

Initial Teacher Education

**A response to the discussion paper
'Working together to shape teaching
education in Victoria'.**

September 2016

About VicSRC

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing students in Victoria. The VicSRC's vision is a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student driven and student focussed. The organisation exists to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET).

Victorian Student Representative Council
Level 3, 180 Flinders St
Melbourne, VIC 3000

T: (03) 9267 3744

E: manager@vicsrc.org.au

Authors: Krista Seddon, Roger Holdsworth and Executive members - for the Victorian Student Representative Council



VictorianStudent
RepresentativeCouncil

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About the VicSRC

VicSRC Vision

A world where all students have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focused.

VicSRC Mission

The VicSRC is the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria.

We strive for a world where all learners have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focussed.

We exist to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). The VicSRC provides resources, events, teacher professional development, and support to principals, teachers and students.

Student Voice

Student voice involves more than just listening to students – it involves taking seriously what they say; it means students participating in decisions made about their education. Student participation in decision-making must play a central role in education – because it is a right, because it assists individuals’ learning and growth, and because it informs and supports improvement in education for all:

- Students have a right to participate in making decisions about matters that affect their lives (as is recognised in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Participation prepares students with skills and attitudes necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world.
- Participation is effective in supporting student engagement and retention and in strengthening learning outcomes.
- Participation supports the social and emotional development of students, assisting them to strengthen their capacity to manage challenges and build respectful relationships.
- Participation helps cultivate a culture of respect in schools, in which student voice is encouraged and valued, and within which diversity is also valued and celebrated.
- Participation enables student knowledge and perspectives to introduce and shape improved and new learning and teaching methods.

Student voice takes many forms

The meaningful participation of students in decision-making about their education and school can be supported in a range of ways. Participation is a core ‘approach’ to the development of learning environments that respect and value young people: their active learning, their contributions to their school and community and their right to have a voice in and share in decisions about the matters that affect their lives.

Most schools in Victoria have some sort of student organisation to represent and work on behalf of students. They operate under many different names, including SRCs, student forums, student councils, student leadership councils, and student voice. In each case, they are made up of a group of students who represent student views within the school. They enable students to meet to discuss, debate and decide on their collective views on education.

Student participation can also occur in many other ways throughout the school. In classrooms, students can negotiate their learning, tutor other students, research and act on issues of social importance, form student action teams or create school and community media, amongst other opportunities.

The VicSRC Response to this Discussion Paper

The VicSRC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the discussion paper: *'Working together to shape teacher education in Victoria'*.

Students are in a unique and valuable position to provide perspectives on teacher education. They have direct daily experience with the outcomes of such teacher education; they think and talk about what makes a good teacher; they meet and respond to teacher candidates during the process of teacher education.

In forming the VicSRC response to this discussion paper, our ideas have been developed through discussion with members of the VicSRC Executive. These are current students in Years 7 to 11 in Victorian secondary schools, elected by their peers to manage the organisation.

These students' views on the discussion paper naturally grow from their direct experience of teachers' practices. Hence most comments in this response centre around Area of Focus 3 and Area of Focus 4, with some more general statements provided on the first two foci.

Area of Focus 1: Raising the quality of teaching and the status of the profession through a robust approach to selection into initial teacher education.

What academic capability threshold should be set for entry into ITE?

To improve the quality of teachers, increasing the minimum ATAR for initial teacher education would be beneficial. Students reject the idea that teachers should enter such courses simply because they can't become qualified elsewhere.

The VicSRC recognises that standards of entry into the profession can be influenced both by threshold requirements but also by demand. It is important to students that teaching is a desirable profession that attracts highly qualified and motivated applicants. That means we need to provide improved flexibility, workload and conditions in schools. Increasing the prestige and pay of teachers, and providing optimal conditions for learning and teaching will, in turn, increase the demand for initial teacher education and hence be reflected in higher ATAR scores.

It is important to students that their teachers are experts in their area of study – both in terms of the content and skills, but also in terms of the pedagogy: how to inspire, teach and communicate their passion for the study.

There is value in making initial teacher education courses graduate entry only. This means that teaching candidates come to the profession with a substantial body of knowledge and skills – and passions – before they specialise in a more vocationally oriented education course.

What personal attributes are important for teachers? How might these be measured in the Victorian context?

The Victorian Code of Ethical Practice recognises the following attributes and principles for any person when working with young people:

1. the empowerment of all young people
2. young people's participation
3. social justice for young people
4. the safety of young people
5. respect for young people's human dignity and worth

6. young people's connectedness to important people in their lives, such as family and community
7. positive health and wellbeing outcomes for young people
8. the positive transitions and healthy development of young people.

It is vital that all teachers have a commitment to working within such principles. We also recognise a good teacher will display skills such as transparency, honesty and integrity, equity and self-awareness, inclusion, cooperation and collaboration, knowledge, skills and self-care.

These principles have strong implications both for the selection of teacher candidates, and for the teacher education with which they are provided. In particular, teacher candidates need to be committed to putting the best interests (and wellbeing) of their students at the centre of their work, to be willing and able to focus on a strength-based approach to working with young people, and to be able to collaborate and co-design with students.

Recommendations:

- *An increase to the minimum ATAR for initial teacher education would improve the quality of teachers.*
- *Improved flexibility, workload and conditions (including pay) of teachers, are needed to increase the prestige of the profession as well as provide optimal conditions for learning and teaching. This will, in turn, increase the demand for initial teacher education and hence be reflected in higher ATAR scores.*
- *Teachers must be experts in their area of study.*
- *There is value in making initial teacher education courses graduate entry only.*
- *It is vital that all teachers have a commitment to working within ethical principles, and display skills such as transparency, honesty and integrity, equity and self-awareness, inclusion, cooperation and collaboration, knowledge, skills and self-care.*

Area of Focus 2: Ensuring high quality pathways into the teaching profession for capable and committed candidates from diverse backgrounds.

Is there a case for greater quality assurance of bridging courses and pathways into ITE in Victoria?

Is there a case for more pathways into ITE courses? What should the key features be?

How can flexible pathways attract career changers and address key areas of need such as disadvantaged and rural settings?

Entry into the teaching profession must attract and cater for people from diverse backgrounds. That means that, as well as ensuring candidates can demonstrate appropriate academic skills and knowledge, other entry opportunities such as interview processes, portfolios, recognised previous experience and observed experience should all be considered. School students themselves can be astute judges of capacity to teach and would welcome being part of the processes in recognising diverse pathways. Increasingly, student representatives are taking part in teacher selection processes in schools.

Students strongly support opportunities for teacher candidates to enter the profession with a broad range of existing skills and experiences that they can then apply to their teaching work. They value the 'life experience' that teacher candidates can bring to the profession.

We would welcome financial incentives to encourage that diversity and experience in candidates, and also link this with possibilities of targeting employment to more 'difficult to staff' areas (eg disadvantaged and rural settings). For example, there is value in the provision of '(re)turn to teaching' scholarships, through which teacher candidates are paid to complete teacher qualifications and, in turn, are committed to working in hard-to-staff locations or in specialised subject areas for a minimum of three years. Such an approach might encourage professionals who have financial commitments to consider re-training as teachers without the financial burden of returning to study without an income.

Students value the energy and passion, the fresh ideas and the diverse experiences that new teachers bring to the profession. However, as the nature of work continues to change, we also need to recognise and acknowledge that, for many younger teaching candidates, a short timescale commitment of 3 to 5 years may be the initial maximum commitment to the profession that is possible. Research such as the 'Life Patterns Project' of The University of Melbourne's

Youth Research Centre, highlights the mobile and flexible life and work patterns being adopted by young people. This has direct implications for the training, re-training and re-entry of teacher candidates, to ensure that value is obtained from initial training, but also that a return to teaching at a future time is facilitated.

Recommendations:

- *Entry into the teaching profession must attract and cater for people from diverse backgrounds.*
- *Opportunities should be provided for teacher candidates to enter the profession with a broad range of existing skills and experiences – including life experience – that they can then apply to their teaching work.*
- *Financial incentives should be provided to encourage diversity and experience in candidates, and to target employment to more ‘difficult to staff’ areas (eg disadvantaged and rural settings).*

Area of focus 3: Improve courses quality, including through feedback loops between graduates, schools and ITE providers.

How can teacher education courses respond to future demands in classrooms and society e.g. building teacher expertise in digital technology, entrepreneurial skills, collaboration?

Students have a lot to say about the future of learning. They believe giving students a strong voice in their education helps prepare them for a rapidly changing world. Such attitudes and approaches are appropriate both for school students and for teacher candidates. It is vital that courses prepare candidates both for changes in their own lives, and also for changes in the lives of their students.

Young people need an education to prepare for a rapidly changing world.

Recent research tells us that ‘young people need to be resilient and adaptable in a world characterised by decreasing job security, the fluidity of globalisation and technology, increasingly diverse societies and over-exposure to the internet.’¹ Young people’s experience of employment is also changing: they are taking longer to find full-time, permanent work and are more likely to be unemployed or under-employed for longer after graduating.² In addition, the nature of work is changing. Today’s students will enter a workforce in which a career may involve changing jobs and directions frequently and perhaps managing multiple pieces of flexible work at the same time. In addition, almost all jobs in the future will require digital literacy and many will demand skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).³

Teacher candidates will experience these same changes, and teacher education courses need to respond to those changes – and also support candidates to develop teaching approaches that recognise and support adaptability, innovation and change for their students.

To succeed in the work environment of the future, young people will need a variety of personal attributes.

They will need to be effective problem solvers and financially literate. They will need to be tech savvy and enterprising, with the ability to manage their own careers. It will be important for them to be flexible, able to manage transitions, and resourceful when faced with change. Confidence, agency, critical thinking and communication will help them succeed in this world, as well as project management and teamwork skills, enthusiasm for learning and the ability to work cooperatively with others. Schools have a key role in preparing young people with these skills and abilities to enable them to thrive in this new environment.⁴ Teacher education courses have

a key role in preparing teachers with these personal skills and abilities – both for themselves and for their role in guiding students.

Students need to be engaged in ways that develop their resilience and independent learning skills.

There is growing concern across the world that students are not sufficiently engaged in school. This is reflected not only in cases where students disengage from school, but is evidenced when students achieve academically in a highly controlled school environment but struggle to stay engaged in the world of learning or work beyond school. Students who are not resilient, self-motivated and continuing learners are not well prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century world.⁵ Teacher education courses have a key role in preparing teachers to develop their own resilience, and as continuing learners – including learning from their students. They should also prepare teachers to support students' roles as continuing, engaged and motivated learners – and recognising the diverse influences and needs that both engage and disengage young learners.

What should be common elements in a graduate's final 'capstone' teacher performance assessment?

Most teaching candidates are pre-disposed to positive views around student teacher relationships and communication, but this needs to be supported and endorsed through the provision of theory, skills and practical ideas to ensure a commitment to student voice is embedded in their practice. These elements are central to a graduate's final assessment.

A final capstone assessment should enable teachers to demonstrate how they will interact with students in their classes and schools. This includes demonstration of how they will develop and support learning input and ideas, and feedback, from students ie how they draw on student voices in their everyday teaching. They should be able to show an understanding of the theory and practice of this, drawing upon opportunities provided within their ITE practice.

School students should also be included in the feedback loops to teaching candidates, through demonstration by candidates of how they have encouraged, enabled, heard and responded to student feedback.

Students have suggested that teacher candidates could use a variety of approaches to amplify student voice and participation, and these processes could be included in 'capstone' assessments:

- Engaging an SRC (or similar body) in discussion about the school's criteria for practice excellence, of learning teaching approaches and of assessment

- Implementing a Teach the Teacher approach to provide a student-led space for discussions between students and teachers about how the school can build practice excellence
- Supporting a team of students to formally evaluate specific practices, including within school placements during ITE, as a curricular or co-curricular initiative
- Formally adopting a regular program of eliciting student feedback on curriculum content, processes, pedagogy and assessment
- Conducting a program of collaborative classroom/learning observations by students and teachers, feeding in to discussions
- Engaging students as technology leaders within the school
- Initiating forms of cooperative learning such as peer- or cross-age tutoring within classes or the school.

The principles around student voice and participation equally apply to candidates who are completing their Initial Teacher Education. Their own student voice enables policy and program development that is highly relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of students. Educational policy and program development must be based on a strong understanding of the needs and experiences of students. Student voice must be central to the development of that understanding. Students have direct experience and understanding of the impact of policies on their learning and lives. When students are supported to engage with the creation of research, policy or programs, a more nuanced and complex understanding of what is needed to best meet students' needs is developed. Good practice participatory design processes adopted in other youth focused fields such as mental health, are yielding strong results in terms of boosting the relevance of programs to young people.⁶

How can partnerships operate from a shared understanding of effective teaching and become self-sustaining?

Teaching candidates need to be able to demonstrate the importance of student/teacher relationships. The teaching profession is increasingly about partnership between students and teachers, with teachers recognised as facilitators of learning. Not only do teacher candidates need to be skilled and knowledgeable within their subject areas, but they also need to be prepared and passionate to be teachers – with a commitment to be part of this profession and to work in partnership with their students.

Teacher education therefore needs to reflect those principles at the core of its understanding of and approaches to effective teaching:

- **Students are more engaged in their school education when they are involved in shaping their learning.** Several strategies can help to achieve this. Firstly, shared responsibility for learning strengthens student engagement. When the responsibility for learning is mutual between teachers, students, families and the local community and all participants are seen as having authority and agency, students are more engaged and motivated. In this way, students are viewed as active partners in their own learning, rather than as passive recipients of knowledge.⁷ This sense of agency motivates students to learn and improves learning outcomes.
- **When everyone is seen as a learner, including teachers, and school is thus a ‘learning commons’, students are more inspired to learn.** When school is viewed as the beginning or ‘basecamp’ of enquiries, rather than the sole source of knowledge, and when learning extends into the community about issues that are seen to matter, learning is significantly enhanced. This process of community engagement through learning (engaging businesses, professionals, families and others – whether virtually or in person) enhances motivation, creates a sense of authenticity about tasks, connects learning to the outside world and improves literacy.⁸
- **When students participate in and lead decisions about their own learning, they also are more likely to acquire a range of skills that will prepare them for the future.** Student-led learning can happen in a variety of ways, but some approaches work particularly well. Project-based learning, in which students plan, design and carry out a project that they then present to others, gives students a chance not only to explore in depth a topic of interest and importance but, when done well, teaches them real-world lessons about drafting and redrafting, responding to feedback, and presenting and explaining work to an audience beyond their peers. Around the world, a series of innovative schools have revamped their teaching to focus on project-based learning. These include San Diego’s High Tech High group of schools, where 99% of students go on to university or a two-year college and 35% of these are the first generation of their family to do so.⁹
- **Students can play a key role in shaping and improving the learning and teaching practices of a school.** Students can collaborate with teachers to refine learning and teaching practices through providing continual formal and informal feedback.¹⁰ Students can evaluate learning and teaching approaches or other aspects of their school through participation in focus groups, by collecting new data, by participating in ‘students as researchers’ initiatives, in reviews by external authorities and in reflection on annual surveys of school data – where they draw on the particular experiences and knowledge that students have about the impact of school approaches. All of these methods help

schools focus on students and ensure they are central to the school's decision-making ethos.

- **A student-centred approach can create positive learning outcomes with students who have not been well-served by more traditional approaches.**¹¹ A student-centred school seeks to ensure that **all** students, including those traditionally marginalised and excluded, are provided with access to ways to participate successfully within the school. To best prepare these and all students for a changing world, an inclusive student-centred school and school system is critical.

Teaching candidates need opportunities to meet and interact with students as competent and active young people. Within teacher education, opportunities should exist for teaching candidates to work with current students on a person-to-person basis that goes beyond a formal or subject-based student/teacher relationship. There are current examples of students (including VicSRC Executive members) co-presenting at university lectures or in tutorials, and facilitating drama-based workshops for teacher candidates. The feedback from teacher candidates has been that such occasions provide “the only time I was able to speak with students as equals”. In turn, this models sustainable approaches in schools, in which, as secondary students have said: “Teachers engage with you, see you succeed, go beyond a textbook, engage in one on one conversations with you, recognise our differences.”

Universities can continue to partner with community organisations such as the VicSRC, but this needs to be developed in a systematic, less *ad hoc* way. When initial teacher education is able to draw on the expertise of community organisations, it provides teaching candidates with a depth to their practice, and access to ongoing practical examples and networks for their careers.

Recommendations:

- *ITE courses should prepare candidates both for changes in their own lives, and also for changes in the lives of their students through teaching approaches that recognise and support adaptability, innovation and change for their students.*
- *Teacher education courses should prepare teachers to develop their own resilience, and as continuing learners – including from their students. They should also prepare teachers to support students' roles as continuing, engaged and motivated learners.*
- *ITE should ensure that the theory, skills and practical ideas around student voice is embedded in candidates' practice. A final capstone assessment should enable teachers to demonstrate how they will interact with students in their classes and schools.*
- *School students should be included in feedback loops to teaching candidates, through demonstration by candidates of how they have encouraged, enabled, heard and responded to student feedback.*

- *Teaching candidates should have opportunities to meet and interact with students as competent and active young people.*

Area of focus 4: Developing early career teachers to become excellent teachers and leaders.

What can we learn from what is currently working well in induction and mentoring, and what is not?

We know that the initial experience of teachers entering the profession after their ITE establishes patterns and approaches that will persist. The support these early career teachers receive is crucial, both in terms of practical provisions (time, mentorship), but also in terms of the nature of relationships with both colleagues and students that is modelled in these first years.

We also know that this beginning time is both exciting and daunting, and marks a huge shift in workload and preparation. It has been extremely valuable that all teachers are given a reduced load as they begin their career – in order to prepare, reflect, seek advice. But we also know that such provisions have not been forthcoming in some instances; the state needs to ensure that such agreements are honoured.

Beginning teachers need to be provided with an appropriate mentor (who has both time and commitment to provide this).

Mentors in particular need to be carefully selected; they need to be supported with remuneration for the role and time, and provided with training and support to carry out that induction role. Mentors can have a huge impact on the way first year teachers view students and develop those important connections and relationships with them. Despite any ITE focus on the value of positive relationships, and their critical role in enabling a productive teaching and learning environment, beginning teachers can become focused on academic knowledge and skills, and their own 'instructive' role in classrooms. Students have observed beginning teachers who have then sought to exert inappropriate power over students through 'behaviour management approaches' that have distanced them from their students, and devalued the possibility of productive relationships.

How can we ensure that a teacher's early work experience sets up a positive and future-focused career outlook?

There is a need to revisit ITE principles after a period of teaching. The provision of a compulsory 'refresher' program after the first year of teaching could be seen as part of the profession's ITE. Such a program would focus on reflection on learning, relationships with students, practical examples of classroom and whole school initiatives, and ways to elicit, consider and act on student feedback.

Such 're-visiting' should also involve mentors and other school-based personnel, and could also invite participation of school students as expert advisers. In particular, courses should enable teachers to examine practices in relation to working with students with diverse needs.

This 're-visiting' could be integrated with the VIT's requirements for evidence to move from provisional to full registration.

Recommendations:

- *All beginning teachers should be given a reduced load as they begin their career, in order to prepare, reflect, and seek advice.*
- *Beginning teachers should to be provided with an appropriate mentor, who has both time and commitment to provide this. Mentors should be carefully selected, supported with remuneration for the role and time, and provided with training and support to carry out that induction role.*
- *There should be a compulsory 'refresher' program after the first year of teaching as part of the profession's ITE, to focus on reflection on learning, relationships with students, practical examples of classroom and whole school initiatives, and ways to elicit, consider and act on student feedback.*

Summary of Recommendations

Area of Focus 1:

- 1.1 *An increase to the minimum ATAR for initial teacher education would improve the quality of teachers.*
- 1.2 *Improved flexibility, workload and conditions (including pay) of teachers, are needed to increase the prestige of the profession as well as provide optimal conditions for learning and teaching. This will, in turn, increase the demand for initial teacher education and hence be reflected in higher ATAR scores.*
- 1.3 *Teachers must be experts in their area of study.*
- 1.4 *There is value in making initial teacher education courses graduate entry only.*
- 1.5 *It is vital that all teachers have a commitment to working within ethical principles, and display skills such as transparency, honesty and integrity, equity and self-awareness, inclusion, cooperation and collaboration, knowledge, skills and self-care.*

Area of Focus 2:

- 2.1 *Entry into the teaching profession must attract and cater for people from diverse backgrounds.*
- 2.2 *Opportunities should be provided for teacher candidates to enter the profession with a broad range of existing skills and experiences – including life experience – that they can then apply to their teaching work.*
- 2.3 *Financial incentives should be provided to encourage diversity and experience in candidates, and to target employment to more ‘difficult to staff’ areas (eg disadvantaged and rural settings).*

Area of Focus 3:

- 3.1 *ITE courses should prepare candidates both for changes in their own lives, and also for changes in the lives of their students through teaching approaches that recognise and support adaptability, innovation and change for their students.*
- 3.2 *Teacher education courses should prepare teachers to develop their own resilience, and as continuing learners – including from their students. They should also prepare teachers to support students’ roles as continuing, engaged and motivated learners.*
- 3.3 *ITE should ensure that the theory, skills and practical ideas around student voice is embedded in candidates’ practice. A final capstone assessment should enable teachers to demonstrate how they will interact with students in their classes and schools.*

- 3.4 *School students should be included in feedback loops to teaching candidates, through demonstration by candidates of how they have encouraged, enabled, heard and responded to student feedback.*
- 3.5 *Teaching candidates should have opportunities to meet and interact with students as competent and active young people.*

Area of Focus 4:

- 4.1 *All beginning teachers should be given a reduced load as they begin their career, in order to prepare, reflect, and seek advice.*
- 4.2 *Beginning teachers should to be provided with an appropriate mentor, who has both time and commitment to provide this. Mentors should be carefully selected, supported with remuneration for the role and time, and provided with training and support to carry out that induction role.*
- 4.3 *There should be a compulsory 'refresher' program after the first year of teaching as part of the profession's ITE, to focus on reflection on learning, relationships with students, practical examples of classroom and whole school initiatives, and ways to elicit, consider and act on student feedback.*

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