

**UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY'S SUBMISSION TO THE NSW  
GOVERNMENT'S DISCUSSION PAPER:  
'GREAT TEACHING, INSPIRED LEARNING'**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper: *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning*.

This submission provides a profile of UWS, our relevance to teaching and a profile of our region. The submission then provides our key responses to each of the five themed areas in the Discussion Paper:

- Inspired Learning
- Initial Teacher Education
- Entry in to the profession
- Develop and maintain professional practice
- Recognise and share outstanding practice

***1.1 About the University of Western Sydney and Our Region***

The University of Western Sydney is a large research-led and comprehensive metropolitan University serving a growing and diverse urban region – Greater Western Sydney (GWS).

Our Region:

Greater Western Sydney is an area of growing importance nationally due to its growing population and economic contribution:

- the region will accommodate 60% of Sydney's growth and 10% of national growth with the current 2 million population increasing to 3 million by 2036; and
- the region has 242,000 businesses and generates more than \$82 billion in economic output a year (gross regional product), making its economy the third largest in Australia behind the Sydney CBD and Melbourne.

The region also has one of the most diverse multicultural communities in Australia:

- one of the largest Indigenous communities of any region in Australia; and
- almost one third of residents born overseas and 50% first or second generation Australians.

Greater Western Sydney is a region which also has significant challenges:

- economic disadvantage (based on the SEIFA scales and high levels of unemployment);
- lower educational attainment levels relative to other areas of Sydney;
- low participation in higher education relative to other areas of Sydney (4% compared with 6.1% for the rest of Sydney [2011 census]).

Our campuses:

UWS has six main campuses in the GWS region spanning 8900 kilometres - Bankstown, Blacktown (Nirimba), Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Parramatta and Penrith with other facilities at Westmead and Liverpool.

Our Students:

UWS students reflect the region, with:

- over 74% of commencing domestic students coming from Western Sydney;
- over 60% being first in family at university (neither parent with a degree);
- the largest number (over 8,000) of low SES students of any university in Australia;
- about 20% of commencing domestic students entering on basis of a TAFE qualification;
- over 150 countries of birth;
- 32.3% are mature age students; and
- 70% juggle work and study.

Our School of Education Profile:

UWS is one of the major Australian educators of teachers. UWS has a graduate entry model for education and in 2012 enrolled the following student numbers in our two school education Masters programs:

<b>Masters of Teaching (Primary)</b>	<b>Masters of Teaching (Secondary)</b>	<b>Total</b>
1, 061	898	1, 959

From 2007-2012, UWS graduates secured 1,524 of the 10, 180 employment appointments made by DEC (14.9%).<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> DEC spreadsheet, "Summary of employment applicants appointed to schools in 2007-2008, 2008-2009,

## 2. KEY SUBMISSION POINTS

### 2.1 Inspired Learning

*Good teachers bring to this capacity to design inspiring learning the empathy and capacity to listen to young people about their aspirations and views of the world, and the pedagogical insights and expertise to lead these young people through learning engagement to success.*

#### Response to this section of the report

The main points we wish to make regarding what makes teaching inspiring are:

Firstly, inspired learning is generally created by teachers who first and foremost have a commitment to enabling young people to learn, and a belief that all children can learn, irrespective of their apparent levels of 'intelligence', social background or cumulative life experience. Understanding the learner as a person, respecting their potential as a learner, and committing to challenge each learner to achieve to their potential, is the critical basis of the good teacher. As Craven (2012) has observed, lacking these dispositions and skills, no teacher, despite their personal intellectual or academic capacities, or their grounding in content knowledge, will inspire young people to learn or succeed in helping them to achieve.

Secondly, inspired learning is created by teachers who can move beyond the technical/organisational requirements of teaching to respond to the needs of their learners. They do this by creatively engaging in the design of learning experiences which can challenge students, which can engage them in meaningful and challenging learning, and which lead them to want to learn more. Good teachers bring to this capacity to design inspiring learning the empathy and capacity to listen to young people about their aspirations and views of the world, and the pedagogical insights and expertise to lead these young people through learning engagement to success.

Thirdly, inspired learning is created by teachers who can address social difference and recognise diversity.

At UWS we particularly value, and promote, the capacity of our student teachers to recognise, value and work positively with social difference as they develop as teachers. The region of Greater Western Sydney (GWS) is one where there is much economic disadvantage and where many families have not experienced educational success. Twenty-five per cent of our student teachers come from low Socio Economic Status (SES) backgrounds, and many of them, and many of our other student teachers, live in GWS and find work in GWS schools.

Overall, the 'diversity' profile of our two major initial teacher education programs (the M. Teach [Primary] and M. Teach [Secondary]) at UWS is:

	Master of Teaching (Primary)		Master of Teaching (Secondary)		Total	
	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage
<b>From GWS</b>	752	72%	679	83%	1431	77%
<b>From low SES background</b>	247	24%	214	26%	460	25%
<b>Other language spoken at home</b>	259	25%	251	28%	510	26%
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</b>	7	0.7	8	1.0	15	0.8
<b>Students with a disability</b>	19	1.8	34	4.2	53	2.9

Our commitment, in partnership with the many public and private schools in GWS and beyond who host our student teachers for professional experience placements, is to develop emerging teachers who do not hold deficit views of their students in schools, and who are committed to adding value to their academic achievement. We believe that our course design and outcomes indicate that we are generally successful in this regard.

*Our Master of Teaching undergraduate pathways at UWS offer other units designed to specifically address the particular dispositions required of 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers ... These units help to open up some of the bigger questions about the role of education in the modern world – questions that are often of great interest to young learners in schools.*

At UWS we place a particular emphasis on working effectively with diversity and difference, and in bringing out the best in learners who may have had difficult backgrounds. This emphasis is to be found in many of the basic units we offer in teacher education that are mandated by the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT). In addition, our Master of Teaching undergraduate pathways at UWS offer other units designed to specifically address the particular dispositions required of 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers (these are not required by the NSWIT). These units help to open up some of the bigger questions about the role of education in the modern world – questions that are often of great interest to young learners in schools. These units also help our student teachers to understand how to inspire young people to want to learn. The titles of these units include: *Learning and Creativity; Learning through Community Service; Education in a Cosmopolitan Society; Ethical Futures; Young People, their Futures and Education; Contemporary Perspectives of Childhoods; Education for Sustainability; and Education and Transformation.*

## **2.2 Initial teacher education**

Firstly, it suggests there should be smaller intakes of teaching degree students at university because not all graduates will become employed as teachers, but it makes no comment about how to predict which student teachers who enter or graduate from initial teacher education programs will either enter, or maintain their involvement in the profession of teaching.

Secondly, it suggests we should raise the ATAR as a means of raising the quality of graduating students and teaching, but then suggests we do not have sufficient Indigenous teaching graduates – a group who are often in low ATAR bands.

The key motivation for the Paper suggesting a reduction in teaching student intake numbers by universities seems to be the number of professional experience placements in schools they will require.

Below, we address the key issues raised in the discussion paper:

- quality of intake, including the notions of the ATAR as a predictor of a good teacher, and the notion of graduate entry programs;
- a focus on outcomes (quality of graduates) rather than on inputs (quality of entrants into teacher education programs);
- intake size;
- workforce needs and planning; and
- the impacts and benefits of professional experience in schools.

### ***Intake Quality, ATARs and Graduate Entry***

*Trying to regulate 'quality' through the mechanism of the ATAR will certainly exclude some who will become very good teachers, and include others who will not.*

There is a building momentum in Australia, embedded in the national Teacher Education Program Standards, that evidence of the effectiveness of teacher education programs should rest upon the outcomes of programs, rather than on the tertiary admission ranks that students achieve while in high school. Re-accreditation of teacher education programs through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) will increasingly rest upon these forms of evidence about graduate competence.

UWS is not convinced that ATAR results, for students who achieve ATARs below 80, represent a reliable indicator of intellectual capacity or a predictor of further educational success. This is particularly true for students who have come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, where they may have undertaken the HSC years while engaging in high levels of part time work or family care responsibilities, or both. Neither can the ATAR predict who will become a good, effective teacher, or who will in fact remain in teaching.

Trying to regulate 'quality' through the mechanism of the ATAR will certainly exclude some who will become very good teachers, and include others who will not. Far more sensible is to determine 'quality' through what graduates demonstrably achieve through their course, both in its university-based and school-based components. 'Quality' in this sense can and should be demonstrated through an evidence-based portfolio including reports from schools where the student has been placed, graduate statements of educational philosophy and achievements, the student's academic record, and work samples undertaken during study.

Apart from our view about the inadequacy of ATAR as a predictor of success, UWS does not use the ATAR as the mechanism for entry into teacher education because UWS has *graduate* entry teaching courses as our standard model. All people who enter our Primary and Secondary teacher education programs are required to have a university bachelor degree as a minimum prior qualification, and graduate with a Master of Teaching degree.

We feel that the graduate entry requirement represents not only a better intellectual preparation for our teacher education students, but also builds upon their life experience and maturity, enhancing their readiness to enter the profession and their performance as teachers when they do so. If we were to emulate the world's apparently most successful education systems – such as Finland – we would be working towards a universal graduate entry model.

### ***Teaching Student Satisfaction***

***Teacher education programs at UWS consistently rate the highest levels of satisfaction of any programs within the university.***

We also strongly disagree with the view put in the discussion paper that the majority of graduates are unhappy with their course. We understand that this finding is from a single survey, limited in its scope, conducted around 2007.

Certainly, student dissatisfaction is not our experience at UWS. Teacher education programs at UWS consistently rate the highest levels of satisfaction of any programs within the university. On the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) surveys issued nationally to graduates each year, UWS teacher education programs rate amongst the highest nationally on both the Good Teaching and Student Satisfaction scales in that survey.

Additionally, a recent external review of our programs found that our students are grounded, and confident in their capacity to teach in schools marked by their diversity and cultural complexity.

## **Intake Size and Workforce Needs**

*It is therefore a significant simplification ... to reduce the question of the workforce demand for new teachers to the number of new graduates required each year by the DEC.*

Notwithstanding the arguments above, we feel in any case that the university sector does provide the various education systems with many high-ATAR students. As the Discussion Paper points out, while the sector produces in excess of 5,000 graduates a year, the DEC only employs 300-500 new graduates into permanent appointments. This provides the DEC with ample opportunity to select the very best graduates from the available pool through responsive and well-configured recruitment processes.

However, we need to be cautious about the claims in the discussion paper that the sector is producing too many graduate teachers:

- While the DEC employs 300-500 new graduates into permanent appointments each year, it also employs up to an additional 1,000 new positions each year from the available pool of previous graduates.
- These numbers do not include new positions in the private school sector, which employs approximately 30% of all teachers in NSW.
- It is clear that the school education sector relies heavily on casual teachers, not just those employed permanently. In NSW, the DEC alone employs 30,000 individual casual teachers each year, across as many as two million casual teaching days per annum. This conservatively represents the equivalent of an additional 10,000, and perhaps as many as 15,000 FTE teaching positions in the system. With its aging teaching workforce, and likely increased demand for sick and long service leave, these numbers come as no surprise; and again, these numbers only represent workforce needs in the public school sector.

It is therefore a significant simplification in the Discussion Paper to claim that “*initial teacher education providers are graduating significantly more primary school teachers than are required*” (p.4), and to reduce the question of the workforce demand for new teachers to the number of new graduates required each year by the DEC. The situation is clearly more complex than represented in the Discussion Paper, and deserves better analysis.

It is important to recognise the full range of teaching workforce requirements across the sectors and regardless of the permanency of the position. Presently those schools which rely on such a heavily casualised teaching workforce would be unable to operate without the large casual pool that the tertiary education sector provides through its graduates. This is particularly the case in Greater Western Sydney, where UWS provides a relatively large, local, accessible and highly competent pool of graduates to schools where there can be significant operational pressures.

## ***Impacts and Benefits of Professional Experience***

*There are many tertiary institutions that have quality and enduring partnerships with schools, where the engagement of student teachers in those schools is viewed as a positive part of the professional conversation in the school about teaching and teacher improvement.*

The discussion paper makes the point that in NSW each year large numbers of professional experience (“Practicum”) placements are required in schools, noting that “*each year more than 18,000 practicum places must be found in schools. Many students who undertake practicum will not seek or gain employment as a teacher upon graduation*”.

While clearly there may be a mismatch between those who require placement and will take out a qualification in teaching, and those who may persist with a career as a teacher, there is an important question. That is, how can we predict which student teachers will persist with a career in teaching and those who will not? And if we cannot predict this with any certainty, are we prepared to dramatically restrict places on the basis of hope and poor analysis, to the possible detriment of the permanent and casual supply of qualified teachers for schools?

As the Discussion Paper points out, there are many tertiary institutions that have quality and enduring partnerships with schools, where the engagement of student teachers in those schools is viewed as being of mutual benefit. The school benefits from student teaching being a positive part of the professional conversation in the school about teaching and teacher improvement. In these schools, the acceptance of student teachers for professional experience is seen as part of the expected professional responsibility of experienced teachers to bring on and mentor the new generation of teachers.

Unfortunately, in some other schools, professional experience is constructed in deficit terms, in which student teachers are seen as ‘burdens’ on the school, and the responsibility to engage with them is constructed as an unwanted ‘favour’ to universities which impacts negatively on the work of the school.

DEC and universities together need to better promote the benefits of professional experience placements in schools. In many schools, the presence of student teachers promotes professional discourse amongst school staff about quality teaching in ways that may not exist at other times. Their presence often enhances opportunities for professional learning and reflection for experienced teachers, as they observe and assist student teachers undertake preparation, delivery, assessment and critical reflection around their practice, and seek feedback from their more experienced mentor teachers during these processes.

*UWS has developed some significant partnerships with schools ... these are win-win programs, adding value to schools and their own students, and to the experiences of student teachers and the outcomes they achieve.*

UWS has developed some significant partnerships with schools around the Centres for Excellence national partnerships program, through our Fair Go project and the Secondary Schools Educational Research Program, through our previous Classmates program, and through our current community-based placements in schools through our Classrooms Without Borders, Refugee Action Support and after-school homework centres programs. These are win-win programs, adding value to schools and their own students, and to the experiences of student teachers and the outcomes they achieve. Other universities have similar exemplars. These models should be highlighted and celebrated as the exemplars they are, by both universities and the school sector. We need to de-bunk the myth that teacher education students are an imposition on schools who do not contribute value to the work of the school. The opposite is overwhelmingly the case.

### **2.3 Entry into the profession**

*Schools in which teachers operate as optimistic and supportive communities of learners are likely to be welcoming and supportive of new staff, and these environments give new teachers every opportunity to develop further their attitudes and teaching skills.*

There is clearly a transition period following graduation in which newly-qualified teachers enter into the profession, either through casual work through which they build momentum and visibility within schools, or through permanent positions for the minority.

The experiences that new teachers have in that transition period can be profound, and a strong determinant as to whether they develop perseverance and commitment to teaching as a career on the one hand, or decide on a career change on the other. The nature of the culture of schools is a critical factor here. Schools in which teachers operate as optimistic and supportive communities of learners are likely to be welcoming and supportive of new staff, and these environments give new teachers every opportunity to develop further their attitudes and teaching skills. Environments which are less optimistic, and more individualistic and even competitive, tend not to provide the same levels of support to staff, and are more problematic in facilitating the development of new scheme teachers (and indeed, the ongoing learning and development of more experienced teachers in the school).

The best developmental environments for teachers are those in which performance evaluation is linked to an innovative culture of the school (teachers are supported to 'try new things' and are celebrated when they succeed), and in which innovation and teacher development is linked to improvements in the full range of outcomes – academic, social and personal - for the students in the school. To become these schools, schools need great leadership which develops open and honest approaches to, and appraisals of, pedagogy and student learning. These teaching cultures are based on experimentation, discussion, sharing of practice, and valuing the different forms of practice that leads to success for students. These are mature educational and operational environments.

*Universities are well equipped to work with schools to assist them to build the sorts of collaborative learning cultures, outlined above, in which teacher development thrives.*

It is an out-dated perspective to see teacher education as revolving solely around pre-service experiences. In very few other professions is there the expectation that beginners are already experts. Too often the notion of 'classroom ready' is used to mean 'classroom accomplished'. Appropriate and supportive *entry* into the profession is a central part of teacher development. Part of what universities and schools could do better is to work together on this early phase of practice.

It is important for education systems to positively engage with universities in facilitating the transition of new scheme teachers into the profession. As UWS has done, many universities have developed mentoring arrangements involving the Highly Accomplished Teachers who are located in the Centres for Excellence partnership schools. However, the number of the Centres for Excellence schools is quite limited, and the focus has not been on transition.

Additionally, universities are well equipped to work with schools to assist them to build the sorts of collaborative learning cultures, outlined above, in which teacher development thrives. We would be happy to engage in further discussion about how to maximise these opportunities.

#### **2.4 Develop and maintain professional practice**

*The best schools have a leadership group that is attuned to contemporary pedagogical issues, has a vision for improving student learning, and is able to scaffold teachers in achieving improved learning outcomes for their students.*

Many of the collegial and inquiry-based contextual factors in schools that support the development of new scheme teachers (outlined above in 2.3) also assist more experienced teachers in renewing their skills and building their pedagogical repertoire.

What we need to support the development of these environments is a range of approaches to professional learning, which may include single day or two-hour professional learning opportunities for teachers, but also include whole-school, site based teacher professional learning around key learning strategies and objectives within the school.

*The challenge is to grow these types of school learning cultures in an increasing number of schools, and then to showcase these successful schools as 'lighthouse' schools and as sites of exemplary practice.*

The best schools have a leadership group that is attuned to contemporary pedagogical issues, has a vision for improving student learning, and is able to scaffold teachers in achieving improved learning outcomes for their students. Teachers whose professional development occurs within, and is supported by, whole-school development strategies, will generally be motivated to develop their professional practice, and will seek out opportunities to do so. The challenge is to grow these types of school learning cultures in an increasing number of schools, and then to showcase these successful schools as 'lighthouse' schools and as sites of exemplary practice. Given the necessary resources, universities are able to provide forms of expertise, particularly through participant research models of school development, to assist in this task.

At UWS, a particularly successful partnership program is being trialled with the south-western Sydney region of the DEC, and involves a cohort of school leaders undertaking study in a Doctor of Education program. In this program school leaders work to develop, analyse data on, and publish about school innovation. School systems need to invest more support for their leaders and teachers to engage in these practical, relevant and challenging forms of professional learning.

### **2.5 Recognise and share outstanding practice**

Many of the points and suggestions made in the Discussion Paper relate to increased forms of recognition and pay. These are important, but should also go hand in hand with other factors which motivate teachers to develop or share their practice.

Peer recognition is important, but it is also important to place this within sharing professional communities rather than positioning effective teachers as elites. In contrast, groups of teachers (such as a whole school staff) are happy to be recognised for their outstanding work, and should be acknowledged as lighthouse sites of practice.

It is through encouraging and supporting schools to develop as effective and critical learning communities that we will identify and be able to showcase exemplary schools.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The University of Western Sydney welcomes this opportunity to contribute a submission on the 'Great Teaching, Inspired Learning' discussion paper on the quality of teacher education.

In summary, we would highlight the following key ideas contained within our submission.

1. Inspired learning is generally created by teachers who first and foremost have a commitment to enabling young people to learn, and a belief that all children can learn, irrespective of their apparent levels of 'intelligence', social background or cumulative life experience.
2. Inspired learning is created by teachers who can move beyond the technical/organisational requirements of teaching to respond to the needs of their learners.
3. Inspired learning requires teachers to engage in the design of learning experiences which can challenge students, which can engage them in meaningful and challenging learning, and which lead them to want to learn more.
4. Teacher education must place an emphasis on working effectively with diversity and difference, and in bringing out the best in learners who may have had difficult backgrounds. This approach to teacher education benefits from a diverse student teacher profile.
5. Trying to regulate teacher 'quality' through the mechanism of the ATAR will certainly exclude some who will become very good teachers, and include others who will not.
6. 'Quality' teaching can and should be demonstrated through an evidence-based portfolio including reports from schools, graduate statements of educational philosophy and achievements, the student's academic record, and work samples undertaken during study.
7. The graduate entry requirement for teacher education should be more widely considered as it may provide a better intellectual preparation for our teacher education students that builds upon their life experience and maturity, enhancing their readiness to enter the profession and their performance as teachers when they do so.
8. The discussion paper's claim that the majority of graduates are unhappy with their

course lacks evidence and is at odds with the experience of students at UWS.

9. There is a need for more detailed analysis on the future education workforce needs. It is a gross simplification to reduce the question of the workforce demand for new teachers to the number of new graduates required each year by the DEC.
10. Universities and DEC need to do more work to de-bunk the myth that teacher education students are an imposition on schools and work hard to foster quality and enduring partnerships with schools, where the engagement of student teachers in those schools is viewed as a positive part of the professional conversation in the school about teaching and teacher improvement.
11. More needs to be done to identify and acknowledge 'win-win' partnership programs which add value to schools and their own students, and to the experiences of student teachers and the outcomes they achieve. These models should to be highlighted and celebrated as the exemplars they are, by both universities and the school sector.
12. Schools in which teachers operate as optimistic and supportive communities of learners are likely to be welcoming and supportive of new staff, and these environments give new teachers every opportunity to develop further their attitudes and teaching skills.
13. It is vital that education systems positively engage with universities in facilitating the transition of new teachers into the profession. Universities can play a valuable role in developing mentoring arrangements, such as those involving the Highly Accomplished Teachers who are located in the Centres for Excellence partnership schools.
14. School systems need to promote a range of approaches to professional learning, which may include single day or two-hour professional learning opportunities for teachers, but also include whole-school, site based teacher professional learning around key learning strategies and objectives within the school.
15. The best schools have a leadership group that is attuned to contemporary pedagogical issues, has a vision for improving student learning, and is able to scaffold teachers in achieving improved learning outcomes for their students. The challenge is to grow these types of school learning cultures in an increasing number of schools, and then to showcase these successful schools as 'lighthouse' schools and as sites of exemplary practice.

16. Teacher recognition and improved pay are important to attracting high quality student teachers and importantly for keeping quality teachers in the profession.

17. Peer recognition is also important for promoting quality teaching and it is important to place this within sharing professional communities rather than only positioning effective teachers as elites. Groups of teachers (such as a whole school staff) should be recognised for their outstanding work, and should be acknowledged as lighthouse sites of practice.

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