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Mr Steve Herbert, MP
Chair, Education and Training Committee
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Dear Mr Herbert

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) welcomes this opportunity to make a brief submission to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Education and Training Committee's Inquiry into Pre-Service Teacher Training.

AARE has over 1200 members from all parts of Australia and many overseas countries. The majority of members are university academics, but there are also many school and VET teachers; officers of teacher organisations, school authorities and education departments; and other education researchers and users of education research.

This submission covers two broad areas: the relationships between research and pre-service teacher education, and the use of research (and evidence more generally) in the inquiry process.

Research and preservice teacher education

In your deliberations during this inquiry and in developing your recommendations, we urge you to ensure that:

- education research capacity within teacher education institutions is enhanced and not inadvertently undermined
- pre-service (and inservice) teacher education is informed by the best available research
- pre-service teacher education develops in all intending teachers a 'culture of inquiry' - a professional capability and commitment to reflect on practice, to research, and to utilise the research of others.

The following information and analysis provides some background on the inter-relationships between education research and pre-service teacher education.

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Australian educational research is of a very high international standard, and has a significant impact on policy and practice. These are the key conclusions of the Commonwealth's Research Evaluation Programme (Higher Education Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) multi-study investigation into Australian educational research, published in the 671 page report, *The Impact of Educational Research* (DETYA 2000).

The report notes that the impact of educational research is not 'clear, identifiable, measurable and direct', but rather it is a 'multi-layered, unpredictable, interacting process of engagement between the researcher and the educator', and thus 'effective and responsive *linkages* at all levels' are necessary (emphasis added) (p. 10).

The 2000 report noted that:

The 1992 review [a similar departmental research evaluation - McGaw et al, 1992] suggests that 'all educators can, and perhaps should, be researchers in their own settings' (p. xiv). This project supports this view as well as identifying the essential role pre-service and in-service teacher education has in developing educators who value and use research to support change. The impact of research in schools and in policy formulation depends greatly on educators' valuing research, and on their ability to apply and critique it. (p. 12)

The AARE supports the view that teachers should be 'researchers in their own settings' - perhaps more strongly than is indicated in the above excerpt. Pre-service teacher education plays an essential role in developing the capability for such research as part of every day professional practice, as well as a general understanding and valuing of research and the ability to 'apply and critique it' noted above.

Measured educational research in Australia (that is, not including research that is part of the every-day professional practice of school teachers and others) is overwhelmingly carried out in universities. According Australian Bureau of Statistics data (*Research and Experimental Development: All Sector Summary, Australia, 1998-99*, Cat. No. 8112.0):

- *Regarding financial expenditure:* the higher education sector accounts for 81 per cent of all expenditure on educational research (specifically, research directed towards the 'education and training socio-economic objective'), but only 29 per cent of expenditure on all research (directed towards all socio-economic objectives) (Table 5, page 18).
- *Regarding human resources (person years) devoted to research and development:* the higher education sector accounts for 91 per cent of all human resources devoted to educational research, but only 50 per cent of expenditure on all research (Table 8, page 21).

The large proportion of educational research in universities is carried out by academics who are involved with initial teacher education and who carry out research as part of their recognised academic role (their personal contribution to the research is funded as part of their academic salary). Thus the research role and opportunities of academics involved in preservice teacher education is a vital part of the overall education research enterprise in Australia. That research activity plays an important part in preservice teacher education - informing the content and pedagogy of courses, providing models of research practice for student teachers, and often providing student teachers with opportunities to be involved in significant formal research projects.

There will be many specific proposals considered by your inquiry that have implications (positive or negative) for the three propositions set out above (enhancing the general capacity for educational research, ensuring preservice teacher education has an appropriate research base, and developing teachers who carry out and utilise research as part of professional practice). It is essential that among those involved in pre-service teacher education there is the *expertise* and *time* (as part of their recognised, funded role) to carry out research - in many modes and levels. The structures also need to be right. On the one hand, federal research policy will be relevant. So, too, will be the structure and nature of preservice teacher

education - something within the ambit of your inquiry's terms of reference. We note that the president of the British Educational Research Association, John Furlong, recently wrote in reference to policies concerned with both general research funding policies (the 'big science' model) and initial teacher education (funding of initial teacher education places without great consideration of the research capacity and activities of staff):

Current policies in England are likely to destroy the capacity of experienced researchers to work collaboratively with teachers and others on the exploration, development and testing of knowledge within their own context. . . . Practitioner research needs people who themselves have research experience and skills . . . [and] access to high quality research [and researchers] as a basis on which to develop their own work. . . . Without a capacity across the system as a whole, there will be an ever-decreasing opportunity for that work to be taken up and used in ways that can benefit learners across the educational system (Furlong 2003, p. 3)

Developments in England stand as a warning for us. Whether or not social and other divisions between schools deepen, it will be increasingly important that *all* intending teachers have access to developing their research capabilities and opportunities to know and understand the best education research and researchers. This will be important for mature-age career changers as it is for younger intending teachers.

Inquiry process

We urge that the Inquiry into Pre-Service Teacher Training be carried out with serious attention to relevant research, and that evidence is tested appropriately. In particular, we suggest thorough investigation and cross-checking (or triangulating) on matters such as:

- future teacher labour market conditions (shortages or surpluses, and how they might arise)
- future separation rates (including the expected patterns of retirements over the next twenty years, and expected separations of early career teachers compared with what has occurred in the past)
- teacher age profiles (generally of more importance than average or median age)
- cohorts of teachers (including in reference to principal class labour market).

Your inquiry is an important one, and we wish you well. Please contact me if you would like elaboration on any of the above matters, or any other contribution from AARE.

Yours sincerely

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References

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