Darling-Hammond (1999) noted:

A number of recent studies have found that graduates of extended (typically five year) programs are not only more satisfied with their preparation, they are viewed by their colleagues, principals and co-operating teachers as better prepared, are as effective with students as much more experienced teachers, and are much more likely to enter and stay in teaching than their peers prepared in traditional four-year programs (p. 24)

The National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education project carried out consultations with stakeholders in initial teacher education around Australia. As a consequence of these consultations, submissions and research, the project developed a set of standards and guidelines for initial teacher education (Adey 1998, pp. 5-28) that detail the core attributes expected of all graduates of initial teacher education programs, and program and organisational features necessary to achieve these graduate attributes. The standards and guidelines state that:

To meet the graduate standards set out in this document, initial teacher education programs will normally need to be of at least four higher education academic years duration (or equivalent) (S. 2.6.1, p. 22)

Students in rural and remote schools often already suffer a range of educational disadvantages, and such schools usually have high staff turnover and a large proportion of beginning teachers. These disadvantages and difficulties should not be compounded by the employment of inadequately prepared teachers.

Preparing graduates for effective teaching in rural and remote locations

An initial teacher education program that realistically and adequately prepares graduates to teach in rural and remote locations is a crucial factor in graduates' initial willingness to teach in such locations, in the quality of their teaching when there, and in their willingness to stay. This is so whether or not the graduate originally came from a rural or remote location.

The Queensland Priority Country Area Program's *Rural Strategies Project Report* (PCAP 1997) reviewed the extensive literature associated with the preparation of initial teacher education graduates to teach in rural and remote schools. They concluded that formal coursework and practical experience specifically concerned with such schools and their communities is essential, noting that:

. . . first year teachers who have experienced an extended period of time in a rural or remote location in the role of teacher and community member are better placed both personally and professionally to enjoy the positive and rewarding experiences that teaching in small schools offer. (p. 154)

This corroborated Hatton et al (1991) who surveyed 1,322 teachers in their second year of teaching in New South Wales. Their findings confirmed their hypothesis that:

Those who undertook a practicum within an area seen as difficult to staff are more willing to accept appointment to such locations than teachers who did not. (p. 287)

Practical experiences in rural and remote locations are clearly crucial. However, they are expensive for the students concerned (especially travel and accommodation costs, and loss of income from their part time employment while they are away from home) and for the teacher education institution (especially the time and expenses of adequate university supervision and coordination). There are other difficulties, including, in many cases, the relatively small numbers of experienced teachers who are in a position to effectively supervise and support the student teachers - this is especially the case in some of the more difficult-to-staff schools where there is high staff turnover and a high proportion of beginning teachers and other teachers new to rural and remote schools.

School authorities (central and local) need to take up the challenge of facilitating and supporting practical experiences in rural and remote locations. Positive initiatives might include:

- assistance with accommodation and travel for student teachers, and facilitation of their integration into the local community;
- support for schools providing supervision for student teachers, such as additional staffing allowances, and resources to support appropriate professional development for supervising teachers - these recognise the existing pressures on many rural and remote schools related to matters such as high staff turnover, a high proportion of inexperienced staff, and the difficulties teachers in those schools already experience in accessing professional development;
- practical support for the work of supervising university staff.

In addition to supporting practicum experiences, school authorities, universities and other parties could also consider other initiatives, such as:

- facilitation of visits by student teachers to rural and remote schools and communities that involve some in-depth experiences but are not the students' formal practicum experiences;

- collaborative research and development concerned with rural and Indigenous education in schools and in initial and continuing teacher education;
- development of regional study centres (such as the award-winning University of Tasmania Burnie study centre) which can facilitate flexible course delivery, and bridging and orientation courses.

An important initiative may be the development of frameworks of agreement between school authorities (central, regional and the schools involved) and universities that provide a basis for effective and efficient collaboration. Effective relationships between schools and teacher education institutions are often based on personal relationships developed in the times (before the 1990s) when there were many more student teachers and education faculties did not have such severe financial constraints (see below). There is an increasing need for more formal mechanisms which set out reasonable, shared expectations, and which are based on understandings of the conditions in which the respective parties operate. The demands and financial constraints on schools, student teachers, and faculties of education are such that the time and effort of each party must be used optimally. The experience should be rewarding for all involved. Opportunities should be taken to value-add, and to facilitate enriching activities and forms of communication such as Internet chat rooms for student teachers and video-conferencing. Collaborative relationships can ensure that this happens optimally.

The implementation of the report of the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Project

The report of the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Project, *Preparing a Profession* (Adey 1998), provides the basis for the development and accreditation of initial teacher education that can meet the needs of schools throughout Australia. The report recommends that accreditation be according to a set of principles which includes 'the involvement of stakeholders in a collaborative structure' (p. 43 - 45). Within the actual Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education developed by the project there are several which are concerned with collaboration with external parties, such as school authorities, schools and their communities, Indigenous communities, and the teaching profession. If implemented, these would ensure opportunities for school authorities and other stakeholders to be effectively involved in programs and their development and review, and the overall provision of initial teacher education in Australia.

Aspects of the Standards and Guidelines also cover matters crucial to quality education in rural and remote locations. Several sections are concerned with the high level professional attributes necessary to become an effective teacher in any demanding situation, and with being familiar with the needs and circumstances of students and schools in rural and remote locations. The section on graduate attributes specifically concerned with Indigenous education is as follows:

1.4.1 Graduates should have developed the knowledge, understandings, capabilities and dispositions to effectively teach Indigenous students, and to teach all students about Indigenous issues.

1.4.2 Graduates should be able to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum of the content areas they teach; and they should be able to participate in the development and implementation of school-based Indigenous studies programs and related school policies and practices, and to respond effectively to issues related to Indigenous Australians which arise in the course of their professional work.

1.4.3 Graduates should understand the need for appropriate consultation with Indigenous communities, and have the knowledge and skills to carry out such consultation.

1.4.4 Graduates should have an appreciation of using English as a second language methodology for Indigenous language speakers, and English as a second dialect methodology for speakers of Aboriginal English. (p. 11)

In the section on Procedures and Criteria for Program Development, Implementation and Monitoring, subsection 2.1.3 states:

The development, implementation and monitoring of those aspects of the program dealing with Indigenous education should involve specific consultation with appropriate Indigenous organisations such as the institution's Indigenous education centre and the State/Territory Indigenous education consultative group. (p. 19)

The ACDE supports the recommendations of the report, and seeks their endorsement by other parties. A copy of the report is enclosed with the hard copy of this submission.

Supporting and retaining teachers in rural and remote schools

The problem of teacher turnover in remote communities is one that needs to be addressed. While a moderate level of staff turnover is desirable, high levels are disruptive to students, weaken the cohesion and collective spirit of schools and the links between schools and communities, and increase the workloads of staff as time is taken for induction and orientation of new staff. In times of teacher shortage, schools with high turnover experience a higher rate of unfilled vacancies (which may be manifest as an accumulation of a series of unfilled casual relief positions, or delays in filling longer term vacancies).

Watson et al (1991) argue that active recruitment to fill vacancies is not sufficient:

It makes little sense to have more teachers go [to difficult-to-staff rural schools], without attempting to remedy problems which cause those who are already there to seek to move as soon as possible. It is wise policy to provide the kind of teaching environment and conditions which will induce more to stay longer or to accept another appointment in a similar area, so that experience as a beginning teacher in the first location can help raise the quality of education in the second. Furthermore, teachers must be able to operate effectively in that initial position. . .

The teacher who goes to an appointment reluctantly, who is poorly prepared for the special demands of the place, who finds the living conditions difficult, the children with unexpected problems, professional contacts narrow, and work satisfaction low is not likely to teach well even though she or he may stay for the compulsory two or three years. If the goal of providing equality of opportunity is to be taken seriously, then staffing must take account of qualitative as well as quantitative concerns. (p. 64)

There can be many reasons for high staff turnover. Some can be pre-empted by recruiting teachers whose preference is to teach in the schools, and who are professionally prepared for the position (see above). To facilitate teachers' satisfaction with their professional work other measures are also necessary: quality induction, development of collegial professional networks among teachers (such as the Warlpiri Triangle), access to continuing professional education, and democratic decision-making within schools and school communities. Such measures will reduce turnover - and improve the quality of schooling received by students.

Other practical support and incentives such as assistance with housing, travel, compensatory leave entitlements, and various financial allowances can play an important role in enhancing professional and personal satisfaction and adjustment.

In general, faculties of education are willing to work collaboratively with school authorities and the teaching profession to develop and enhance professional development and collegial networks through research and continuing professional education. However, the financial constraints on faculties to be involved in such work needs to be recognised.

The financial constraints of faculties of education

A number of the initiatives noted above would ideally be taken up by faculties of education. However, teacher education in most universities is in extraordinarily difficult financial

circumstances. University teaching in general has been experiencing financial difficulties in recent years, and education faculties have greater problems than most other faculties. There are several reasons for this:

- teacher education enrolments are generally paid at a low rate in the internal university financial allocations, yet, out of this amount, education faculties need to make the award provision payments to supervising school teachers (an allocation that has increased to around 25 per cent of the total budget of many education faculties where initial teacher education students spend most of their four or five years enrolled in faculties other than faculties of education);
- the general requirement that all post-initial, non-research post-graduate courses are funded through fees, in the context of the difficulties teachers or school authorities have in paying such fees, means that education faculties cannot provide the cross-subsidy from fee-paying courses to undergraduate and other courses available to some other faculties - in fact, to provide accessible continuing professional education for teachers, education faculties often need to subsidise such postgraduate courses;
- education faculties generally do not have access to the surplus funds generated from commercial activities and large numbers of full fee overseas and local students which are available to some other faculties.

2. Ensuring access to quality education by Indigenous people in rural and remote locations

Access to school and further education

The ACDE is concerned with access to school and further education by Indigenous people as a basic right for the individuals concerned and in terms of the broader consequences for Indigenous communities and for the general Australian society. One of those consequences in which we have a particular interest is the professional preparation of Indigenous people to become teachers in Indigenous communities and throughout the Australian education systems at all levels.

Proposed changes to ABSTUDY are likely to have a negative impact on the ability of some tertiary education providers, most notably Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, to continue offering high quality, community-based educational programs. Such programs play a crucial role in the professional and para-professional education of people in those communities, and this in turn supports the education, health and welfare of those communities. The ACDE appreciates the fact that in 1998 exemptions were available to those institutions that could demonstrate that it was impossible for them to operate a course within the six trips and 40 days limit imposed by DETYA. However, it is still the case that the proposed new limits will threaten the viability of some courses if not modified.

There is a serious lack of provision of secondary education in the Northern Territory that must be addressed. In some other States there is also a problem of a lack of secondary school provision because higher income and educationally aspiring students have historically left the area for boarding schools in metropolitan and major regional centres. There have then not been the numbers or political pressure for the establishment of secondary schools even if there have been sufficient numbers at the primary level. Others, especially those from families with low education levels and a weak attachment to secondary schooling, are then denied easy access to secondary schooling that would otherwise be available. A concerted effort involving school authorities and the Commonwealth (working cooperatively, and not cost-shifting) is necessary to set up a virtuous circle of high quality, accessible secondary schooling keeping Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at school in, or close to, their local communities.

Quality of education in Indigenous communities

The ACDE generally supports government-sponsored efforts to raise literacy and numeracy standards. However, such programs must not be implemented at the expense of vernacular language and culture initiatives which have been negotiated with communities, otherwise they will be counter-productive. Top-down decisions such as the NT Government's decision to phase out bilingual education programs can send the message that Aboriginal language and culture have little importance now in the education of an Indigenous child. The ACDE sees room for both in any well-balanced educational program. Schools can only become vibrant community resources that powerfully support the education of those who are part of them, if local knowledges, languages and social systems are represented in them.

One of the basic and underlying problems for rural and remote education is the poverty of Indigenous communities that continues to limit the developmental opportunities that are available to them. Australia has the capacity to redress the situation. What seems to be lacking is the political will.

3. Telecommunications infrastructure

The development of rural and remote regions is hampered by poor telecommunications infrastructure. It is not acceptable that the best that can be offered some users is a \$7 per hour link via Telstra's rural connect scheme, using slow and unreliable lines. Australia needs to extend high-capacity telecommunications access to all parts of the country. High quality, affordable telecommunications are essential for education at all levels, whether by distance mode or on campus.

4. Appropriate indicators of disadvantage

Appropriate indices are required for the equitable allocation of program funds directed to redressing disadvantage based on lack of geographic access to education. The schemes currently used, such as the metropolitan/rural and remote classification, developed in the early 1990s by the then Department of Primary Industry and Energy, are not satisfactory. A better approach, such as one based on the Griffith Service Access Frame, would result in more equitable allocations. For a detailed consideration of the Griffith Service Access Frame and its alternatives in the context of access to higher education, see Western, McMillan and Durrington (1998).

5. Conclusion

This submission has covered a range of issues. The ACDE would be willing to collaborate with other parties to improve the quality of education for Australians in rural and remote communities. Too often good intentions and good initiatives languish through lack of broad, sustained support and adequate infrastructure.

References

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