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Dear Mr Hartsuyker

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO TEACHER EDUCATION

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) welcomes this opportunity to make a brief submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training Inquiry's into Teacher Education.

AARE has over 1300 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 educational researchers and users of educational research.

In this submission we make comments concerning educational research which have most relevance to specific terms of reference:

- ToR 7 where we are concerned with the nature of the teacher professionalism that will best ensure effective teaching in the areas listed (and other areas). Research for and in professional practice is a crucial feature of effective teaching and should be a fundamental consideration in initial and post-initial teacher education.
- ToR 5 where we discuss the research basis of teacher education. In particular, we highlight the comparative lack of infrastructure support for education research that would allow faculties of education to continue to produce quality research and recommend the establishment of a body independent of government departments that would operate a national competitive research scheme in the field of education.

ToR 7. Educational research and the preparation of highly professional teachers

This ToR covers a range of specific aspects of professional teaching practice (including literacy and numeracy teaching, classroom management, use of IT, and interaction with colleagues, communities, and authorities). We believe that, for each of them, effective

practice requires a high level of *professionalism*. Such professionalism is underpinned by the profound understandings and competencies of *professional-as-researcher and effective user (incorporator) of research*. Without these understandings and competences, the current specific knowledge and techniques relating to each of the aspects/topics listed under ToR 7 (except vii) may soon be outdated or not be applicable to diverse situations.

We expect that the Committee will receive a number of submissions concerned with the use of the term ‘training’ throughout the ToRs. This is no petty complaint. It goes to the heart of the most effective teaching in schools and other educational endeavours. Effective teaching is highly professional in the sense that it constantly involves sophisticated *judgements* that take account of the of the particular circumstances of practice (learners and their communities, the curriculum, the school/college/centre, colleagues, etc), the teacher’s reflections on previous related practice, and knowledge of relevant research by others (whether, for example, published in international journals or carried out by colleagues and discussed in the staffroom). It is the ability to appropriately evaluate and integrate all these elements and effectively apply them that makes for effective practice. Each incident will be unique. There can be no neat formula that teachers are ‘trained’ to apply without evaluation, integration and judgement. That is the essence of professionalism.

Teachers need to be inducted into a *research culture* for the necessary high level of professionalism to be developed. During an initial teacher education course this would require day-to-day contact with active researchers as well as specific course content and experiences related to research (methodologies for ones own practice, and for the evaluation and application of the research of others).

In addition, school authorities should support a research culture through their own policies and practices, including direct involvement in educational research, and the recognition and dissemination of such research. School authorities’ attitudes to educational research are affected by, and affect, the nature and standing of educational research in universities.

The Research Quality Framework (RQF) initiative, which is being developed though 2005 by the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training, will have implications for the quality of initial and continuing education of teachers through its effects (when implemented) on the research capacity and research practice of those associated with teacher education – as academics, industry partners, or higher degree students. It will also affect (if indirectly) the research practices of school authorities, classroom teachers, and others, and the nature and quality of research on which educational policy can be based. Among the issues of relevance to this Committee that AARE discusses in its submission in response to the RQF Issues Paper include:

- the recognition, valuing and assessment of research for and in professional practice
- the potentially damaging consequences for the teaching profession and the enterprise of education generally of classifying a proportion of universities as ‘less research intensive’ and thus providing them with less support and resources for research. This is because teacher education and educational research is disproportionately located in universities most likely to be so classified. Yet Australian educational research has a very high international standing compared with other fields of study (DETYA 2000) – thus education is often a research intensive field within otherwise less research intensive institutions.
- the importance of strategies for *succession* for educational researchers in universities and *capacity-building* for the increasing numbers of early career researchers to ensure the vibrancy of research culture that all teacher education students experience. This is particularly urgent in education because in that field the age profile is older than academia as a whole – in 2004 60 per cent of university staff in the education ‘academic organisational unit’ were aged 50 and over, while only 45 per cent of all academic staff were aged 50 or over.

These issues are expanded on in our submission, which is on AARE's website at <<http://www.aare.edu.au/exec/rqf.pdf>>. We would be happy to discuss with the Committee the issues for teacher education and quality teaching involved with the RQF, especially as those issues become clearer later in the year.

Recommendations:

- 1.1 That the Committee develop a clear statement on the nature of teacher professionalism that it believes should be the outcome of initial teacher education and further developed throughout teachers' careers through formal and informal continuing professional education. This statement should incorporate teacher-as-researcher and as effective user of the research of others.
- 1.2 That the Committee make appropriate recommendations regarding the DEST Research Quality Framework initiative, seeking to ensure that the development of the potential for high level professionalism (as outlined above) in all graduates of initial teacher education programs is fully supported, and not made more difficult by reducing the research capacity or output of some education faculties because, for example, of their institutional location.
- 1.3 That the Committee seek input through 2005 from AARE, DEST and others regarding aspects of the proposed RQF and its proposed implementation to assist with development of recommendations regarding the RQF.

ToR 5. Research and teacher education

Australian educational research has been found to be of very high international standing – according to research by Phelan, Anderson & Bourke, over the period 1987-98

Australia's share of international *publications* is greater in education than for any other major field in this country except for the earth sciences... Australia's share of international *citations* is greater for education than for all other major fields except for the earth sciences and the agricultural sciences. (DETYA 2000, p. 579, emphasis in original).

Australian educational research has also been found to have high levels of impact to the benefit of education in Australia (DETYA 2000, summarised on pp. 10-12).

Teacher education has been significantly influenced by research in many ways. Other submissions are sure to consider this in detail. Here we want to make more general points: first, about the nature of educational research, in particular about on-going *capacity* for large-scale *Australian* research into and for teacher education, and, second, about the overall level of educational research and the implications for teacher education.

In contrast with other fields, there is a dearth of national competitive research schemes in education. The only education-specific schemes, among the hundreds on the Australian Competitive Grants Register (http://www.jcu.edu.au/office/research_office/assist/ngc.html) are the NCVER (research in vocational education and training) and relatively small literacy and numeracy schemes managed within the DEST Schools Group. This limits the overall production of educational research, and especially limits larger scale, mission-oriented research that is not tightly controlled by funding bodies (such as school authorities). It is this kind of research that may make a significant contribution to the research base of teacher education. This is discussed by Di Mayer (2004). Writing in relation to the USA (but her comments could equally apply to Australia), she notes:

Major (research) grants are rare in the field of teacher education, and as a result teacher educators often study their own teaching and their own programs, producing a wide variety of studies that include many small scale and unconnected studies of practice. (p. 16)

While such studies may provide a useful research base for many aspects of teacher education, especially where circumstances are similar, a significant gap remains for high quality, larger scale research into teacher education. This includes longitudinal research. It also includes high quality quantitative *and* qualitative research, contributing breadth and depth respectively to understandings in the field and which together will provide the necessary evidence to inform action and policy.

A national competitive grants scheme, such as the Education Research and Development Committee (ERDC) that operated from the mid 1970s to 1981 could provide a mechanism for such research. In the late 1970s the ERDC had a significant program of research into teacher education. Summaries of fifteen research reports and a 100-page analysis were published in the 414-page ERDC Report No. 19, *Research into Teacher Education: The Practical Teaching Skills* (edited by Mal Hewitson, AGPS, Canberra, 1979). Since the demise of the ERDC there has not been similar support for research into teacher education. Large scale educational research (outside NCVET) has generally been associated with the priorities of school authorities or the Commonwealth regarding school education, and funded by ARC grants that have required industry partners (school authorities or professional associations). Teacher education has competition from very many other fields and topics for the small number of ARC-funded ‘discovery’ (investigator-driven) grants.

It may be possible for the research activities of the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL) to be organised into a scheme that can qualify for the Australian Competitive Grants Register. However, the scope of NIQTSL is not comprehensive, and additional schemes should also be considered. It should be noted that in addition to the National Health and Medical Research Council, there are a dozen or so other registered schemes for research into particular aspects of health, and the NHMRC itself has a similar number of topic-specific sub-schemes.

Judging what is good educational research is not a simple matter. Lyn Yates (2004), a past president of AARE, points out that ‘good’ research needs to (a) be technically good, (b) make a contribution to knowledge, and (c) achieve something that matters (pp. 16-17). It is important to appreciate the diversity of methodologies, topics and scales of good (high quality, valuable) educational research. However, there may be gaps in some of these, and the infrastructure and incentive systems around educational research may not support or may inhibit research that could fill those gaps.

Therefore particular mechanisms should be developed, especially national competitive grant schemes (or equivalent) that would better ensure obvious gaps in research scale, methodology and topic are filled. However, the national resourcing of educational research remains a problem.

The overall national commitment to educational research is very low relative to other industries and areas of society. Expenditure on education (schools, early childhood education, VET and higher education) is more than 5 per cent of the Australian GDP (OECD *Education at a Glance*), and workers in education make up more than 5 per cent of the Australian workforce (estimated from ABS Labour Statistics). Yet expenditure for research in the ‘socio-economic objective’ of ‘education and training’ is only 1.7 per cent of all Australian research expenditure, and human resources devoted to research in the ‘socio-economic objective’ of ‘education and training’ is only 3.8 per cent of all Australian human resources devoted to research, and those people are overwhelmingly located in universities (ABS, *Research and Experimental Development 2002-13*, Cat. No. 8112.0, Table 5, p. 12, and Table 8, p. 15). On-going improvements in initial and continuing teacher education requires a strong research base. Very broadly, that research needs to cover (a) the extensive field that teachers will encounter over their careers, and thus the content of the initial and continuing teacher education curriculum, and (b) many aspects of higher education policy and practice related to teaching and research, institutional arrangements, student numbers and support, and links with the field, and thus the overall effectiveness and efficiency of teacher education in meeting the

qualitative and quantitative needs for and of the teaching workforce. This cannot be adequately achieved without improvements in the resourcing of educational research, including by school authorities and others outside the university sector.

Recommendations:

2.1. That the Committee consider recommending the establishment of an education-specific research grants scheme that can qualify for the ACGR, or a similar mechanism that will support larger scale, high quality research into teacher education, and support research that will fill any other particular gaps in educational research that may be identified.

2.2 That the Committee recommend overall improvements in the resourcing of educational research so that research support of this vital area of the Australian society and economy (which is so important for the nation's future) can be closer to the level of national research support for all other areas of society and economy.

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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