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QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education (C4IE) produces research on matters that affect students in school education with the aim of improving the educational experiences and outcomes of *all*, particularly those experiencing marginalisation. One of C4IE's objectives is to address knowledge gaps and positively influence attitudes by disseminating research evidence, engaging in public debate, and providing quality professional learning opportunities. C4IE makes this submission in response to the draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

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## Priority Area 1: Elevating the profession

The proposal to elevate the teaching profession through awards and honours are insufficient to recognise excellence in the teaching profession. There are considerably more hardworking, committed teachers than could ever be recognised through an awards scheme and many of these are quiet achievers who wouldn't even think to put themselves forward for an award. Further, awards systems can be divisive and can be gamed; those who can write a good application are not necessarily those who are most deserving of the accolade.

We advocate for the development of recognition structures and financial incentives for teachers who: (i) work in communities that serve disadvantaged, complex, and remote communities; (ii) positively impact student inclusion, engagement and achievement; and (iii) collaborate effectively with their peers, with parents, and allied health professionals. Robust criteria should be developed to enable measurement of teacher capabilities in these three key areas. Recognition structures should be deployed fairly and transparently, at regional and school levels. Ideally, multiple measures will be used to recognise the complex intellectual work and time that teachers invest in collaboration, co-planning, instructional design, feedback, and reflection.

The APST should also be revised accordingly as they are currently too broad and open to interpretation. Explicit criteria are necessary and should be conducted in consultation with experts in inclusive education due to issues with existing terminology (e.g., differentiation when the focus should be on universal design and reasonable adjustments; Graham et al., 2021). Recognition is already possible through the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) Certification process, however it would need to be more streamlined and supported as a role within the current systems to be seen as valued recognition.

## Priority Area 2: Improving teacher supply

ITE students experience considerable financial constraints associated with undertaking professional experience placements. A National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education funded study (Grant-Smith et al., 2017) determined that while 7% of students experienced financial hardship during semester, this increased to 56% during practicum, which was a



statistically significant result. The financial stress experienced as a result of professional experience participation does not discriminate, although the effects on some cohorts, particularly equity cohorts may be more pronounced. For example, in the aforementioned study, 12 times as many students struggled financially during their practicum placement compared to during semester which resulted in their implementing strategies such as stockpiling work and wages during semester to be able to financially afford to cover basic essentials (food, rent, transport to/from placement) while undertaking placement (which also meant they may have had to make strategic choices about attending classes and how deeply they engaged in learning materials), going without food etc. ITE students with additional responsibilities such as caring also experienced considerable barriers (e.g., availability of childcare for temporary placements, costs associated with supporting caring responsibilities when placements were in locations not near to their home etc) that impacting their practicum experience, and also whether they would continue in the degree program. Significant assistance and attention towards the financial, relational, and academic implications of the current professional experience practices is required to both reduce the multiple and connected stresses experienced by ITE students associated with their practicum, and also better support equity cohorts who may otherwise leave the profession if the barriers to access become as insurmountable as they currently are.

### **Priority Area 3: Strengthening Initial Teacher Education (ITE)**

Members of QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education agree with the need to strengthen initial teacher education (ITE) programs to ensure teachers are well-equipped to undertake inclusive, evidence-based teaching and assessment practices, particularly in early reading instruction, classroom management, cultural responsiveness, and teaching diverse learners. It is imperative that initial teacher education students undertake practicum placements in inclusive schools providing high-quality, accessible instructional and assessment.

It is imperative that sufficient space is available in ITE curriculums to enable at least two mandatory core units in inclusive education, similar to those offered in QUT's Bachelor of Education (Primary). Our degree introduces preservice teachers to the concepts and frameworks that underpin inclusive education early in their degree. The unit 'Teaching Diverse Learners', helps students understand the history of inclusive education, know their legislative obligations, understand how to consult students to gain their expert insights, and provides a grounding in universal design to enable accessible lessons, assessments, and learning environments design.

The second mandatory unit is 'Teaching students with complex learning profiles'. This unit takes students through the process of making reasonable adjustments for students who may, for example, need to access a different achievement standard. This unit also covers professional collaboration and partnering with parents and is supported by the best-selling book: *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice* published in 2020 by Routledge (2nd Edition to be published in 2023).



QUT's inclusive education ITE packages two units with the minimum core knowledge that teachers need to successfully include all learners. These units should always be preceded by an evidence-based unit on child and adolescent development (focusing on cognitive processing, executive function and language development), and supported by professional experience in inclusive settings. This mandatory two-unit structure should exist in all Australian education degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate).

## Priority Area 4: Maximising the time to teach

We agree actions are needed to free up teachers for teaching and collaboration. Practical solutions, enacted through practice and process protocols, are required. Teachers in secondary schools need to teach fewer lines within their subject specialisations, not beyond. Teacher release must be allocated in block format, to enable the deep intellectual work required for planning effective, accessible lessons/assessment, not sporadic time allocated across a week. Year level/subject areas teaching teams should be released together for collaboration/co-planning. Time is required for inter-professional collaboration with speech pathologists, school psychologists/guidance counsellors, specialist teachers, enabling within-school support (to staff and students) and professional development (Tancredi et al., 2020).

Structures need to be established so teachers can co-plan curricular units, playing to team members' strengths and ensuring that teams are clear on what is to be taught, and what constitutes student success. Teachers require support to enact universal design principles in designing curriculum units and assessments. Removing barriers to access from the planning stage means reduced time investment to make adjustments, increasing time for teaching and collaboration (Cologon & Lassig, 2020). Professional learning to improve classroom organisation (routines/cues and teacher preparedness/productivity) would also be of benefit (Graham et al., 2020). We support the idea of a high-quality centralised bank of resources, freeing up teachers' time and providing quality control, however, resources must be designed to be accessible for diverse learners and easily adjusted for students with complex learning profiles. *We do not want a repeat of C2C nationally.*

## Priority Area 5: Better understanding future teacher workforce needs

No feedback was provided for this priority area.

## Priority Area 6: Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession

Schools need more HALTs building capacity in classrooms with teacher peers, providing local, targeted expertise. Yet for more HALTs to consider certification, teachers need to hear clearly the benefits of applying. Excellent teachers are suspicious of policy or media stories of elite

teachers getting a reward without knowing what is expected. Teachers can't see how they can do more within current workloads. HALTs need to be part of an overall strategy for school improvement, with encouragement from leadership teams, ongoing roles influencing their peers, mentoring new teachers, and engaging in local improvement projects. Roles need to be resourced with time both for HALTs and those teachers they will coach and mentor. The application process needs to be less onerous, but still support the deep professional reflexivity and renewal evident in our research that made it powerfully motivating for HALTs to continue their influence (Willis et al., 2021, Willis et al, 2022a). Twenty-two recommendations were made in a national roundtable of HALTs hosted by QUT, certifying authorities and employer bodies from each state and territory (Willis et al, 2022b). Teachers want more support in how to argue for evidence of impact, such as this open access resource developed by QUT <https://research.qut.edu.au/impactstory/> and networks to encourage knowledge sharing. Celebrating the HALT stories on AITSL's Illustrations of Practice website would also enable evidence to circulate widely and recognise these outstanding teachers.

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Members of The Centre for Inclusive Education (C4IE) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) conduct high-quality research across three interlocking programs: (i) Curriculum and Learning, (ii), Inclusion and Exclusion, (iii) Health and Wellbeing. For more information about C4IE, its members and research outputs, please contact Lara Maia-Pike, C4IE Coordinator [lara.maiapike@qut.edu.au](mailto:lara.maiapike@qut.edu.au) or visit [www.research.qut.edu.au/c4ie/](http://www.research.qut.edu.au/c4ie/)

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