Preliminary report: Who says what about Initial Teacher Education and whose perspectives are heard?

A mapping of stakeholder submissions in response to the Australian Federal Government's Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) reforms by the NSW Council of Deans of Education

Research Team

Penny Van Bergen[1], Mary Ryan[2], Ken Cliff[1], Susan Ledger[3], Michele Simons[4], Lucie Zundans-Fraser[5], Sue Gregory[6], Rachel Adlington[6], Deborah Youdell[7], Rebecca Andrews[7], Chrissy Monteleone[2], and Cathy Little[8],– on behalf of the full NSW Council of Deans of Education.

[1] University of Wollongong, [2] Australian Catholic University, [3] University of Newcastle, [4] Western Sydney University, [5] Charles Sturt University, [6] University of New England, [7] Macquarie University, [8] University of Sydney.

Research Assistant

Olivia R. Maurice[1, 2]

[1] University of Wollongong, [2] Western Sydney University

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the ancestors and descendants of the Country known as Wiradjuri (New South Wales) and recognise that this is sovereign, unceded territory. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' enduring connection to Country and pay our deep and ongoing respect to the Elders, past and present.

Executive Summary

Background and Context

The Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) was formed by the Australian Government in September 2022 to address potential concerns regarding Initial Teacher Education (ITE) that were previously identified by the Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable and Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review. According to Education Minister Hon Jason Clare, teachers who are better prepared with appropriate knowledge and skills will be less likely to withdraw from the profession. However, there are concerns that ITE programs provide students sufficient preparation. Members of the panel included Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Mark Scott, President of the Australian Council of Deans of Education, Michele Simons, retired Professor Bill Louden, CEO of the Australian Education Research Organisation, Dr Jenny Donovan, principal Andrew Peach, and teacher Rebecca West.

In March 2023, the TEEP panel released a Discussion Paper targeted at addressing workforce shortages and promoting excellence within ITE. There were four proposed reform areas:

1. Strengthening ITE programs to deliver effective beginning teachers[1]
2. Strengthening the link between performance and funding for ITE programs
3. Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching, and
4. Improving postgraduate ITE programs to attract more mid-career applicants.

In response to these reforms, public submissions were open until April 2023. All submissions available for public download are available at: *https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/consultations/teacher-education-expert-panel-discussion-paper*. One hundred and seventeen stakeholder submissions were received (excluding two from Macquarie University and the University of New England, which were submitted but do not appear).

The TEEP final report, Strong Beginnings, was released in July 2023. All four areas for reform were retained. While the report stated broad support from stakeholders (e.g. "*stakeholders broadly supported both the core content and formalising it in the accreditation of ITE programs to ensure the*

[1] NB: In the initial Discussion Paper, this recommendation for reform was worded "Strengthening ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates.

content is prioritised and consistently delivered in ITE"; "*In submissions to the Panel's Discussion Paper, stakeholders supported a focus on funding that improves the quality of all ITE programs rather than rewarding individual providers*"), and notes that some changes have been incorporated where relevant, it is often not clear which stakeholders did or did not provide support to specific recommendations and why. Some, but not all stakeholders are cited in the final report.

Media Coverage

Media commentary following the release of the TEEP Discussion Paper was frenzied. Hon Minister Jason Clare stated in his press release that *"the work of the Expert Panel will be important in helping us to strengthen initial teacher education, increase completion rates and deliver more classroom ready graduates."* Affirming the TEEP's recommendations for core content in ITE related to the brain and learning, Ross Fox, Director of Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn, quoted in the ABC media, indicated that a move in the Canberra Goulburn diocese towards greater adoption of the science of learning in ITE curricula has produced improved literacy outcomes for students completing NAPLAN (Duffy, 2023), while comments to Fairfax from Joanna Barbousas, Dean of the La Trobe School of Education, were similar: "*[Overreliance on liberal arts and sociology traditions] doesn't prepare graduates for classrooms. We kept some philosophy but switched to focus on evidence-informed approaches to developing teacher's skills*" (Carroll, 2023). In an opinion article for SMH, however, Debra Hayes, then Head of the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, posited that the reforms were an over-reach and avoided the responsibility of governments and educational systems to address graduates' experience entering the workforce.

Identifying the Problem

While the TEEP Discussion Paper argues a deficit in the preparedness of educators, and this under-preparation has been cited extensively in the media as a cause of teacher attrition, there is little evidence for this claim. Indeed, as we note below, recent Australian evidence suggests that graduate teachers are as effective in the classroom as more experienced teachers (Gore et al., 2024; Graham et al., 2020). Academic critics have instead generally attributed retention challenges to poor pay and conditions. Clifton and colleagues from the Network of Academic Directors of Professional Experience, writing for the Australian Association of Research in Education's "EduResearch Matters" blog, suggested that professional experience in ITE programs had been weaponized to introduce core content and to de-professionalise teacher education. In their Talking Teachers podcast (2023), Dr Don Carter and Associate Professor Jane Hunter from UTS suggest moves are expected to yield even more formidable consequences for increasing staff shortages.

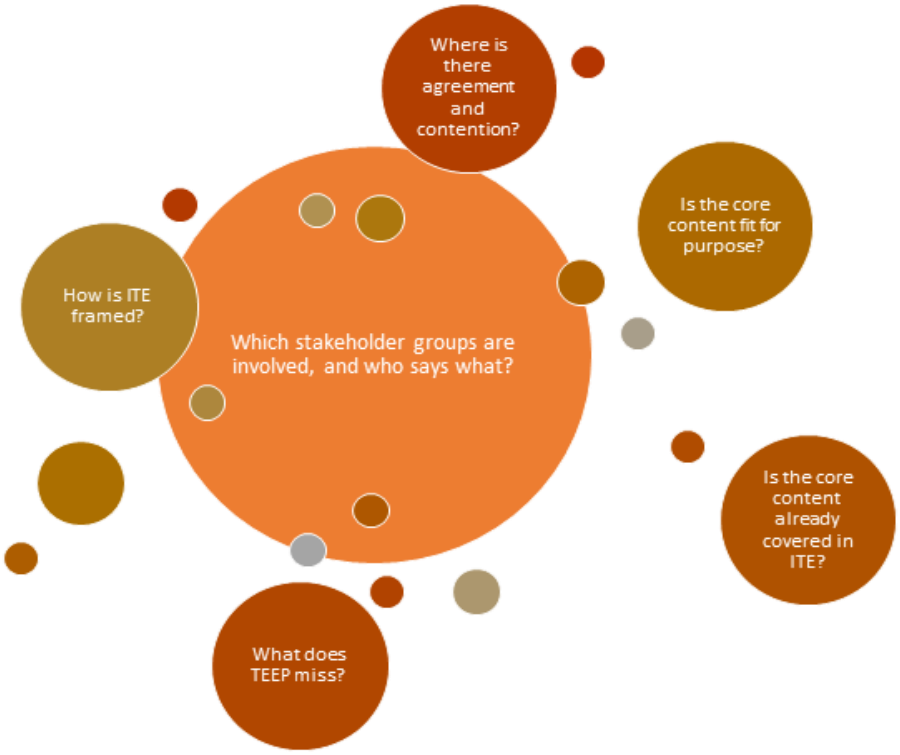
About this Project

Considering equivocal stakeholder perspectives, those discussed in the media following the release of the final TEEP recommendations, the NSW CDE identified a strategic need to systematically identify who the clusters of stakeholders are that hold similar perspectives to one another, the themes that emerge in those stakeholder submissions to TEEP, and the forms of convergent and divergent evidence those

stakeholders draw on to support their submitted responses. There was also a strategic need to identify areas of consensus towards the TEEP findings and recommendations across multiple or all stakeholders.

In this project, therefore, we aimed to identify and compare themes in submissions to TEEP from different educational stakeholders (including higher education providers, Australian teacher regulatory authorities, councils of deans, employers, teachers' associations, educational research groups, advocates, individuals, and others). We conducted additional in-depth analyses of stakeholder responses specific to Reform Area 1, proposing mandated core content, Reform 2, proposing performance measures for initial teacher education programs, and Reform Area 3, proposing new mechanisms to enhance professional experience. We also conducted an in-depth analysis of those stakeholder voices that were and were not cited in the Strong Beginnings final report. Each in-depth analysis is accompanied by a published journal article, reproduced here with permission.

Figure 1. *Visualisation of Potential Themes*



Benchmarking

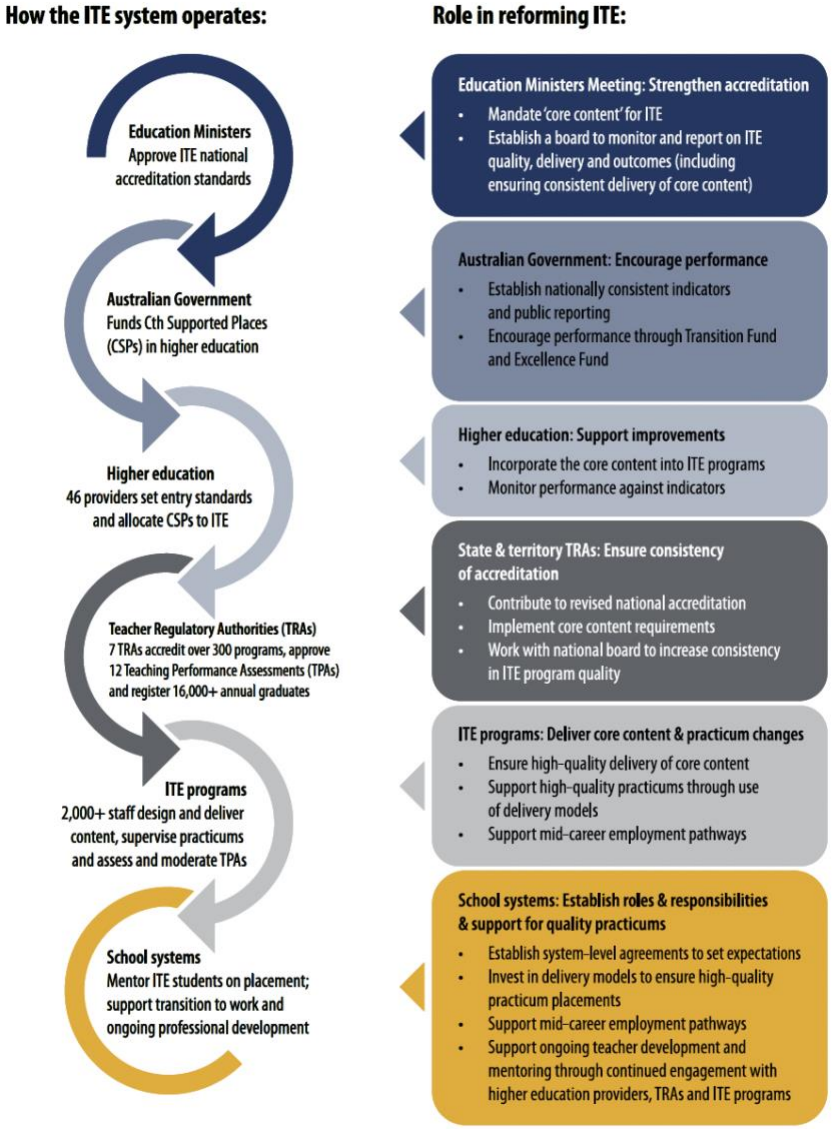
We drew on methodological approaches from Jongenelis et al. (2023), who recently mapped the content of individual public submissions and industry submissions to a new regulatory change from the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration in the availability and regulation of e-cigarettes in Australia; from Stafford et al. (2020), who mapped submissions from distinct industry clusters (e.g.

alcohol producers, retailers, licensees, trade associations, and advertisers) to various Australian government alcohol policy consultations between 2013 and 2017; and from Ulucanlar et al. (2014), who compared submissions from transnational tobacco companies to the 2013 UK Government consultation on plain packaging for cigarettes and tobacco products against independent scientific evidence. In all three cases, the mapping of submission themes allowed for the identification of clusters of stakeholder groups, the identification of themes and tactical strategies used by such groups, and the formulation of responses and recommendations designed to protect public policy.

Identifying Stakeholder Groups

Initial stakeholder groups were identified via reference to the Strong Beginnings report (see Figure 2). These included higher education providers, teacher regulatory authorities, councils of deans (representing programs), and employers (representing school systems). Additional stakeholder groups were identified by the research team following review of the stakeholder submissions and included teacher associations, educational research groups, advocates, individuals, and others.

Figure 2. *Stakeholders represented in Strong Beginnings (reproduced under creative commons licence)*



Common Method

Content analysis provides an intersection of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, facilitating the collection of data on category frequency and content (Obermair et al., 2018; Weber, 1990). Content analysis is an apt method for analysing textual data, including policy submissions and consultation submissions, as it can be used to systematically categorise and quantify content into frames and codes (Entman, 1993; Obermair et al., 2018). Here, a code refers to a predefined category reflecting a significant textual theme (Hamad et al, 2016).

To complete our content analysis inductively we used Leximancer v5.0: an artificial intelligence-based text mining software developed to analyse textual content, extract information and create visual data outputs. Informed by Bayesian theory, Leximancer identifies code frequencies and relationships via an emergent and unsupervised synthesis of input (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Leximancer also creates a visual map providing a review of main themes and relationships, organised by colour whereby brightness correlates with prominence and closeness indicates semantic similarity (Campbell et al., 2011).

Procedure

For the proposed project, publicly available submissions to the consultation were downloaded from the TEEP submission portal and then uploaded into Leximancer v5.0 (*n* = 109) to identify emergent themes. Analysis in Leximancer progressed in three stages: data cleaning, manual checking of concepts, and final analyses (Cheng & Edwards, 2019). First, data was cleaned by removing author information, affiliations, acknowledgements and references. Second, after uploading the cleaned data for each stakeholder group, Leximancer-identified concepts were checked manually. Due to the automated nature of code generation in Leximancer, it is possible that some irrelevant, conflicting or otherwise extraneous codes may be extracted. These codes were removed before the final analysis. Stakeholders submitting responses to each reform area are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder Textual Responses to TEEP Reform Proposals (note that stakeholders with no textual response submitted questionnaire responses)

Stakeholder Category	T1	T2	T3	T4
Higher Education Providers				
Alphacrucis University College			Yes	Yes
Australian Catholic University (National School of Education)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Catholic University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Centre of Educational Measurement and Assessment at University of Sydney				
Charles Darwin University	Yes	Yes		Yes
Charles Sturt University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Central Queensland University Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Edith Cowan University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Flinders University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Graduate School of Education, The University of Western Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
La Trobe University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monash University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Murdoch University	Yes			
Queensland University of Technology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Southern Cross University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Swinburne University of Technology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sydney University	Yes			
Teacher Education Academics at the University of Technology Sydney	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teachers and Teaching Research Centre – University of Newcastle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Canberra	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The University of Queensland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The University of South Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Newcastle, School of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of NSW, Centre for Social Impact				Yes
University of Southern Queensland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Tasmania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of the Sunshine Coast	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University Of Wollongong	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TRAs				
Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authority	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Councils of Deans				
Australian Council of Deans of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Network of Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NSW Council of Deans of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Queensland Council of Deans of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Victorian Council of Deans of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School Systems: Employers				
Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Catholic Schools NSW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
National Catholic Education Commission	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
North-Eastern Montessori School & Sydney Montessori Training Centre	Yes			
Northern Territory Department of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NSW Department of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Steiner Education Australia	Yes			
Victorian Department of Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School Systems: Teacher Associations				
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia	Yes		Yes	Yes
Australian Council of State School Organisations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Council of TESOL Organisations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Education Union	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Primary Principals' Association	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers Association NSW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Independent Education Union of Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Institute of Special Educators	Yes			
Primary English Teaching Association Australia	Yes			
The Australian Special Education Principals' Association	Yes		Yes	
Advocacy Groups				
Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Association of Special Education	Yes			
Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia				
Dyslexia Victoria Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc. (ICPA Aust)	Yes			
Regional Education Commissioner	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Educational Research				
Australian Council for Educational Research	Yes			
Australian Education Research Organizations' Board	Yes	Yes		
Other				
Asia Education Foundation	Yes			
Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering	Yes			

CSIRO	Yes		Yes	
Education Research Solutions	Yes			
National Advocates for Arts Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teach For Australia				
Teachers TV Foundation				
Transforming Education Australasia	Yes	Yes		
Individuals				
Barnes, Carol	Yes			
Edmunds, David	Yes			
Emeritus Professor Terry Lovat	Yes	Yes		
Emeritus Professor Wayne Sawyer and Emeritus Professor Rob Hattam	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Ferman, Terrie	Yes		Yes	
Gardiner, John				
Halsey, John	Yes		Yes	
Harpur, Paul				
Jakupovic, Wardah				
Lovell, Oliver	Yes			
Mangubhai, Dr Francis	Yes			
Millican, Kevan				
Mundy, Mick				
Norman, Karen			Yes	
Rogers, Jo				
Sankey, Derek	Yes		Yes	
Selkrig, Mark				
Thraves, Genevieve				

Findings

Below we present our focus and findings in four papers. Each has also been submitted for publication. Note that because each paper is reproduced, Table and Figure numbers restart at 1.

Paper 1: The positioning of quality and expertise in initial teacher education: Policy enactment in the Australian context

Teacher quality and teacher education improvement have been central discourses for at least two decades in global education. In Australia, despite the pervasive nature of these discussions, there is a lack of substantial evidence indicating the existence of a problem in this regard. Policies aimed at enhancing the 'preparedness' of teacher graduates and elevating the 'quality' of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs have nonetheless emerged as prevalent solutions over the past decade. The latest enactment of reforms in the policy chain is the Strong Beginnings report from the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP). In this paper, we align with Ball's perspective that policy should be viewed as a dynamic process rather than a presumed, ready-made solution to a problem. We utilise systematic conceptual coding using Leximancer to enable a nuanced exploration of the understandings, practices, and conditions of influence for the policy actors inscribed in the initial TEEP Discussion Paper. We also analyse concept frequency and collocation in the final Strong Beginnings report, noting two main propositions: first, that there is a problem with quality in ITE; and second, that practice is foregrounded in professionalisation. We highlight the consistencies and contradictions within the discourses of the final report and the submissions from policy actors that contributed to this policy enactment process. We suggest that evidence is used when it suits a policy position, but ignored if it disrupts the platform position. We conclude by arguing that the policy actors in this policy enactment process should be afforded the professional authority to continue a well-established process of continual improvement.

Keywords: Initial Teacher Education, quality, reform, policy, stakeholder responses, pre-service teachers

The positioning of quality and expertise in initial teacher education: Policy enactment in the Australian context

Teacher quality and teacher education improvement have been central discourses for at least two decades in the realm of global education, as noted by Cochran-Smith and colleagues (2018). Despite the pervasive nature of these discussions, Bourke et al. (2016) argue that there is a lack of substantial evidence indicating the existence of a problem in this regard. In our exploration of these discourses, we align with Ball's (2015) concept of "discursive," which emphasizes the ways in which discourses or communicative acts are employed and disseminated within various contexts. For instance, the term "evidence" has gained prominence within educational discussions, often becoming synonymous with large-scale randomized controlled trials as the definitive form of acceptable evidence. This highlights a shift in the discourse around teacher quality, with claims that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) does not have robust bodies of evidence to indicate high quality and therefore should be assumed to be lacking in quality. In response to this discursive challenge, policies aimed at enhancing the 'preparedness' of teacher graduates and elevating the 'quality' of initial teacher education programs have emerged as prevalent solutions over the past decade (Fitzgerald & Knipe, 2016; Ryan et al., 2024). The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group report (TEMAG, 2014) has been particularly influential in advocating for these policy-driven approaches. The latest enactment of TEMAG reforms in the policy chain is the Strong Beginnings report from the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP, 2023).

The discursive concepts of quality and preparedness in teacher education are represented in different ways across the education sector and in public discourse, and the ‘expertise’ associated with ITE is often sourced from outside of teacher education. This study interrogates how terms related to quality and expertise are discursively linked across documents produced by ‘experts’ in teacher education. We adopt Ball's (2015) perspective that policy should be viewed as a dynamic process rather than a presumed, ready-made solution to a problem (also explored by Ozga, 2020). Recognizing policy as a process extends beyond mere implementation, bringing attention to what Ball et al. (2012) term "policy enactment." Unlike policy implementation, which often overlooks context and individuals "outside the formal machinery of official policy-making" (Ozga, 2000, p. 113), policy enactment places emphasis on both the contexts in which the policy will take place and the diverse array of stakeholders, often referred to as policy actors, actively engaged in the policy process (see also Bourke et al., 2022). We utilise textual analysis to provide the tools for a nuanced exploration of a dynamic policy enactment process in teacher education, including the ways in which discourses of quality and expertise are aligned across diverse policy actors.

First, we discuss the policy context related to teacher education in Australia, with reference to the global context. Next, we frame our study through the lens of discursive policy enactment, to account for the contextual conditions and multiple actors that inform decision-making around policy. We focus on a recent process of policy enactment in the Australian teacher education context – the TEEP - from which a major textual outcome was produced: Strong Beginnings. We use inductive content analysis and textual analysis to interrogate the understandings, practices, and conditions of influence for the policy actors inscribed in this report. We analyse the consistencies or contradictions within the discourses of the final report and the submissions that contributed to this policy enactment process. We

conclude with a discussion about the ways in which expertise and quality are represented in the enactment of teacher education policy in Australia.

Teacher education policy context

The global discourse on teacher quality revolves around language, information, and representations emphasizing the primary role of teaching as enhancing student outcomes on standardized test scores (Kennedy, 2015; Singh et al., 2021). This discourse is evident in various international reports, including those by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) such as "Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers" (OECD, 2008), Teaching and Learning International Surveys (TALIS, https://www.oecd.org/education/talis.htm/), European Union commissioned reports, and McKinsey reports (Mourshed et al., n.d.). It is also reflected in national policies, such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, https://www.aitsl.edu.au/) accreditation documents, ministerial reviews of ITE (TEMAG, 2014), and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, https://caepnet.org/) standards in the United States. In conjunction with outcomes from high-stakes tests like Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, https://nces.ed.gov/timss/), Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/index.asp), and the National Assessment for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Australia, along with their associated ranking tables, these accreditation documents and standards have fostered an uncritical acceptance of a specific teacher and teacher education quality agenda, relying heavily on student assessment league tables (Ryan et al., 2024). Stronach (2010) argued that this impact narrative has become so prevalent that it could be considered a hegemonic hyper-narrative linking multiple texts worldwide to present a singular view of quality. This focus on 'learnification' has become the Australian national policy solution to the perceived problem of teacher quality (Singh et al., 2021, p.3) which fails to recognise the importance of student wellbeing, social connectedness, and flourishing both at and beyond school (Biesta, 2019).

There is a dearth of longitudinal (or any) evidence about types and content of teacher education programs that constitute quality. Brooks (2021) suggests that there are four categories of quality in ITE promulgated in policy enactment: 1) *Inputs* such as characteristics and prior academic achievement of candidates; 2) *Processes* such as placements and program content and cohesiveness; 3) *Outputs* such as performance assessments against standards, measures of content knowledge, employment rates; and 4) *Perspectival* including graduate and employer satisfaction.

Tools utilized to measure quality and classroom readiness through these indicators have emerged as influential instruments in policy implementation. Diez (2010) explored various types of evidence employed in teacher education programs in the United States, endorsing Teaching Performance Assessments (TPAs) as one example (see, for instance, https://www.edtpa.com/pageview.aspx?f=gen_aboutedtpa.html). TPAs are performance-based assessments for teacher education students, designed to gauge their preparedness for entering the teaching profession (Parkes & Powell, 2015). Some researchers, such as Goldhaber et al. (2017) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2013), asserted that TPAs scores could predict teacher effectiveness. However, critics like Gore (2015) and Parkes and Powell (2015) have voiced concerns about the reliability and content validity of these assessment instruments. In the Australian context, the AITSL has proposed

classroom observations and satisfaction surveys as potential mechanisms for demonstrating impact in their *Insights* publications. However, these instruments have not been without criticism. Caughlan and Jiang (2014) argue that classroom observation instruments often lack reliability and credibility, while satisfaction surveys reveal shortcomings in terms of response rates, biases, and power relations. Satisfaction surveys are also often muddied by overarching university experiences, including non-academic factors unrelated to ITE programs (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013).

Brooks (2021) suggests that metrics, measures, and indicators in ITE primarily function as standards for quality assurance. They serve as proxies for quality, acting as representations rather than direct reflections of quality itself (Vagi et al., 2019). It iss important to note that the emphasis on indicators may obscure the understanding that quality within a learning context is a transformative process. Quality, in this context, is a descriptive and relative concept, not an absolute entity, and it does not easily transfer across different educational settings. Despite this nuanced perspective, these indicators are pervasive and constitute a part of the limited array of policies in teacher education that significantly impact international and national discussions (Mayer, 2017; Ellis et al., 2020).

According to Sahlberg (2019) the current educational landscape is largely characterized by discourses centred around well-being and equity. The impact of these discourses is likely to be closely tied to local concerns and priorities. For instance, in New Zealand, where there is a national preoccupation with the distribution of educational achievement, especially after being labelled a 'high-achievement, local equity' nation by the OECD, there is a growing emphasis on educators who can effectively address equity issues in the classroom (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). In contrast, England and Australia are grappling with a dominant discourse of crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. This crisis is reflected in policies that advocate for the diversification of routes into teaching, the privatization of education, permitting unqualified teachers in state schools, and prioritizing subject specialists over expert pedagogues. However, it is worth noting that the rationale behind these policies has been subject to debate (Ellis et al., 2020; Ellis & Spendlove, 2020). In essence, the conceptualization of quality in ITE is contingent on the specific contextual factors at play (Brooks, 2021).

Theoretical framing: Policy enactment through discourse

The conceptual framework of policy enactment provides a dynamic and non-linear approach to explore ‘quality' and ‘expertise’ in teacher education, navigating the intricacies inherent in the policy process. Significantly, this framework breaks the problematic circular logic cycle where new policies often cite old policies as 'evidence', In doing so, the framework creates space for new ideas and alternative perspectives to emerge. To comprehensively study policy enactments, three key facets, as proposed by Ball (2015) – the 'interpretive,' the 'material,' and the 'discursive' – must be thoroughly examined. The interpretive facet delves into how policies are read and understood by those involved in the policy process, shaped through language in the form of descriptions and explanations of content. Investigating the complex interplay of interpretations, translations, active readership, and the creative processes surrounding policy opens up spaces for fresh perspectives on teacher education quality and expertise. The material facet, on the other hand, explores how contextual factors influence policy, detailing the context through descriptions and explanations. Despite good intentions in central policy making, there is often a lack of consideration for constraints and enablers in the policy context. Finally,

the discursive facet examines how policy discourses are articulated and acted upon by policy actors, constituted by descriptions of actions and reactions. Understanding how these discourses are spoken about and implemented provides valuable insights into the dynamics of policy enactment and its impact on discussions surrounding 'teacher education quality.'

The Current Study

Drawing on Ball's three key facets to policy enactment above, this study aimed to interrogate constructions of ITE quality and determine which voices are given authority to make these claims in response to the TEEP suite of policy reforms. To do so we used two forms of content analysis to map TEEP submissions: first, a mapping of which policy actor submissions made in response to the TEEP Discussion Paper were taken up in the final Strong Beginnings report, and second, a systematic conceptual coding of the Strong Beginnings report using inductive content analysis software tool Leximancer. We were interested both in the frequency of different themes or narratives and the collocation of these themes (see Obermair et al., 2018), represented visually as a concept map. To further support our interpretations, we compared these themes with those emerging in the stakeholder responses of several large stakeholder groups.

We framed citations to submissions in the Strong Beginnings report as elevation of stakeholder voice and proxy recognition of expertise. We therefore were interested in the patterns of greater or lesser citations to different policy actors and groups, with additional analyses of themes in the final Strong Beginnings report and stakeholder submissions highlighting congruence and incongruence in interpretations of quality and evidence by different policy actors.

Method

In part one of our analyses, we mapped the stakeholder submissions that were and were not taken up in the Strong Beginnings report in each of four reform areas. These reform areas are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Reform Areas recommended by TEEP for Australian ITE*

Reform Area	Components
1. Strengthen ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates	1.1 Evidence based practices 1.2 Core content for ITE programs 1.3 Embedding the core content in ITE programs 1.4 Nationally consistent assessment of ITE program quality
2. Strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE programs	2.1 Purpose of the indicators 2.2 Reporting on indicators 2.3 Future development of the indicators 2.4 Informing student choice 2.5 Streamlining reporting requirements 2.6 Financial incentives 2.7 Further options considered by the panel
3. Improve the quality of practical experience in teaching	3.1 High quality practical experience for ITE students 3.2 Reforms to improve the quality of practical experience 3.3 Key challenges to delivery of high-quality practicum placements 3.4 System-level approach to delivering practical experience
4. Improve postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants.	4.1 Characteristics of mid-career entrants 4.2 Motivations for and barriers to entering the teaching profession 4.3 Transitioning into initial teacher education 4.4 Attracting and supporting more mid-career entrants 4.5 Building the evidence base for mid-career programs

Following existing stakeholder research with a similar methodology, this citation analysis process initially involved retrieving all stakeholder submissions from the public domain (Jongenelis et al., 2023; Stafford et al., 2020). Submissions were then collated a priori into policy actor groups using clusterings that aligned as best possible with the stakeholder groupings proposed within Strong

Beginnings, including higher education providers (HEPs), teacher regulatory authorities (TRAs), Councils of Deans, employers, teachers' associations, educational research organisations, advocates, individuals, and others. Finally, stakeholders who were and were not cited in the Strong Beginnings report were tallied. To determine who was given voice and when, this citation analysis was organised by stakeholder grouping and reform area.

In part two of our analyses, we used Leximancer 5.0, an artificial intelligence-based text mining software, to analyse emergent themes and collocations in the Strong Beginnings Report. To enable comparisons of foci and narrative, including areas of agreement and disagreement with the final Strong Beginnings report, we also conducted supplementary mappings of the emergent themes and collocations present in responses to the TEEP Discussion Paper for several large stakeholder groups. Analysis in Leximancer involved three stages: data cleaning, researcher confirmation of auto-generated codes, and final analyses (Cheng & Edwards, 2019). To clean the data, content such as forewords, abstracts, author affiliations, headings, figures, appendices, and references (in-text, footnotes, reference lists) were omitted. Reform-specific introductions and conclusions were retained. Submissions were then uploaded to Leximancer v5.0, and Gaussian analyses were used to generate an inductive report of initial overall codes (true discovery mode). Informed by Bayesian theory, Leximancer inductively extracts code frequencies and relationships via an emergent and unsupervised synthesis of input (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Due to the automated nature of code generation in Leximancer, however, it was possible that some irrelevant, conflicting or otherwise extraneous codes could be extracted. To confirm the emergent codes, therefore, the researchers reviewed the initial code list: removing extraneous codes that carry no importance (e.g. "want") and joining any codes that represent the same underlying concept (e.g. "school" and "schools"). To determine the final themes and colocations, the analysis was then run and visual maps produced. Themes were organised by colour, where brightness corresponded to prominence and closeness indicated semantic similarity (Campbell et al., 2011).

Findings and Discussion

The TEEP final report cited submissions throughout the four chapters aligned to the four reform areas. From the 88 public submissions included in the analysis, 52 were cited in the final TEEP report (see Appendix 1). Of the 35 HEP submissions included, 28 were cited. In addition, the three state Councils of Deans of Education (NSW CDE, Queensland CDE, Victoria CDE) that made a submission were cited, along with the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and an ACDE Network of Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Education. TRAs were cited (Australian Teacher Regulatory Authorities and AITSL), as were two Catholic education authorities (National Catholic Education Commission and Catholic Schools NSW) and all three state education systems that made submissions (Northern Territory, NSW, and Victoria). Eight out of the eleven teacher associations were cited, one advocacy group, two educational research organisations, and one 'other' stakeholder (the Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium):

- The submission cited across the highest number of sections came from ACDE, followed by ATRA, Australian Catholic University, AITSL, NSWCDE and NCEC
- Reform area one used 18 submissions (7 HEPs; 2 TRAs; 3 Deans Councils; 3 school system employers, 2 educational research organisations, 1 other)

- Reform area two drew upon 35 submissions (20 HEPs; 2 TRAs; 3 Deans Councils; 2 school system employers; 6 teacher associations, 1 educational research organisation; 1 advocacy group)
- Reform area three cited 26 submissions (12 HEPs; 3 TRAs; 4 Deans Councils; 4 school system employers; 3 teacher associations)
- Reform area four cited 16 submissions (7 HEPs; 2 TRAs; 4 Deans Councils; 2 school system employers; 1 educational research organisation)

The TEEP report drew on interlocutors from six key stakeholder groups, and arguably prioritised expertise in the order of Education Deans, Higher Education Providers, Regulatory Authorities, teacher employers, teacher associations, and education research organisations. The discourses prevalent in the report indicate some consistencies and contradictions with those across the submissions of these six groups. Policy enactment (Ball, 2015) is used to analyse these consistencies and contradictions through discourse. The interpretive facet of policy enactment enables an analysis of the content descriptions and explanations within the TEEP report, and within the submissions proffered through this policy enactment process. The material facet explores how contextual factors are important for each of these policy actors. Finally, the discursive facet examines how policy discourses are acted upon by policy actors and can make visible the voices of authority that shape the ensuing actions of this policy process.

Analysis of policy enactment in Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel

Two main propositions are evident from the analysis of concept frequency and collocation in the TEEP report: first, that there is a problem with quality in ITE; and second, that practice is foregrounded in professionalisation. The first proposition is discursively represented through the discourse of *quality improvement through regulation*. The second proposition is represented through the discourse of *professionalisation through practice*.

Figure 1. 'Strong Beginnings': Positioning a problem with quality in ITE

Discourse of quality improvement through regulation

The theme of ITE is the focus of the TEEP report, and this is indicative in the frequency of 832 hits across the report. Content is the next highest theme associated with ITE at 279 hits, then teaching with 203, placement with 153, stakeholders mentioned 58 times and regulatory with 24 hits.

With an interpretive policy enactment lens over these themes, the discourse of 'quality' proliferates as a term used 341 times across 79 different pages of the document. It is collocated with terms such as 'ITE', 'practical experience', 'teacher workforce', 'recent graduates', 'candidates', 'accreditation decisions', 'teaching', 'assurance', 'measures', 'delivery', 'lift', and 'improve'. The report normalises through repetition the areas of ITE that should have the descriptor 'quality' yet this term is highly contested, with different value judgements underpinning the various measures of quality in ITE (Brooks, 2021; Caughlan & Jiang, 2014). For example, there is no definitive evidence about what content

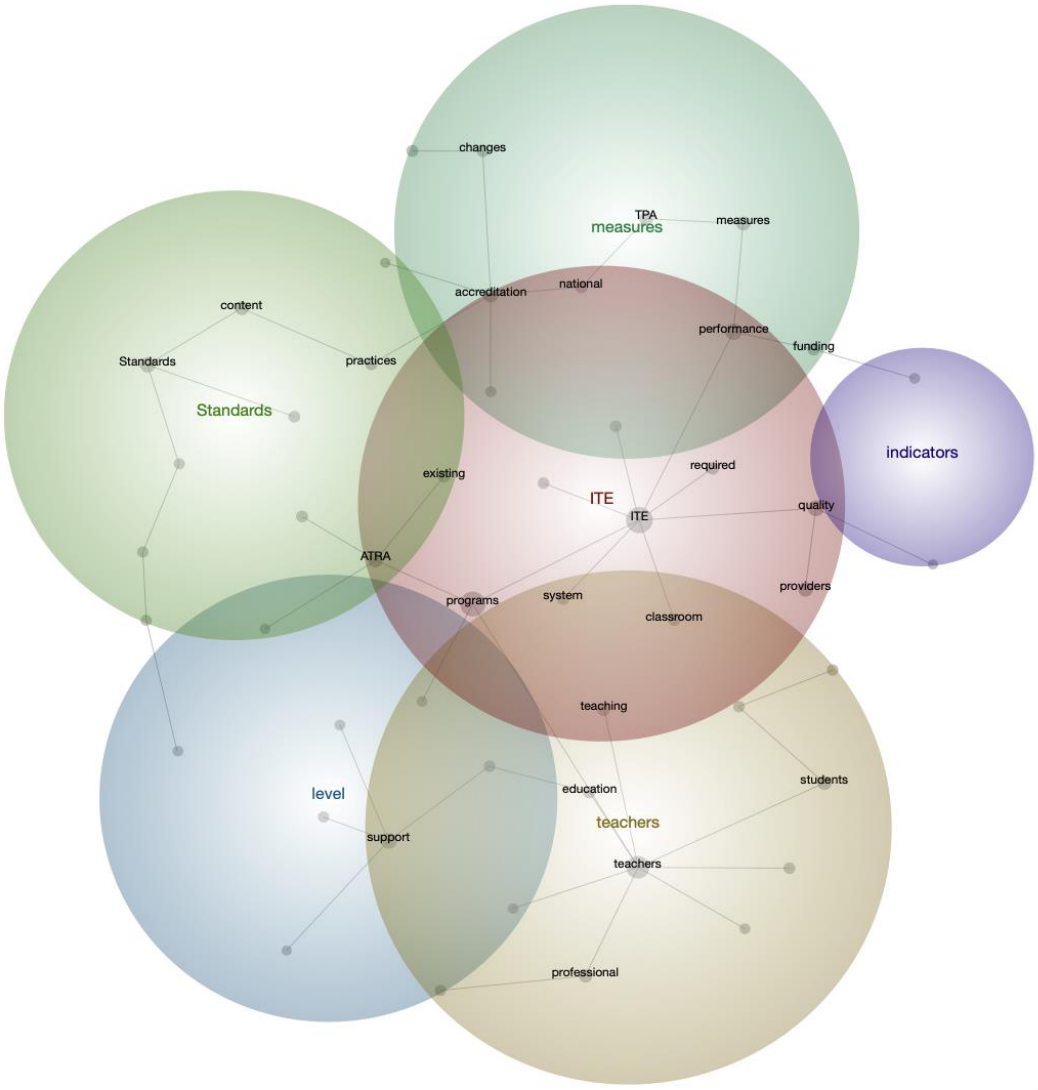
constitutes a quality ITE program, yet the TEEP report sets out a quasi-curriculum for 'core content' (TEEP, pp. 95-104). 'Quality candidates' is a term used interchangeably with 'high-achieving candidates' in the report and these descriptors are discursively realised through "Proportion of school leavers with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) above 80 enrolled in ITE" (TEEP, p. 44). However, there is no direct correlation between prior attainment and teaching quality (Vagi et al., 2019).

'Effective' is afforded an equivalence with 'quality' and is used 65 times alongside 'beginning teachers', 'pedagogical practices', 'rules and regulations' and 'programs'. Materially, ITE covers birth to Year 12, and the diversity of student cohorts means that effectiveness is always contextual, however, there is an interpretive logic of effective pedagogical practices as "practices including explicit modelling, scaffolding, formative assessment, and literacy and numeracy teaching strategies that support student learning because they respond to how the brain processes, stores and retrieves information" (TEEP, p. 9). These practices are focused more on the early childhood/primary years of schooling, yet with a broad expectation that the pedagogies for early reading will be enacted, for example, in secondary science and mathematics classes.

The report also interpolates a *lack of quality* through evidentiary terms of 'assurance' and 'measurement'. Discursive elements of policy enactment are evident through action verbs of 'lift' and 'improve' to indicate that quality is not at the level expected. 'Improve' or 'improving' is used 203 times across 74 pages of the TEEP report. It is collocated mostly with 'quality of ITE', 'underperformance of ITE', 'higher education providers', 'practical experience', 'students' and 'postgraduate ITE'. A related term 'reform' is used 42 times over 22 pages of the report, collocated with 'identified areas', 'broad effort', 'major', 'determined approach', 'priority', 'ITE', 'positive outcomes', 'previous', 'further … necessary', 'implement', 'enacted', and 'considerable'. There is a strong message that ITE in Australia is to blame for falling standards in our schooling system.

The discursive solution to this quality problem is more control and regulation. 'Strengthen or 'strengthening' is used 69 times across 40 pages of the TEEP report, collocated with 'ITE programs', 'links between performance and funding', 'economic', 'accreditation and monitoring', 'focus on evidence-based teaching', 'quality and consistency of ITE programs', 'oversight and governance', 'authorising environment', 'link between theory, research and practice', and 'provider-school partnerships'. Similarly, 'report' and 'reporting' is used 215 times over 86 pages of the document, collocated with 'TEEP', 'ITE', 'indicators', Education Ministers', 'requirements', 'outcomes', 'students', 'templates', 'beginning teachers', 'transparently', 'public', 'performance', and 'requirements'. The submissions from TRAs (Figure 3) reflect these themes, with prevalent concepts of 'ITE' (224 hits), 'teachers' (170 hits), 'measures' (104 hits), 'standards' (96 hits), 'level' (20 hits) and 'indicators' (18 hits). HEPs have been required to engage deeply with this accrediting environment for well over a decade in Australia, with highly prescribed programs based on professional standards, mandatory reporting on impact and lengthy accreditation documentation (Bourke et al., 2022). This solution of greater control to improve quality has no evidentiary basis. Quality accreditation decisions are more about consistency and control than necessarily about the most effective programs (Brooks, 2021).

Figure 2. TRA Leximancer Map



Despite the foregrounding of the term 'evidence' which is used 101 times collocated with 'content', 'teaching' and 'student learning'. The TEEP report seems to lack evidence for its claims. For example, it conflates quality teachers and programs with a growing teacher shortage in Australia, stating:

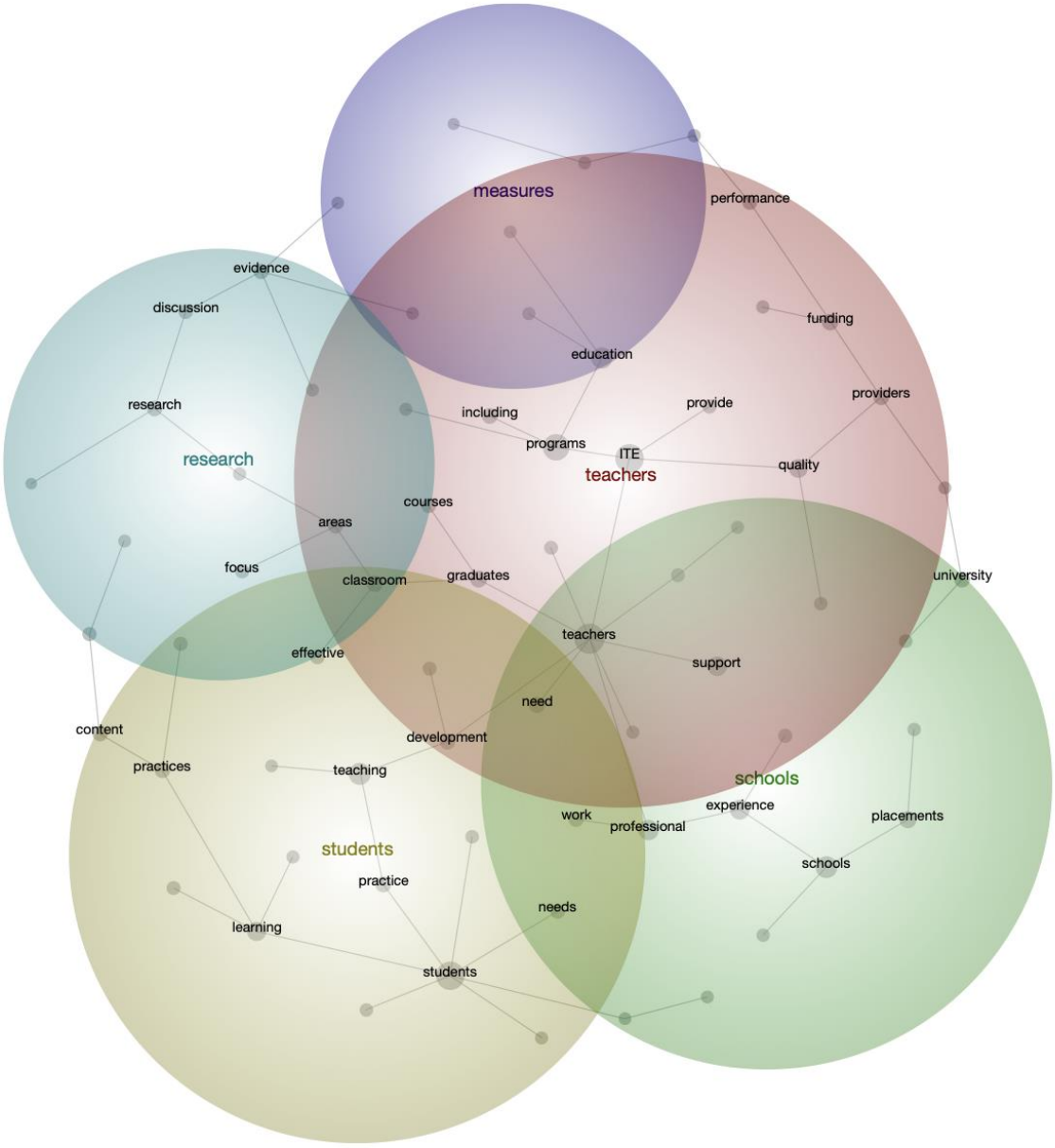
> "One of the best ways to help beginning teachers be successful from day one is to improve ITE… But too many beginning teachers have reported that they felt they needed to be better equipped for the challenges they faced in the classroom on starting their teaching careers. Sadly, too many fail to complete their studies or stay in the profession long enough to flourish. Nearly four in 10 ITE students leave their course within six years

> of commencing their degree and around one in five beginning teachers leaves within the first three years of entering the teaching profession." (TEEP, p. 6).

There are two causal relationships created through the discourse: first, *success as a new teacher is solely attributed to the ITE program* rather the material factors of school communities, access to mentors, resources, and ongoing professional learning as a new teacher, what is valued at a particular school and so on. Diez (2010) articulated four barriers that interrupt the logic of linking ITE programs to teacher success in progressing student learning: (1) graduates often revert to what they experienced themselves when they were at school; (2) sometimes ITE programs promote pedagogies contradictory to what are found in schools; for example, explicit instruction models versus active inquiry learning; (3) the influence that unprofessional colleagues can have on graduates; and (4) the lack of follow-up studies tracking the progress of ITE graduates.

The second causal relationship proposed in Strong Beginnings is that *attrition from ITE and teaching is caused by the quality of ITE programs*. However, no evidence is cited to support these claims. Some evidence of ITE student satisfaction is reported from results of the 2022 Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) (https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/Data-Visualisation/gos), yet the findings of this survey are equivocal. The GOS has around a third of graduate teachers respond, and of this third, 33% were primary teachers and 40% were secondary teachers. Of these respondents, 32% reported a need for more relevant course content, 31% indicated a need for more practical experience and 25% suggested more practical classroom knowledge was needed (TEEP, p.23). In addition, the reported results of a survey administered to ITE students as part of this policy process (no details provided) showed 73% agreed they had many opportunities to practice explicit modelling and scaffolding in a classroom whereas only 40% agreed that they had an opportunity to practice explicit phonics in a classroom (TEEP, p.37). There are some dubious conclusions drawn about the inadequacies of ITE programs from this evidence: first, satisfaction surveys are widely criticised as a measure of quality in ITE (Brooks, 2021); and second, the latter survey undertaken as part of this policy process relates to opportunities in classrooms, *not* whether these practices were included in their ITE program.

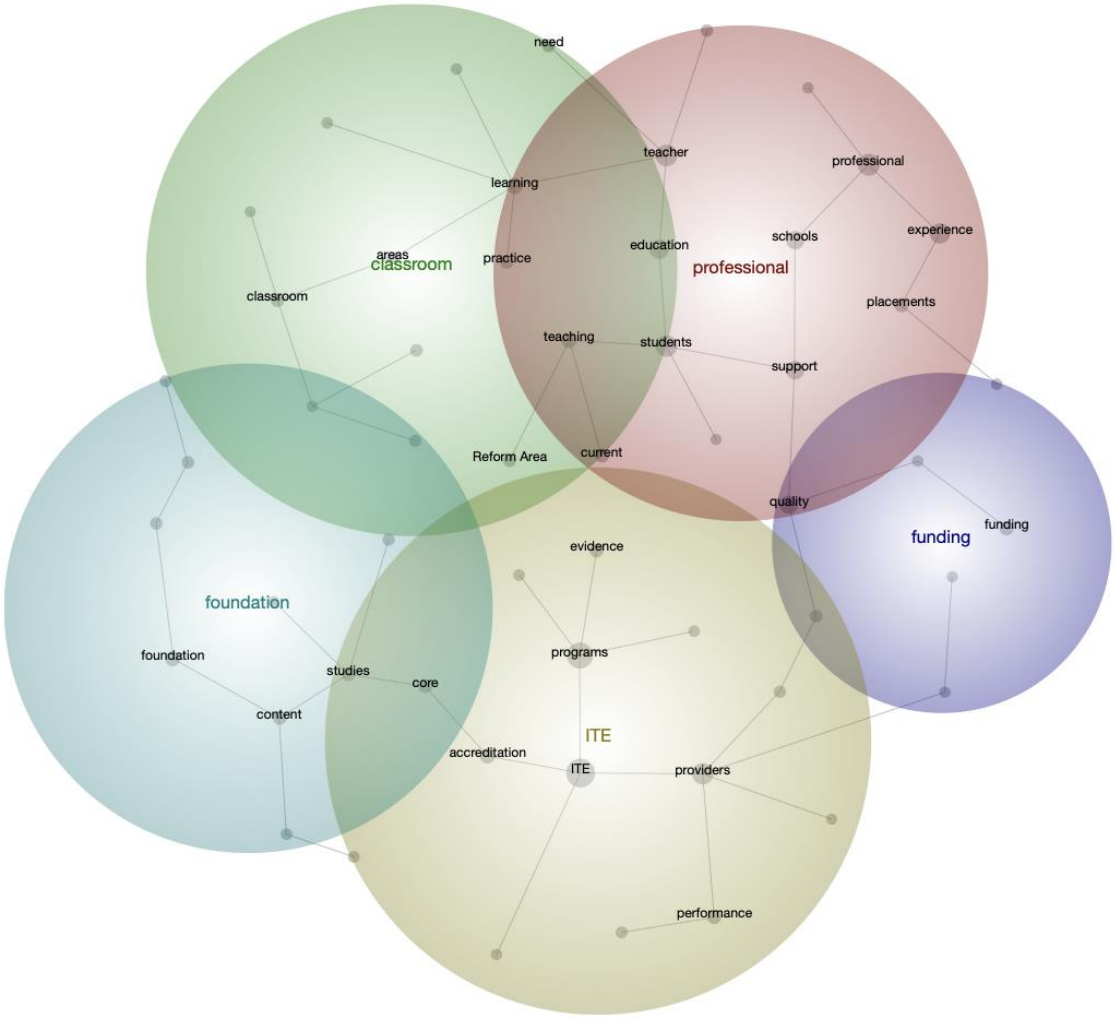
Figure 3. Higher Education Provider Leximancer Map



The representation of a problem of quality in ITE is unsubstantiated in the TEEP report. Many of the stakeholder submissions, however, interpolate terms such as evidence, performance measures and quality in ITE. HEPs (Figure 3) prioritise the themes of 'teachers' (1636 hits), 'students' (1283 hits), 'schools' (1095 hits), 'research' (640 hits) and 'measures' (115 hits), while deans councils (Figure 4) prioritise 'professional' (326 hits), 'ITE' (290 hits), 'classroom' (134 hits), 'foundation' (68 hits) and 'funding' (46 hits). The authoritative voices of these submissions represent a broader view of the lifespan of teaching, with ITE as the research-informed foundation, and supporting the teacher as a professional focused on students and school communities. Deep partnerships between HEPs and

schools is a feature of this discursive teaching lifespan from these stakeholders. The discourse of quality is a consistent one between the TEEP report and the main interlocutors, however the interpretive claims and discursive enactments of 'quality' are inconsistent. The material conditions within which ITE operates, as explained throughout the HEP and Deans' Councils submissions: that ITE is *initial* preparation of teachers; that there has been a significant reduction in funding for ITE; and that many variables affect graduate success; are not accounted for in the positioning of quality as a problem in ITE. The prevalent discourse in the submission from Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is one that permeates the TEEP report. It positions ITE as lacking quality in content and pedagogical strategies. Despite being cited less times, this organisation is afforded more authority. The recommendations that have been enacted through this policy process are those that align with these discourses.

Figure 4. Councils of Deans Leximancer Map



Discourse of professionalisation through practice

The second key discourse evident in the TEEP report is one that prioritises 'practical experience' in classrooms. 'Practical' is used 239 times over 45 pages, collocated almost exclusively with 'experience'. 'Professional', on the other hand, is used 113 times over 48 pages, collocated with 'experience', 'development', 'standards', 'practice', 'learning', 'recognition', and 'para-(professional)'. 'Experience' is used 209 times, 'teaching' has 175 hits, 'placements' is mentioned 131 times, 'support' has 118 hits, and 'practice' is used 72 times. The terms 'mentor or 'mentoring' are used 126 times over 26 pages, collocated with 'teachers', 'ITE students', 'skills', 'coach core content', 'providers', and 'teacher capacity'. Reform areas two and three in TEEP are focused on the need to improve and increase time in classrooms, including through fast-tracking teachers into the profession through mid-career pathways. The recommendations of TEEP relate to establishing 'system-wide coordination of practical experience delivery' (p.13), 'national guidelines for high-quality practical experience' (p.14), 'systemic support and investment in practical experience' (p. 14), support and value effective mentoring' (p.14), 'Develop, expand, and promote mid-career pathways' (p. 15-16) and 'build the evidence base for mid-career programs' (p.16). Through an interpretive policy lens, the report falls short in its justification of the affordance of value to 'practical experience'. It uses the term 'practical' rather than 'professional' experience, signifying a technical focus on teaching rather than the broad work of a teacher in the school and engaging with diverse parents and communities. There is strong evidence, for example, that a sense of belonging at school is crucial for students to experience success (Allen, 2022) and teachers are those most able to increase that sense of belonging for students.

In addition, while the TEEP report is explicit and prescriptive in its recommendations for 'core content', the report provides no guidance on professional experience, other than to recommend the development of national guidelines. While there is broad recognition, particularly from HEPs (Figure 4), Deans' Councils (Figure 5), and teacher associations (Figure 6) that time in schools is crucial, there is a dearth of research on how much time in classrooms is optimal in an ITE program. There are also several factors that impact on student teachers' capabilities to develop their skills and professional agency, their sense of belonging and, in some cases, their physical and mental health while in schools (Hanly & Heinz, 2022). These include the existence (or absence) of school support structures, school culture, peer networks, paid or unpaid additional workload and financial pressures. These material conditions of policy enactment are more likely to impact the quality of preparation in schools than the number of days or the structure of a program.

Figure 5. Teacher Associations Leximancer Map

Submissions from HEPs and Deans Councils call for funding to improve the logistics and support resources for professional experience, as well as more funding for research that investigates the fidelity of different ITE models. Funding for research on ITE is scarce from major funding bodies such as the Australian Research Council (ARC). In 2023, for example, just eight of more than 400 ARC ''Discovery Project' grants were in education and just one of 100 mid-career "Future Fellowships" was in education. In this discourse of professionalisation through practice, there is a similar blurring between 'quality' programs that produce successful graduates, and the critical teacher shortage. Reform area four appears to be solely related to the latter. Reform area two is ambiguous in its intent, calling for a more diverse, yet high-achieving candidate pool, while at the same time cautious in reducing the number of applicants to ITE. Findings show that candidates from diverse backgrounds are typically more affected by unintended consequences of entry requirements such as the Literacy and Numeracy Test for ITE (LANTITE) than are those from less diverse backgrounds (Hilton & Saunders, 2022). Further, any attempts to be more selective will necessarily mean reductions in the numbers of candidates admitted. Therefore, these calls create conflicting requirements for ITE providers that are impossible to satisfy.

The TEEP report is also contradictory in its intentions to 'improve' ITE. The discursive lens of policy enactment suggests that the strong recommendations in reform one about the 'core content' of ITE programs are a way to show a strong hand of government intervention to 'fix' student scores on

standardised tests through teacher preparation. This is despite the inherent flaws to such an argument (Diez, 2010; Brooks, 2021). The weaker recommendations from the other three reform areas, which have not been taken up by Education Ministers across Australia, suggest that quality measures cannot interfere in the enrolment of the large pipeline needed to staff classrooms in Australia.

Conclusion

In this paper we utilised Ball's (2015) policy enactment to demonstrate how the process of policymaking can afford authority and expertise in ways that are not necessarily consistent with the authoritative discourses of the field. We explored the constraints and enablers of the interpretive, material, and discursive ways in which the *Strong Beginnings TEEP Report* has been promulgated in Australia. It is paradoxical that the TEEP report emphasizes evidence, yet much of its enactment lacks empirical support. There are certainly elements in the fine-grained detail of the report, such as assertions around the evidence for teaching phonics or the necessity of including in ITE cognitive evidence of how the brain learns, that are agreed upon by the majority of policy actors. However, the underpinning discourses of a largescale problem with ITE or the unquestioned assumption that more practical experience equals more successful graduates, is not supported by the evidence presented.

Previous research (see Brooks, 2021; Ellis & Spendlove, 2020), as well as the findings of our study, confirm that quality is not a simple or singular concept that can be easily defined, measured or 'fixed'. Quality of ITE and success of graduate teachers is heavily influenced by interpretations (such as those from politically savvy 'experts'), material conditions (such as funding, school-university transitions and teacher shortages), and different ways of speaking and acting within specific contexts (e.g., governments taking up some recommendations and not others). On face value, HEPs and Deans of Education are afforded a strong authority and voice in this policy enactment process. There are certainly recommendations from those submissions that have been included in the TEEP report. However, those recommendations that have been actualised are from a narrow source: educational research groups sitting outside universities that consider ITE incapable of developing curriculum or ensuring that graduates are well-prepared as novice teachers. Indeed, the HEPs' and Deans' Councils submissions suggest an openness to continual improvement, research informed content, and strong partnerships with schools. Despite the rhetoric of the federal government about listening to educators, the TEEP report fails to attribute this level of professional expertise to teacher educators who research and teach in that specific policy sphere.

Although imperfect, policy emphasis at the national level has been effective in its discursive goal of engraving the importance of evidence and impact into the education lexicon (Ryan et al., 2024). All the policy actors in this process indicated awareness of how important the perceived and actual measures of quality and graduate readiness have become in education. There was agreement on the need to draw from other fields (such as psychology and cognitive science), and to use the best available evidence to inform and improve educational programs. We argue that for policy enactment to lead to meaningful transformation and positive outcomes for graduate teachers and learners, it cannot de-professionalise teacher educators. Teacher education should not be used as a political football to manufacture a political platform of change and improvement. The important task now for ITE is to

interrogate layers of policy and work with TRAs, teacher associations and teacher employers to enact realistic and contextualised indicators of quality to the attainment of educational goals.

Appendix 1. *Policy Actors included in analysis and TEEP report*

Higher Education Providers	**Included**	**Section**
Alphacrucis University College	yes	2.2
Australian Catholic University	yes	1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 2.3, 3.3, 3.4, 4.4, 4.5
Australian Catholic University (National School of Education)	no	
Charles Darwin University	yes	2.3, 3.4
Charles Sturt University	yes	2.3
Central Queensland University Australia	yes	2.4
Edith Cowan University	yes	1.4, 2.1, 2.3
Federation University (Institute of Special Education)	yes	3.3
Flinders University	yes	2.2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.4
Griffith University (School of Education and Professional Studies)	yes	1.3, 2.2, 2.3, 3.3
La Trobe University	yes	2.2, 2.6, 4.4
Macquarie University	yes	2.6, 3.3, 3.4
Monash University	yes	3.3, 4.3, 4.4
Murdoch University	no	
Queensland University of Technology	yes	2.3
Royal Military Institute of Technology	yes	3.3
Southern Cross University	no	
Swinburne University of Technology	yes	2.2
The University of Melbourne (Graduate School of Education)	yes	2.2
The University of Queensland	yes	1.3, 3.3, 4.3
The University of South Australia	yes	2.2
The University of Sydney	no	
The University of Sydney (Centre of Educational Measurement and Assessment)	no	
The University of Sydney (School of Education and Social Work)	yes	2.3
The University of Western Australia (Graduate School of Education)	yes	4.3
University of Canberra	yes	1.4, 2.2, 2.3, 3.3
University of New England	yes	3.3
University of Newcastle (School of Education)	yes	2.3
University of Newcastle (Teachers and Teaching Research Centre)	yes	1.4, 3.3
University of NSW (Centre for Social Impact)	yes	4.3
University of Southern Queensland	yes	2.2, 2.4
University of Tasmania	no	
University of Technology Sydney (Teacher Education Academics)	yes	1.3, 2.2, 2.3
University of the Sunshine Coast	yes	2.3, 2.4
University Of Wollongong	no	
Teacher Regulatory Authorities (TRAs)	**Included**	**Section**

Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA)	yes	1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6, 3.3, 4.4
The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)	yes	1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 3.3, 3.4, 4.4
Councils of Deans	**Included**	**Section**
Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE)	yes	1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 3.3, 3.4, 4.4, 4.5
Network of Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Education	yes	1.3, 2.3, 2.4
Network of Associate Deans of Professional Experience Steering Committee	no	
NSW Council of Deans of Education (NSWCDE)	yes	1.2, 2.3, 2.6, 3.3, 3.4, 4.4
Queensland Council of Deans of Education	yes	3.3, 3.4, 4.5
Victorian Council of Deans of Education	yes	3.3, 3.4, 4.2
Employers	**Included**	**Section**
Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn	no	
Catholic Schools NSW	yes	1.4, 2.6
National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)	yes	1.2, 1.3, 3.3, 3.4, 4.3, 4.5
North-Eastern Montessori School & Sydney Montessori Training Centre	no	
Northern Territory Department of Education	yes	3.4
NSW Department of Education	yes	1.4, 2.2, 2.6, 3.4
Steiner Education Australia	no	
Victorian Department of Education	yes	3.3, 3.4, 4.2, 4.3
Teacher Associations	**Included**	**Section**
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia	no	
Australian Council of State School Organisations	yes	2.3, 3.4
Australian Council of TESOL Associations	no	
Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network	yes	2.3
Australian Education Union	yes	3.3
Australian Primary Principals Association	yes	2.2, 2.3, 2.6
Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers Association NSW	yes	2.1
Independent Education Union of Australia	yes	2.6, 3.3
Primary English Teaching Association Australia	no	
Queensland College of Teachers	yes	3.4
The Australian Special Education Principals Association	yes	2.2
Advocacy Groups	**Included**	**Section**
Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented	no	
Australian Association of Special Education	yes	2.3

Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia	no	
Dyslexia Victoria Support	no	
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia	no	
Regional Education Commissioner	no	
Educational Research Organisations	**Included**	**Section**
Australian Council for Educational Research	yes	1.4, 4.2
Australian Education Research Organisation's Board	yes	1.3, 2.3
Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia		
Other	**Included**	**Section**
Asia Education Foundation	no	
Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium	yes	1.4
Australian Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering	no	
CSIRO	no	
Education Research Solutions	no	
National Advocates for Arts Education	no	
Teach For Australia	no	
Teachers TV Foundation	no	
Transforming Education Australasia	no	
Individuals	**Included**	**Section**
Barnes, Carol	no	
Edmunds, David	no	
Emeritus Prof Terry Lovat	no	
Emeritus Prof Wayne Sawyer and Emeritus Prof Rob Hattam	no	
Ferman, Terrie	no	
Gardiner, John	no	
Halsey, John	no	
Harpur, Paul	no	
Jakupovic, Wardah	no	
Lovell, Oliver	no	
Mangubhai, Dr Francis	no	
Millican, Kevan	no	
Mundy, Mick	no	
Norman, Karen	no	
Rogers, Jo	no	
Sankey, Derek	no	
Selkrig, Mark	no	
Thraves, Genevieve	no	

Paper 2: Perspectives on core content in Initial Teacher Education: A systematic mapping of stakeholder responses to Government reform in Australia

In 2023, the Australian Federal Government's Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) recommended that initial teacher education include mandated core content related to the Brain and Learning, Effective Practices, Classroom Management, and Enabling Factors (Reform Area 1). Implicit were assumptions that some or all providers do not include such content and that graduates are therefore unprepared for the classroom. The aim of the current paper was to map stakeholder responses to this reform. Using content analysis software Leximancer, we captured emerging themes in public submissions across nine groups: higher education providers, regulatory authorities, councils of deans, employers, teachers' associations, educational research groups, advocacy groups, individuals, and others. While the final TEEP report, "Strong Beginnings", claimed broad support, we found both agreement and disagreement regarding both the need for reform and the scale of reform needed. Several individual stakeholders were strongly in favour, yet others considered the mandating of core content an overreach. Larger stakeholder groups, including higher education providers, employers, teachers' associations, and teacher regulation authorities typically called for nuance: arguing that initial teacher education programs already included the core, that additional interdisciplinary insights were needed to avoid curriculum imbalance, and that the recommendations for some practices drawn from cognitive science extended beyond current evidence.

Keywords: Initial Teacher Education, accreditation, cognitive science, core content, content, pre-service teachers

Perspectives on Core Content in Initial Teacher Education: A Systematic Mapping of Stakeholder Responses to Government Reform in Australia

Teaching is a complex endeavour, and the design of initial teacher education (ITE) programs is political (Hardy et al., 2020). Upon graduation, new teachers must be prepared with a repertoire of knowledge and skills relating both to discipline and pedagogy (Shulman, 1986, 1987); a multifaceted understanding of child and adolescent learning (Graham, 2021; Martin, 2009; Weinstein et al., 2018; Youdell et al., 2020); a suite of strategies for promoting positive learning environments (De Nobile et al., 2021); and the capacity to meet diverse student needs (Graham, 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2021). Narratives regarding the adequacy of ITE and the connection of theory to practice perpetuate across countries (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hardy et al., 2020; Trippestad et al., 2017).

ITE in Australia has been subject to continued and ongoing reform. Most recently, in August 2022, the Australian Federal Government announced a commitment to "*…improve Initial Teacher Education to boost graduation rates and ensure teachers are better prepared for the classroom*" (Australian Government, 2022). According to Education Minister Hon Jason Clare, teachers who are better prepared with appropriate knowledge and skills will be less likely to withdraw from the profession, thus alleviating the teacher shortage (2023a). Unfortunately, neither the claim to a lack of preparation nor the claim to a connection with teacher shortages were supported by evidence. Nonetheless, in September 2022, a new Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) was formed to spearhead the initiative for further ITE reform. Members of the panel included Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Mark Scott, President of the Australian Council of Deans of Education, Professor Michele Simons, retired Professor Bill Louden, CEO of the Australian Education Research Organisation, Dr Jenny Donovan, principal Andrew Peach, and teacher Rebecca West. In May 2023, the TEEP panel released a Discussion Paper with four proposed reform areas.

This paper focuses on Reform Area 1, which proposed mandating core content for ITE programs in four areas believed to be lacking: *The Brain and Learning*, including memory, expertise, and cognitive load, *Effective Practices*, including explicit modelling and scaffolding, *Classroom Management*, including fostering positive environments, and *Enabling Factors*, including First Nations Peoples, cultural responsiveness, and diversity (see https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/resources/teacher-education-expert-panel-discussion-paper). Proposed content was supported by three commissioned reports from the Australian Educational Research Organisation (AERO): one on evidence-based practices, one on embedding practices, and one on current practices in Australian education (including a keyword search of unit outlines from six representative providers). The Discussion Paper further proposed that coverage of these areas be assessed via the existing Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA), which is completed by all ITE students in their final year.

Heightened Australian media commentary following the release of the TEEP Discussion Paper largely supported the mandating of core content in ITE. Ross Fox, Director of the Catholic Education Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, stated to the Australian Broadcasting Commission that a current focus in ITE courses on "*student-directed learning and exploring education through societal power structures*" was not working (Duffy, 2023). Professor Joanna Barbousas, Dean of the La Trobe School of

Education, reported to the Age that an overreliance on liberal arts and sociology traditions wouldn't prepare graduates for classrooms: "*We kept some philosophy but switched to focus on evidence-informed approaches to developing teachers' skills*" (Carroll, 2023), while chair of the TEEP panel, Professor Mark Scott, argued to the Sydney Morning Herald that the reform would force providers to use evidence-based approaches (Harris & Grace, 2023). In an op-ed article for the Sydney Morning Herald (2023), however, Professor Debra Hayes of the University of Sydney described the reforms as an "absurd overreach", stating that every ITE program in the country already includes the proposed content. She further cautioned against a narrow focus on the brain that excludes other interdisciplinary insights.

Despite a strong and frenzied media reaction to the proposed TEEP reforms to ITE, with quotes from specific individuals, it is not clear how different educational stakeholder groups view the proposals or how these views might align with expertise. Indeed, while Australian media coverage relating to education is often negative (Mockler, 2022), some stakeholders are likely to have greater authority in ITE research, design, or governance than others. The TEEP final report, Strong Beginnings, suggested that "*stakeholders broadly supported both the core content and formalising it in the accreditation of ITE programs to ensure the content is prioritised and consistently delivered in ITE*" (2023, p. 9). Little attempt was made to distinguish between stakeholders, however. One hundred and seventeen public submissions in response to the TEEP Discussion Paper were received from nine stakeholder groups, including higher education providers, teacher regulatory authorities, councils of deans, employers, teacher associations, educational research groups, advocacy groups, individuals, and others, yet no systematic analysis of these distinct stakeholder perspectives exists.

The aim of this study was to map public stakeholder submissions to the TEEP recommendations for mandated core content in ITE. We drew on methodological approaches from Jongenelis et al. (2023) and Stafford et al. (2020), who used inductive content analysis to identify themes in public submissions to government consultation processes for the regulation of e-cigarettes and alcohol respectively. We employed the methodological tool Leximancer to complete our analysis. Informed by Bayesian theory, Leximancer uses an unsupervised synthesis process without researcher intervention: thus, themes are genuinely emergent (Cheng & Edwards, 2019; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). We were interested in the priorities of each stakeholder group, their stance on the proposal for core content, and any areas of tension or disagreement.

We hypothesised that higher education providers would focus more strongly on the types of evidence underpinning ITE curriculum than would employers or teachers' associations, given that most academics hold dual teaching and research roles, but that both would recommend a suite of additional topics necessary for a balanced curriculum. We further predicted that teacher regulatory authorities would focus on the authorising environment, with recommendations to use existing accreditation processes and not TPAs and with consideration for the content already accredited in ITE programs. In contrast to the conclusions drawn in the Strong Beginnings final report, which suggested broad agreement with the core content as presented, we predicted points of disagreement in approach, focus, and breadth.

Method

Of the 118 submissions made in response to the TEEP Discussion Paper, 108 were downloaded from www.education.gov.au, separated by reform area, and then collated by stakeholder group. A further seven were submitted confidentially; three to our knowledge were submitted publicly and referenced in the final *Strong Beginnings* report, but were unavailable to download on the government website. These included a submission from the University of New England and two who have chosen not to be identified here. Twenty submissions were excluded from the analysis because they either did not provide textual responses or provided irrelevant material (e.g. a coaching brochure). Of the final 88 submissions, 81 responded specifically to Reform 1 and were included in the analysis (see Table 1).

Data for each stakeholder group was cleaned of author information, affiliations, acknowledgements, references, and reproductions of the original TEEP document. Responses to Reform 1 were extracted and uploaded to Leximancer v5.0 for data processing, and Gaussian analyses were used to generate an inductive report of initial codes. Due to the automated nature of code generation in Leximancer, it is possible for irrelevant or extraneous codes to be extracted. Thus, the final stage involved inspection of codes to merge like codes (e.g. 'student' and 'students') and remove those without relevance (e.g. 'want') such that overarching themes could be determined. Commonly occurring terms such as 'teachers' and 'provider' were kept in the analysis, despite dominating several themes, for two reasons: first, removal would mischaracterise the nature of some submissions, and second, differences often emerged in how these themes were discussed between stakeholders. Following the processing of data, visual maps of themes and relationships were produced (see Campbell et al., 2011).

Table 1. Stakeholders responding to TEEP Reform Area 1.

Group	Stakeholders*
HEPs	Australian Catholic University National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, Charles Darwin, Charles Sturt, Central Queensland University, Edith Cowan, Flinders, Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia, La Trobe, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Monash, Murdoch, Queensland University of Technology, School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith, Southern Cross, Swinburne, the University of Sydney, the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work, Teacher Education Academics at the University of Technology Sydney, Teachers and Teaching Research Centre at University of Newcastle, the University of Newcastle School of Education, and the Universities of Canberra, Queensland, South Australia, Southern Queensland, Tasmania, Sunshine Coast, and Wollongong.
TRAs	The combined Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
Councils of Deans	Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), the Network of Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Education (NADLATE), NSW Council of Deans of Education (NSW CDE), Victoria Council of Deans of Education (Victoria CDE), and Queensland Council of Deans of Education (Queensland CDE)

Employers	NSW Department of Education, State of Victoria, Northern Territory Department of Education, National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Schools NSW, Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, North-Eastern Montessori School and Sydney Montessori Training Centre, Steiner Education Australia.
Teachers' associations	Associations of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, Australian Council of State School Organisations, Australian Council of TESOL Organisations, Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network, Australian Education Union, Australian Primary Principals Association, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers Association NSW, Independent Education Union of Australia, Institute of Special Educators, Primary English Association of Australia, Australian Special Education Principals Association.
Educational researchers	Australian Council of Educational Research, the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia (MERGA), Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Board.
Advocates	Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, Australian Association of Special Education, Code Red Dyslexia Network Australia, Dyslexia Victoria Support, Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia, Regional Education Commissioner.
Individuals	Nine individual submissions
Other	Asia Education Foundation, Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, CSIRO, Education Research Solutions, National Advocates for Arts Education, Transforming Education Australasia.

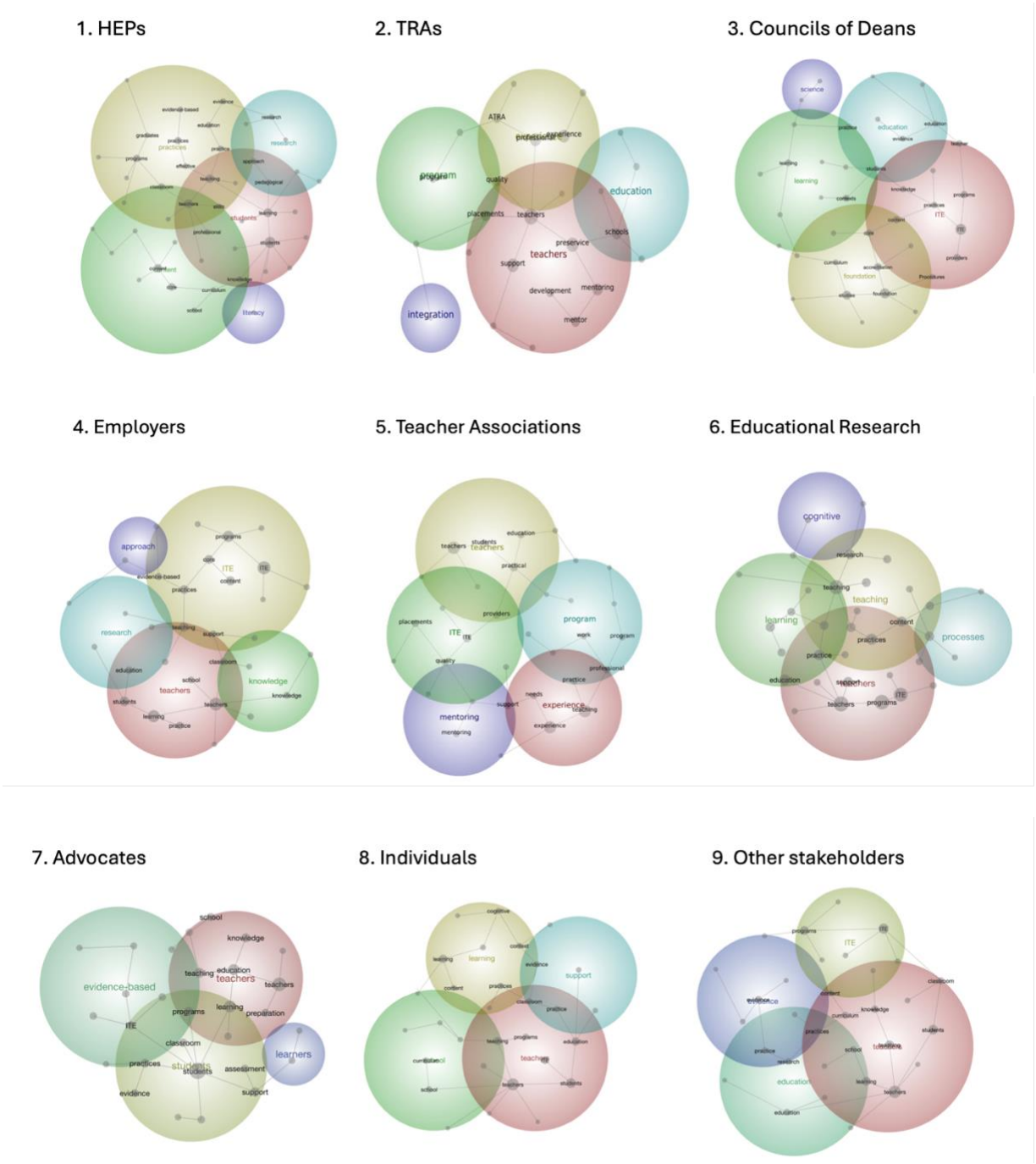
* An additional two universities (UNE, anonymous) and one teachers' association also made public submissions, referenced in the final "Strong Beginnings" report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel. Unfortunately, these submissions do not appear on the government website and could not be included in our analyses.

Results

Higher Education Providers

'Students' was the most significant theme for higher education providers (405 hits), with an emphasis on the professional readiness skills that a teacher must bring into the classroom with them to support diverse learners. Sub-concepts included students, teachers, learning, teaching, knowledge, approach, professional, skills, pedagogical, and development (Figure 1). Queensland University of Technology's approach was to "*equip [pre-service teachers] with the knowledge, skills, and reflexivity to create inclusive learning environments and select from a toolkit of evidence-based pedagogical practices to engage diverse learners*", while Central Queensland University highlighted the importance of "*extensive knowledge of pedagogical approaches that support the strengths, interests, needs, and developmental stages of children and school aged learners*". La Trobe described a current project tracking how course content supports knowledge and skills as their own pre-service teaching students transition into the profession.

Figure 1. *Leximancer themes in response to TEEP Reform Area 1 for each stakeholder group*



'Practices' was the second most significant theme (376 hits), with a strong focus on the nature of the evidence that underpins effective classroom practice. Sub-concepts included practices, programs, classroom, education, evidence, practice, evidence-based, effective, and graduates. Some universities highlighted an existing adherence to evidence, with the Australian Catholic University noting that their programs were "*rooted in evidence-based practice and continue to be highly reactive to the changing needs in schools and society*", and Central Queensland University and Edith Cowan both noting that "*the*

suggested core reflects areas already addressed in ITE". The University of Queensland reminded the panel that "*all ITE programs have been and still are required to be evidence-based*", while the University of Wollongong stated that their alignment with evidence-based practices was "*consistent with the Higher Education Standards Framework and particularly Standard 3.1.2*".

Notably, there were also differences in provider perceptions of the strength of the evidence-base underpinning the new core content. While the University of Sydney stated that "*the Expert Panel is to be congratulated for their excellent analysis... and especially the emphasis they place on... brain science and learning*", the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work argued against *"...a canon of evidence-based practices (which falsely implies the existence of teaching practices that are applicable across all stages, curriculum areas and contexts)"* and particularly a "*misinterpretation of the meaning of explicit instruction to mean a low-level transmission approach*". University of Canberra warned that highly prescriptive programs could "*perpetuate a belief in 'the evidence' as immutable*", while Southern Queensland argued that "*...the cognitive science aspects need to be framed within the context of application in classrooms, which are significantly different to the clinical settings for the trials*".

'Content' was the third theme (224 hits, sub-concepts: content, core, school, curriculum) and explored the importance of broad ITE curricula going beyond the core content. The University of South Australia expressed concern that "*the notion of "core" privileges some areas of the curriculum over others and consequently positions other content, contexts, and approaches as "non-essential" (i.e. not core)",* while Southern Cross similarly recommended against a "*narrowing of this comprehensive content/curriculum*", noting that the proposed content was "*overly simplistic"*. Several universities noted the importance of mechanisms to ensure evidence remains up to date: something at threat when imposing core content.

'Research' was the fourth theme (69 hits; sub-concept: research), and focused both on a range of research findings relevant to education and the role of specific research organisations cited in TEEP. Monash asked "... *whether experts in the field would regard the research items relied upon... as 'seminal'*, for example, while Charles Sturt University expressed concerns that "*the Australian Education Research Organisation is used as a primary source of information to support the use of practices. However, it is an external research organisation with a narrow instrumentalist focus*".

Finally, in the literacy theme (19 hits; sub-concept: literacy), providers agreed that literacy must be prioritised. According to the University of Wollongong, for example, "*we welcome the continued focus on the five key elements of literacy and a firm focus on early reading*". Charles Sturt suggested that numeracy was also important, while the University of Queensland suggested a focus on digital literacy.

TRAs

The most significant theme across the two submissions was 'Content' (54 hits), with sub-concepts including content, programs, ITE, existing, accreditation, evidence-based, practice, effective, and research (Figure 2). Interestingly, while the AITSL Board supported the concept of core content,

albeit with "*further exploration and consultation*", the ATRA "*strongly caution against the prescription of core content*" and instead argued for a broader approach where expectations can shift and evolve "*along with best-practice and current research.*" Echoing other stakeholder concerns for balance, AITSL also expressed concerns that the development of core content may lead to *"a select group of [graduate teaching standards] prioritised over others".* 'Practices' was the second most significant theme and reflected the authorising environment surrounding ITE programs and practices (38 hits; sub-concepts: practices, teachers, teaching, education, learning, evidence, student, curriculum). The ATRA suggest that new core content "*be set out in an attachment or addendum to the Standards and Procedures*", while AITSL similarly urged "*possible amendments to the Standards and Procedures to implement the core content in accreditation processes".* Both stakeholders urged against using the TPA to measure core content as it would detract from the core purpose of that instrument. The ATRA highlighted the positive impact of current programs: "*94% of [principal] respondents agreed their graduate had a positive impact on student learning*."

The final themes were 'Providers' (5 hits; sub-concepts: providers) and 'Classroom' (3 hits; sub-concepts: TPA, required). The ATRA "*cautions against imposition of new accreditation requirements that impose an excessive regulatory burden on ITE providers",* noting that "*core content is generally already integrated into ITE programs*". AITSL highlighted collaborations with Macquarie University "*to develop sample ITE program outlines to support program standard[s]*".

Councils of Deans

'ITE' was the most significant theme for CDEs (781 hits; Sub-concepts: ITE, content, providers, programs, teacher, practices, knowledge, and procedure), and there was a particular focus on the visibility of evidence that ITE providers draw on when developing their programs. Like higher education providers, CDEs agreed that "*initial teacher education is evidence and research-based*", with the Queensland CDE noting that Australian higher education providers are best equipped to design teacher education programs and "*are required to evidence their programs ...[in] accreditation"*. The NSW CDE highlighted a particular need to enhance the *"visibility of existing evidence-based practices currently embedded in ITE programs"*, while the Victoria CDE suggested an audit for this purpose: "*Most providers are already doing the things they are telling us to do, but we may not be consistent. A proper audit of ITE programs would identify how much is currently being offered and whether some programs need revision*."

The second theme was 'Foundation' (69 hits; Figure 3), reflecting both the foundational role of ITE in education and the Australian and NSW CDE recommendations for core content to be broadened and reframed as foundation studies. Sub-concepts included: foundation, studies, accreditation, core, curriculum, and teaching. Consistent with the TRAs there was agreement between CDEs that the Accreditation Standards and Procedures should be amended to document any mandated content but that TPAs should not. The NSW CDE highlighted the use of elaborations in the existing NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) accreditation process, and, like some higher education providers,

recommended panels of experts be used to review the core: "*foundation or core content is unlikely to look the same in 20 years' time as it does today*".

The third theme was 'Education' (48 hits; Sub-concepts: education, evidence, students, and practice), in which particular concerns were raised about recommended changes to ITE programs. The Queensland CDE, noting that the Quality Initial Teacher Education review that had preceded TEEP was a "*desktop analysis*" and not a review of accreditation, suggested that accreditation documents should be made public to demonstrate evidence and ongoing improvement. The ACDE expressed concerns about the "*the rapid popularisation of cognitive science inspired practice [and] premature ... mandating ... of education practice underpinned by particular elements of cognitive science*". Both the NSW CDE and NADLATE agreed that the teaching of cognitive phenomena is critical but noted that despite current framings in the TEEP report, information about the brain and memory is not a teaching approach. The Queensland CDE and NADLATE expressed concerns that professional teaching standards related to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had been inappropriately aligned with classroom management and "enablers of learning".

The fourth theme was 'Learning' (40 hits; Sub-concepts: learning, contexts) and reflected holistic understandings of learning and development in education. CDEs expressed both a recognition of the importance of cognition and a call for multidisciplinary foundation studies. The Queensland CDE argued that "*there are ecological, sociological, cultural, and personal dimensions to learning that the TEEP core content (the brain and learning) fail to consider*", for example, while the NSW CDE called for "...*insights from educational psychology, sociology, philosophy and history*" and the ACDE highlighted "*poor specificity regarding students' backgrounds, histories, and contexts and the influence of these sociological factors on learning*". For the Victoria CDE, *"This report suggests disaggregated bodies of knowledge without a sense of the learner."*

The final theme, 'Science' (11 hits; Sub-concepts: science, applied), extended on this narrative by highlighting the risk of overgeneralizing evidence from existing cognitive science research. According to the Queensland CDE, "*the TEEP proposed core is limited to views of cognitive science that align with controlled trials rather than contemporary classroom contexts*". The ACDE similarly highlighted "*... large disconnects between the evidence-base for basic cognitive science and applied cognitive science... applied cognitive science is far more limited and provides a less positive, and more complex picture than the basic science*", and go on to point out that "*arguments made for the application of the content across all contexts and for all students and all curriculum areas do not find support in one of the key seminal texts cited".* This text, Perry et al.'s (2021) systematic review of applied cognitive science in the classroom, states:

> "*We are convinced that basic... and applied cognitive science have the potential to offer, respectively, significant insights into learning and pedagogic practice. We are also convinced, however, that the rapid popularisation of cognitive science inspired practice has led to the premature recommendation—and even mandating—of education practice... Of particular concern is the application of findings from particular subjects, age ranges, and contexts to*

other—often quite dissimilar—areas... members of the profession [must be] skilled to understand... these complexities".

Employers

The most significant theme for employers was 'Teachers' (133 hits; sub-concepts: teachers, learning, students, teaching, teaching, education, practice, classroom, school), with a focus on teachers' necessary knowledge and skills (Figure 4). Like the Councils of Deans, employers highlighted the "*disciplinary... epistemic, and procedural*" knowledge needed to be a teacher. Steiner Education suggested that pedagogy is an art requiring teachers to "*understand human development, nurture their own artistic abilities, creatively apply artistic materials and teaching strategies in lessons, and cultivate an aesthetic classroom and school environment*", while the NSW Department of Education suggested that "*the Brain and Learning is an excellent opportunity to include trauma-informed practice*" and the National Catholic Education Commission recommend a focus on the "*the developmental stages of children and young adults including the impact of trauma on brain development... and strategies to foster positive wellbeing*". Interestingly, the Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn differed from other employers in their strong focus on core content to the exclusion of other approaches: "*There is no time to waste in school, so we need to teach as efficiently and effectively as possible [using] the Science of Learning... this links nicely to Rosenshein's Principles of Instruction [and] Cognitive Load Theory".*

Many employers focused on the importance of teachers' ongoing development of this knowledge and skills throughout their careers. The Northern Territory Department of Education highlighted that ITE is designed to "*meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the graduate career stage, and like any other profession, graduate teachers require supported induction to the profession and ongoing quality professional development*", while Steiner Education Australia argued for "*continued engaged, purposeful lifelong learning"* and the State of Victoria highlighted their Teaching Excellence Program "*for highly skilled classroom teachers to support high quality professional practice, disciplinary knowledge and deeper understanding of the science of learning*".

The second most significant theme, 'ITE' (110 hits), focused on the breadth of offerings and the regulatory environments for ITE. Sub-concepts included ITE, programs, content, practices, core, evidence-based, and support. Catholic Schools NSW noted the need for "*balance between the science of learning and the art of teaching*", while the National Catholic Education Commission suggested that "*core content should not occupy a disproportionate amount of time in ITE*" and the NSW Department of Education expressed concerns about "*the way core content might be designed and undermine the amount of time available for other important content*". While there were varied perspectives regarding a single national regulator, the NSW Department of Education went on to highlight regulatory frameworks in NSW as examples of best practice for capturing this content:

"NSW ITE providers have long-developed approaches to addressing these requirements and embedding necessary content in relevant units... NESA stipulates that all NSW ITE programs

address essential teaching area-specific discipline and pedagogical practices that align with the relevant NSW syllabuses."

The third theme, 'Knowledge' (33 hits, sub-concepts: knowledge, context), considered issues of generalizability and application. Steiner Education Australia recommended "*innovation in practice developed in response to diverse contexts, rather than relying on meta-studies and assuming that application will be largely universal*", while the NSW Department of Education stated that *"knowledge and instructional practices would need to be contextualised and demonstrated in different school contexts on professional experience"*. In contrast, the Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn argued for a more standardised approach: *"exploring the instruction that will have the most impact, that is efficient and effective is essential... to understand the specifics of translating the knowledge learnt into the classroom, there also needs to be demonstrations of practice.*"

Teacher Associations

'Teachers' was the most significant theme (363 hits, sub-concepts: teachers, ITE, education, learning, content, programs, support, knowledge, classroom, evidence, research, and school) and reflected teachers' professional identities and competencies (Figure 5). Like higher education providers and Councils of Deans, the Primary English Teaching Association of Australia argued that "*Education is informed by multiple disciplines including social psychology, linguistics, sociology, cultural and literary studies, all of which are necessary to developing crucial teacher competencies*" and the Australian Council of TESOL Organisations highlighted both the "*multi-disciplinary knowledge base*" and *"extensive literature on pedagogic content knowledge [that places] professional judgement and meta reflection at the core of teacher development and effective teaching".* The Australian Special Education Principals Association suggested that "*to equip new teachers with the skills to apply ... knowledge and understanding in the classroom, theory and practice in initial teacher education must be inseparable*", while the Australian Education Union noted the role of professional judgement: "*it is important to ensure... that the role of teachers' professional judgement in interpreting research evidence and adapting teaching and learning strategies to local school contexts and diverse student needs is emphasised in ITE programs*".

The second most significant theme was 'Students' (238 hits, sub-concepts: students, teaching, practices, practice, evidence-based, and approach) and had a focus on the breadth of knowledge and support that teacher education students need to develop. The Institute for Special Educators stated that although "S*tudent teachers need to be placed with a skilled teacher for their practicum experience.... this is not always the case. It is important, therefore, that the students are mentored on site by university staff who have had a successful teaching career and who also include evidence-based practice*". The Australian Early Childhood Teachers Association joined most employers, but not the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, in advocating for greater depth in TEEP: "*there are numerous evidence-based practices in addition to those noted... an eclectic approach is required for quality teaching and learning*". The Australian Education Union suggested that teacher education students must be supported to understand the nature of evidence itself:

"...constant measurement and data collection is not the meaning of "evidence-based" that would support a high-quality workforce and education system, or improved outcomes. Nor is "evidence based teaching practice" to be used as euphemism for the imposition of direct instruction approaches or programs that limit teachers' pedagogical autonomy."

The smallest theme was 'Cognitive' (7 hits, sub-concepts: cognitive; a fourth theme, 'Wide', had only 4 hits and did not produce meaningful data). The Primary English Teaching Association urged caution in attempting to "*reduce education to brain activity alone*", noting that "*too often the findings of neuroscience and the cognitive sciences are used to make broad policy and pedagogic claims*", while the Australian Council of TESOL Associations suggested that the TEEP Discussion Paper "*conflates the fields of brain science, cognitive science and educational psychology*".

Educational Research Groups

The most significant theme was 'Teachers' (see Figure 6) and focused on teachers' progression from study to classroom (76 hits; subthemes: teachers, programs, ITE, practices, education, practice, and support). With regards to the political climate, the Australian Council for Educational Research argued that "*reviews of teacher education have consistently targeted the quality of ITE programs without comprehensively examining the transition into practice*." For the AERO board, however, new and redesigned programs will "*better achieve an integration of theory and practice*". The Australian Council of Educational Research went on to query the expectations placed on ITE programs, stating that they "...*support efforts to ensure that graduate teachers are 'classroom ready' but suggest that classrooms, schools, and education systems must also be 'graduate teacher ready'*".

The second most significant theme was 'Teaching' (68 hits, sub-concepts: teaching, content, research, accreditation, evidence-based, knowledge, approach, core, and evidence), and focused on the authorising environment governing teaching in Australia. For AERO's Board, the Discussion Paper highlighted necessary reforms. To ensure these reforms "*have their intended outcome in improving the quality of ITE*", the Board recommended nationally consistent Stage 2 accreditation with core content documented via amended accreditation templates, "*mandatory inclusion of core content within the nominated impact measures*", the annual selection of specific program impact measures "*for national shared scrutiny*", and "... *a new national oversight process, conducted by AERO, to review program documentation for research and reporting*". For MERGA, however, the proposed reforms go too far in suggesting a restricted range of teaching approaches not supported by the literature. They note that "*a hallmark of rigorous research is close attention to the sources of that research"*.

The third theme was 'Learning' (23 hits; sub-concepts: learning, school) and focused on the knowledge and practical skills teachers need to promote student learning. For ACER, for example, "*highly effective teaching requires a strong foundation of deep disciplinary knowledge, understanding of how learners typically progress within a discipline, pedagogical content knowledge... and a repertoire of effective evidence-based pedagogical practices*". Interestingly, differences between stakeholders emerged in the extent to which higher education providers could be trusted with the task of educating students about learning. In contrast to AERO's Board, who highlighted the need for ITE reform and

program redesign, ACER suggested that "*pitting ITE providers against school educators based on a supposed theory-practice divide will not achieve a coherent system of teacher education*". MERGA queried the research base on which the original TEEP Discussion Paper was based, noting that many of the sources given are syntheses, not peer reviewed studies ("*the 'evidence' summarised in Table 1.2 links evidence for all three practices to a single blog post from a senior researcher at AERO*"), or cite references between 25 and 40 years old ("... *often dated, relies heavily on a single area of research ... or misrepresents research intended for a different cohort of learners*"). The fourth and fifth themes, 'Cognitive' and 'Processes', were artifacts of Leximancer's sub-theme mapping process but had no hits not otherwise captured by other themes. For this reason, we did not consider these themes further.

Advocates

'Students' (104 hits, sub-concepts: students, learning, need, ITE, classroom, classrooms, programs, gifted) was the most significant theme (Figure 7), and focused on specific advocates' perceptions of how to support students with specific needs. For the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, for example, *"identification and assessment* [of giftedness] *are significantly more efficiently implemented by teachers who undertook specialist studies in gifted education."* For Dyslexia Victoria, *"it is self-evident, that when students cannot read, they suffer poor self-esteem, can be targets of bullying and can demonstrate behaviours of concern out of shame, avoidance, boredom, and frustration, often not being able to access classroom learning."* The Australian Association of Special Education urged that interventions used to support individuals have a sound research base, noting that many are "*marketed with extravagant claims*".

The second theme, 'Teachers' (95 hits, sub-concepts: teachers, learning, education, teaching, knowledge, programs, school, preparation), focused on teachers' own preparedness and expertise in meeting student needs. Dyslexia Victoria Support expressed concern that in ITE *"the issue of science and evidence is rarely discussed, much less privileged... some schools currently use reading programs that have been completely discredited such as Balanced Literacy or Reading Recovery, and some use evidence-based programs such as the evolving body of research known as the Science of Reading."* The Isolated Children's Parents' Association suggested incentives to support teachers in regional and remote areas and noted that a failure to equip such teachers with knowledge of special needs education will contribute to poor retention rates.

The third theme, 'Evidence-based' (11 hits, sub-concepts: evidence-based), overlapped with both larger themes in focusing on the nature of evidence that should underpin effective practice. While Dyslexia Victoria Support endorsed approaches recommended in the core content, the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented highlighted concern for a "*one-size fits all*" approach: "*The practices that have been highlighted as evidence-based by the panel serve to water down [existing] differentiated practices.* The final theme, 'Learners' (7 hits, sub-concepts: learners), focused on the diversity of learners in schools including "*students with a disability, First Nations learners, gifted/talented learners, twice exceptional learners... refugee students, ... etc".*

Individuals

Nine individuals made submissions to Reform 1. The most significant theme was 'Teachers' (310 hits, sub-concepts: teachers, students, education, teaching, ITE, classrooms, programs, practice; Figure 8) and related to gaps or omissions in teacher preparation in ITE and the profession. One individual highlighted that the range of professional development teachers are offered "*relate more to 'wellbeing' or 'frills' than academics*" while another suggested that teacher education had yet to catch up with the trend of multilingual classrooms.

The second theme was 'Learning' (165 hits; sub-concepts: learning, practices, evidence, context, cognitive, content). One individual stated that "*Human cognitive architecture is the basis of learning, and it should be constantly and consistently referred to*", while another advocated for greater attention to the cognitive load experienced by English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) learners. Contrasting with these perspectives, one individual stated that ''*The brain and learning' demonstrates a very limited understanding of teaching and learning, and how learning is constructed outside of cognitive science*", and another queried the strength of AERO's conclusions cited in TEEP:

> "*AERO lists its 'seminal works' for this rigorous evidence base... What do Perry et al, therefore, actually conclude on managing cognitive load? We quote extensively: There are numerous studies showing appreciable positive effects for strategies to manage cognitive load within the evidence we have. There are also appreciable numbers of neutral and negative results, suggesting complexity in the principles and challenges of making it work in practice.*"

The third largest theme was 'School' (87 hits; sub-concepts: school, curriculum), and considered how schools could better meet student needs. For one individual, "*one of the mantras of the full inclusion ideology proponent is 'All means all'*". Another suggested that "*It seems doubtful whether current [classroom] arrangements ... are best designed to enhance imagination and creativity".* Two individuals discussed the importance of self-regulated learning.

The final theme was 'Support' (24 hits, sub-concepts: support), and had two distinct foci: support for teachers, and support for the TEEP report. One individual advocated for in-school support for teachers who supervise placements, for example, while another suggested that teachers too often feel abandoned, with implications for retention. Two queried the conclusions of TEEP: "*What evidence is there to suggest that these 'core content' areas are not currently being addressed in ITE? I argue that evidence is needed to support this implication from the expert panel*"; "*the Panel is pressing for what is in effect a 'state theory of learning' which is less comprehensive and which its own literature does not support, but, rather, effectively undermines*".

Other Stakeholders

The most significant theme was 'Teacher' (139 hits, sub-concepts: teachers, students, teaching, learning, knowledge, practices, classroom, curriculum, school, enabling), with a mixed focus on the skills teachers need (Figure 9). For Educational Research Solutions, universities must "*devote significant time and expertise to enabling ITE students to produce teaching plans – commencing on day one in their classroom*". For the Asia Education Foundation, in turn, an 'Asia literate teacher' "*possesses expert*

knowledge of content, assessment strategies and pedagogy for teaching Asia related curriculum", while for the Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium, "*effective teaching is about the weighting of various pedagogical practices while interacting with the context*".

The second most significant theme was 'ITE' (49 hits, sub-concepts: ITE, programs, content), and focused on a range of issues specific to those stakeholders. For the Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium, "*collaboration across institutions and activities, such as moderation, adds value to the program and stakeholders".* For Transforming Education Australasia, "*ITE programs need to recognise [Steiner and Montessori] pedagogies and their place in the Australian landscape... this is not recognised anywhere in the [TEEP report]*". For Education Research Solutions, "*a review of disruptive behavior is urgently required, and it has to begin with ITE programs*".

The third theme was 'Education' (42 hits, sub-concepts: education, research, practice) and the smallest theme was 'Evidence' (18 hits, sub-concepts: evidence). Both had a specific focus on research and theory underpinning education and shared substantial overlap. Education Research Solutions suggest that "*ITE graduates... undertake their own action research... to discover 'what works'*", while Transforming Education Australasia advocate for "*rich application of research into teaching practices [involving] ongoing university/school partnerships*" and the National Advocates for Arts Education suggests that "*the notion of 'evidence-base' needs to be expanded beyond the typical large scale quantitative studies*".

Summary

Higher education providers focused particularly on the professional readiness skills that teachers need for the classroom, the use of evidence in ITE programs, which most agreed was already strong, and adequacy of the proposed core content and its accompanying literature. Councils of Deans likewise argued that initial teacher education is already evidence-based, as required both in accreditation and professional practice, while TRAs focused on the accrediting environment. Higher education providers, Councils of Deans, AITSL and the ATRA suggested that Standards and Procedures should be amended rather than TPAs. Employers and teachers' associations both focused on the breadth of interdisciplinary knowledge required for teaching, with employers also focusing on the need for ongoing professional learning and development. Within the educational research group, ACER highlighted a need for education systems to be 'graduate teacher ready'. The AERO board strongly endorsed the core content, while MERGA, like some higher education providers, queried the evidence-base underpinning this content. Advocates and other groups tended to focus on their own specific interests, including regional and remote education, Asian education, science education, and giftedness and special needs, while individuals adopted a range of perspectives.

Discussion

Australian stakeholders produced a wide range of submissions in response to the TEEP Discussion Paper proposal for the mandating of new core content in ITE (Reform 1). Common themes running across stakeholder groups included the extent to which ITE does or does not use evidence-based practices, agreement or disagreement with the core content, the need for nuance when

considering the generalizability of research findings from the cognitive sciences, and the extent to which the proposed reforms address real and known issues in education.

The extent to which ITE does or does not use evidence-based practices

A strong theme for higher education providers and councils of deans was a commitment to evidence-based practices, with submissions commonly highlighting their adherence to evidence in foundation studies and noting AITSL and TEQSA requirements that programs include evidence and research. Counter to suggestions within the TEEP Discussion Paper and in media releases from the Federal Education Minister, Hon Jason Clare (2023a), multiple providers also specifically highlighted their coverage of cognitive science phenomena, classroom management, and other aspects of the proposed core content. This was echoed by the ATRA, representing accreditation bodies across Australia. Where tone differed from that in the TEEP Discussion Paper, however, was in the conflation of well-established phenomena regarding the operations of the brain and learning with specific instructional practices that, for stakeholders, have not been established in the contexts to which they are being mandated (a theme we expand on below).

One difficulty identified by some providers and councils, including Southern Cross University, the NSW Council of Deans, and the Victorian Council of Deans, was the visibility of what happens and where. While all providers must demonstrate evidence in their programs against the Australian Professional Teaching Standards, there have not previously been any systematic mappings of core content across the sector. Nor are there mechanisms to reassure government or the general public. AERO's own commissioned research for TEEP provided an initial mapping with six providers by searching for keywords within subject outlines (also see Buckingham & Meeks, 2019, for similar approaches to reading), yet outlines are often scant and may use different terminology (e.g. 'memory' vs. 'information processing'). No attempts have been made to ask all providers or TRAs about these inclusions: thus, claims that ITE providers do not currently teach core content topics are not based on the kinds of robust evidence that would be expected to drive Federal policy change.

Agreement or disagreement with the core content

Some individual stakeholders strongly endorsed mandating the proposed core content in the current form. Among the educational research group this included the AERO board, who suggested several additional reforms including a national oversight process conducted by their own organisation, and among employers this included the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, who noted that the core represented the most efficient and effective teaching practices. Several advocates were also supportive, including Dyslexia Victoria Support and the Australian Association of Special Education, as were some individuals.

For larger stakeholder groups, however, including higher education providers, councils of deans, employers, and teachers' associations, together with educational research groups ACER and MERGA, the prevailing attitude toward the mandating of core content was one of caution. A systematic review of ITE curriculum commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in England (Perry et al., 2019) indicated a dearth of information or evidence on what makes a successful

curriculum for initial teacher education. Over and above the use of evidence, stakeholder groups in our study were particularly concerned at the narrow focus of the core content and highlighted a breadth of additional understandings and insights relevant to the learner. Other topics noted in submissions included psychological content related to student-teacher relationships, wellbeing, mental health, creativity, and motivation, which have substantial interactions with cognition and learning, and interdisciplinary insights from sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, and other disciplines. The ATRA went further than many providers, strongly recommending against the mandating of core content, while AITSL offered in-principle support: albeit with opportunities to consult with relevant experts before the content is fixed.

The TEEP final report, Strong Beginnings, acknowledges these additional areas of focus and suggests that the mandated core content should not be treated as exhaustive. For some stakeholders, however, there was a concern that tight curriculum space may make the sensible integration and sequencing of other important content challenging. For example, the NSW Department of Education and The National Catholic Education Commission each expressed concern that mandated core content might occupy a disproportionate amount of time relative to other content. The Victorian CDE expressed a concern the TEEP Discussion Paper presents "disaggregated bodies of knowledge", and the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented suggested that the "one size fits all" approach to core content would water down differentiation. Taken together, these findings suggested more widespread dissatisfaction regarding the design and breadth of core content than is conveyed in the final Strong Beginnings report.

The need for nuance and concerns for generalizability

Above we note concerns from multiple stakeholder groups that the core content suggested in the TEEP Discussion Paper included concepts from the cognitive sciences that have the potential to be applied or generalized in ways that are not appropriate to the context. The University of Sydney, whose Vice Chancellor chaired the TEEP committee, commended the panel for their excellent analysis: however, their own School of Education and Social Work expressed strong disagreement with the canon of evidence provided. Teacher association stakeholders, such as the Primary English Teaching Association, suggested that findings from cognitive science are too often used to make broad policy and pedagogic claims, while the Australian Education Union suggested that "evidence-based" is not synonymous with direct instruction.

Employers focused on contextualisation in their 'Knowledge' theme, expressing the common concern that research evidence must be carefully applied to the classroom and that the appropriateness of different practices may not be universal (the Catholic Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn was an exception to this theme, noting that demonstrations of practice are necessary for translation but that the most efficient and effective approaches should be drawn from the science of learning). Councils of Deans extended this point in both the 'Education' and 'Science' themes. While councils typically acknowledged the importance of deep foundational knowledge in cognitive science, they highlighted worrying risks in overgeneralizing from basic to applied science, and from contexts with evidence of success to contexts where the evidence was lacking. The Ofsted review of ITE curriculum in the UK (Perry et al., 2019) similarly found that although evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning

are important, evidence varies between age phases of schooling and there is no common curriculum to suit all phases.

Finally, several stakeholders highlighted concerns that the seminal works recommended by AERO do not always support the summaries provided in the TEEP Discussion Paper. The Mathematics Education Research Group Australia and others noted that many references were not peer reviewed, or were older, while the Australian Council of Deans of Education and others noted that a seminal text in the TEEP Discussion Paper, Perry et al. (2021), recommended *against* the mandating of specific teaching practices from cognitive science: believing it to be concerning and premature. This text, a large systematic review of cognitive science in the classroom, found that many of the instructional recommendations drawn from cognitive science were not yet established across all ages and disciplines. This means that specific strategies that work best in one disciplinary or developmental context may not be best suited in another.

In the final report, Strong Beginnings, the TEEP panel make some reference to these concerns for generalizability: "*some stakeholders highlighted areas of the core content where further specificity would be beneficial.... This included concerns about the direct application of cognitive science to teaching and learning".* Curiously, however, this distinction was not addressed.

Addressing real and known issues

The final meta-theme to emerge in stakeholder submissions was the extent to which the recommendations would address real and known issues. This trend matches that observed in other countries, where ITE quality is frequently made the scapegoat for other sector-wide concerns (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hardy et al., 2020; Trippestad et al., 2017).

One such issue related to the use of evidence, which we address above, while a second related to graduate readiness. Graduate readiness is important: indeed, for higher education providers, the largest theme ('Students') related to the development of professional readiness skills that must be brought into the classroom. In the TEEP Discussion Paper, a perceived lack of readiness among ITE students is suggested as a key cause of the teacher workforce shortage. In discussions about TEEP, Minister Clare (2023b) has suggested that 50% of students leave the profession in the first five years. Yet the latest figures from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) conducted by AITSL suggest that attrition over first five years of teaching is closer to 5% than 50% (AITSL, 2024). The Australian Council of Educational Research criticized arguments linking ITE quality to attrition for attempting to pit providers against employers, and for failing to examine the transition to practice: teachers must be classroom ready, but so too must education systems be graduate teacher ready. Employers themselves also suggested a more nuanced approach. The Northern Territory Department of Education noted in their submission that ITE is intended to support teachers to meet graduate standards, with employers then supporting "induction and ongoing quality professional development". The State of Victoria noted their successful program to enhance teachers' disciplinary knowledge and to engage with the science of learning. Finally, and consistent with research evidence (e.g. Carroll et al., 2022; Collie & Mansfield, 2022; Rajendran et al., 2020), several teachers' associations, advocates, and individuals suggest other causes of teacher burnout and attrition including workplace stress.

Taken together, these findings suggest that ITE providers and employers are each aware of the need to support graduate teachers as they move into their career, and data indicates that for the most part, there are signs of success: teachers do remain in the profession for the first five years (AITSL, 2024). Such a need is consistent with that in other professions, including engineering, medicine, business, where the short duration of university education is acknowledged and where graduates are expected to be supported within the systems they are employed. To address teacher workforce shortages, systemic issues relating to workplace stress and workload must be addressed.

Conclusion

The aim of the current paper was to map stakeholder perspectives on the proposal for core content in ITE in Australia. As predicted, given their research backgrounds, higher education providers and councils of deans focused more strongly on the evidence-base currently underpinning ITE than did employers, teachers' associations, or other stakeholders. Interestingly, however, views regarding the breadth of knowledge needed for teaching were similar across most stakeholders. Further, both providers and employers suggested that graduates would continue to need support as they transitioned into the profession. In contrast to the conclusions drawn in the Strong Beginnings final report, which suggested broad agreement with the core content as presented, large stakeholder groups more commonly called for nuance: for greater breadth in content, for more evidence of current practices, for differentiation across phases of schooling, and for caution in mandating specific teaching practices for which the evidence is not yet clear.

Paper 3: 'Quality and consequence': Interrogating the drive for new performance indicators and funding levers in Australian Initial Teacher Education

Performance indicators and other accountability measures are increasingly common in higher education internationally. Consistent with this trend, the Australian Federal Government's Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) recently recommended new reforms to strengthen the link between performance and funding of initial teacher education (ITE) via (i) the measurement and publication of ITE performance on four categories of indicators, including student selection, student retention, graduate readiness, and the employment outcomes of recent graduates and early career teachers, and (ii) the use of transition, excellence, or compact-based funding as levers for driving quality. While the proposal for the adoption of performance indicators to measure the quality of ITE has since been accepted by Australian Education ministers, our inductive content analysis of 56 stakeholder responses revealed a divergence of views on the validity of the proposed performance measures and the potential impacts of these indicators on student diversity and graduation numbers. Higher education providers, Deans of Education, employers, teachers' associations, and teacher regulatory authorities were consistent in arguing that the proposed indicators were not direct measures of quality and may have perverse or unintended consequences, with providers incentivised to "game the system". Some stakeholders also queried assumptions that current accreditation processes are not sufficient to drive quality. We discuss implications of this reform for implementation and policy, noting important anomalies between stakeholder feedback and recommendations made in the final TEEP report.

Keywords: performance indicators, funding, Initial Teacher Education, accountability, higher education, stakeholder

‘Quality and Consequence’ in Initial Teacher Education: Interrogating the Drive for a Program Performance-funding Nexus in Australia

The insertion of performance indicators in the education sector is now ubiquitous across nations (Rizvi, 2014), enabling governments to incentivise action and financially reward performance in line with current priorities (Dougherty et al., 2016). However, there are concerns regarding their success. While such measures are aimed at enhancing the provision of high-quality education in schools and universities, they have also been criticised as poor proxies for quality: enabling accountability and compliance (Harvey, 2007) yet raising questions about the narrowness of particular indicators (Brooks, 2021), the importance of context (de Boer et al., 2015), and the potential for unintended consequences (Day, 2019; Dougherty et al., 2016; Gaertner & Brunner, 2018). It is in this context that we consider how diverse educational stakeholders viewed recent Australian policy proposals to implement new performance indicators as measures of the performance and quality of initial teacher education (ITE).

Below we provide a brief overview of the use of performance indicators in schools and higher education globally. We then outline new Australian federal government proposals for “*Strengthening the Link between Performance and Funding of ITE Programs”* via the application of performance indices and related funding support. Using inductive content analysis, we analyse themes in the public submissions to these reforms to determine the perspectives of diverse stakeholder groups with different motivations and experience.

Performance and Education

The introduction of performance indicators in higher education has been more recent than in the school sector yet shares common characteristics and builds on these. At the school level, the measurement and comparison of student performance within and across settings is a well-established mechanism of government oversight and quality assurance (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012) while at the same time acting as a lever for attracting families to schools; steering institutional practice, authorising state intervention; and establishing new school markets and quasi-markets via the fragmentation of school provision (Ball & Youdell, 2008; Rizvi et al., 2014; Kenway, 2017). At the university level, while performance indicators have long been linked to national student enrolment data and bibliometric measures of research productivity and impact (Taylor, 2001), governments increasingly also require providers to use large datasets and unique student identifiers to track and report students’ performance across time, attrition, equity grouping, and graduate destinations. They have increasingly also augmented these moves by the establishment of student-consumer ombudsmen-style overseeing agencies (Beerkens, 2022; Sarrico, 2022).

Accountability mechanisms do the important work of exposing and tracking inequities and disproportionate representation across educational trajectories and outcomes, enabling governments and communities to demand that state-funded education institutions serve disadvantaged communities better and make efforts to interrupt their historic role in reproducing educational privilege and exclusion (Woessmann, 2009). In the UK, for example, the Government-established Independent Office for Students introduced a requirement that Higher Education Providers not only track student completion

and performance by demographic group but also *improve outcomes* amongst non-traditional and first-in-family university students and *close gaps* between various student cohorts. While such goals are admirable, the imposition of performance indicators has nonetheless led to consequences described in the literature as 'perverse' (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Penn, 2023). Institutions and educators develop processes and engage in practices designed expressly to maximise performance against specific indicators, even when this might be at the expense of quality pedagogy or of inclusion for the very same equity groups that these performance policies had hoped to support (Penn, 2023). It is in this wider policy context, and in the face of a persistent teacher shortage, that Australian Initial Teacher Education (ITE) — delivered almost exclusively through Higher Education Providers — has come under renewed scrutiny.

New Performance Levers in Australian Teacher Education

Consistent with global trends, ITE in Australia has been subjected to intense and ongoing reform efforts (Bourke & Ryan, 2023). In September 2022, the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) was established by the Australian Federal Government in response to the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) review to consider how best to enhance the quality of ITE in Australia. In May 2023, four areas for ITE reform were proposed in a Discussion Paper released for stakeholder feedback, and in July 2023, the final report entitled *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel 2023* was released. Noting that current accreditation processes focus on minimum standards and not ongoing quality enhancement, the panel recommended in the second reform area to "s*trengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE programs*" via i) the measurement and public reporting of ITE program quality against a transparent set of performance indicators and ii) the provision of modest performance funding. The four sets of performance indicators proposed include ITE student selection, retention, classroom readiness, and transitions into the profession (See Table 1).

To our knowledge, no other Australian degree qualifications have performance measures against which the quality of providers might be asserted. Drawing on Brooks (2021, after Harvey, 2007), who has outlined a four-fold typology of measurement of the quality of ITE globally including *inputs* (e.g. characteristics and prior academic achievement of candidates), *processes* (e.g. program content and cohesiveness); *outputs* (e.g. performance against standards, employment rates); and *perspectival measures* (e.g. graduate and employer satisfaction), the TEEP panel's recommended student selection indicators represent input measures of ITE program quality. Retention and transition indicators can be understood as output measures of program quality, capturing how many ITE students graduate and how many are employed, while classroom readiness indicators are arguably diluted and perspectival proxies for quality.

Table 1. Proposed ITE performance indicators

Category	Focus	Proposed Indicators
Selection	Entry and participation of diverse and high-quality candidates to ITE	Proportion of students who are First Nations; from regional and remote locations; low socio-economic status; school leavers with an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) above 80; or enrolled in STEM subjects
Retention	Students retained over the course of ITE from entry to graduation	First year attrition and six-year completion rates
Classroom readiness	Students' perceived preparedness for teaching and satisfaction with course quality	Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) 'preparedness to teach' question and Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching (QILT) survey 'student satisfaction' question
Transition	Employment outcomes of recent graduates and early career teachers	Proportion of graduates employed upon graduation; registered and employed after two years; and employed in regional and remote areas, low SES areas, and STEM subjects

The three potential funding mechanisms for strengthening the link between ITE program performance and funding suggested in the TEEP Discussion Paper included a transition fund to support Higher Education Providers to improve performance and offset costs associated with incorporating proposed new core content into curricula, an excellence fund to support selected Higher Education Providers who are taking a leadership role in supporting improved performance across the sector, and/or the implementation of mission-based compacts to ensure Higher Education Providers are accountable to the Federal government for improving on areas of underperformance. Together with the application and public reporting of ITE performance indicators, which are intended to have implications for reputation and market share by informing students' choice of provider, these mechanisms to link ITE performance and funding are designed to incentivise Higher Education Providers to strive for excellence and improvement in ITE program quality. However, as noted above, prior scholarship has offered a variety of perspectives on what constitutes quality (Brooks, 2021), and there is potential for 'high' performance on some measures to have unintended consequences for other indicators. Foresight and caution are therefore needed to mitigate any unintended consequences to these intended policy reforms (de Boer et al., 2015).

The Present Study

Given frequent Government proposals to reform ITE, there is urgent need for research into the views of other policy actors about ITE program impact (Bourke & Ryan, 2023). The aim of this study was to understand diverse stakeholder feedback regarding the TEEP proposal to adopt four categories of performance indicators measuring ITE quality, the selection and public reporting of those indicators, and new funding mechanisms for ITE programs including transition and reward funding. By mapping public

submissions of nine key stakeholder groups to the TEEP Discussion Paper, including Higher Education Providers, employers, teachers' associations, and others, we aimed to interrogate the alignment of stakeholder submissions regarding these reforms to the final TEEP recommendations.

We drew on methodological approaches from Jongenelis et al. (2023), who mapped the content of individual public submissions and industry submissions to a new regulatory change from the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration on the availability and regulation of e-cigarettes in Australia. We collated all public stakeholder submissions to the TEEP Discussion Paper that referenced or responded to *Reform Area 2*, *Strengthening the Link between Performance and Funding of ITE Programs*, and used inductive content analysis to map responses across distinct stakeholder groups including HEPs, employers, teachers' associations, and others.

We hypothesised that Higher Education Providers involved in the delivery of ITE would oppose the recommendation that ITE performance be measured and published via the four proposed categories of indicators, on the basis that such measures have been demonstrated to have perverse consequences in other education sectors (Penn, 2023) and collectively may indicate system health rather than individual ITE program quality. Further, such measures are proxies for quality rather than direct measures and are therefore susceptible to outside influence (see Day, 2019; Gaertner & Brunner, 2018). We hypothesised particular concerns related to the measurement and publication of performance on graduate employment outcomes: although ITE students typically rate their programs positively (QILT, 2022), employment outcomes fall outside the direct control of providers. We also hypothesised concern over the use of student self-report data to indicate 'classroom readiness': while recent Australian evidence suggests that graduate teachers are as effective in the classroom as more experienced teachers (Gore et al., 2024; Graham et al., 2020), the use of student report risks the unintended consequence of providers prioritising satisfaction above rigor. We made no predictions regarding the perspectives of employers, teachers' associations, or other stakeholder groups who do not deliver ITE.

Method

To align with the focus of the study on stakeholder viewpoints, we drew on the final report of TEEP, *Strong Beginnings*, which highlights the roles of Education Ministers, higher education providers, teacher regulatory authorities (TRAs), ITE programs, and school systems in reforming ITE (2023, p. 8). We used this framework as a guide, identifying higher education providers, TRAs, Councils of Deans, employers, and teachers' associations as the units of analysis. We next reviewed submissions made to the proposed TEEP reforms and identified four additional stakeholder groups: educational research groups, advocates, individuals, and 'other'.

We used Leximancer, an automatic inductive content analysis tool for large datasets, to identify emergent themes and sub-concepts for each stakeholder group. All publicly available submissions to the TEEP Discussion paper were downloaded from www.education.gov.au (n = 108). Those that provided full textual responses to recommendations in Reform Area 2 (n = 56) were then collated by stakeholder (see Table 2), cleaned of pre-amble, author affiliations, and references, and uploaded to Leximancer v5.0 for processing. Because Leximancer uses machine learning to identify themes and sub-concepts, operating without researcher input, findings that emerge are genuinely inductive (Haynes et al., 2018). We elected

Guassian processing settings over topic network processing to maximise the discovery of indirect relationships between themes (Haynes et al., 2018). Similar terms, such as 'student' and 'students', were merged and irrelevant codes, such as 'want', were removed. Although Leximancer allows themes to be renamed following revision of the theme sub-concepts and associated text, we elected to retain the original theme labels to ensure transparency. Following processing, visual maps of emergent themes and sub-concepts were produced (see Campbell et al., 2011).

Table 2. Stakeholders responding to TEEP Reform Area 2.

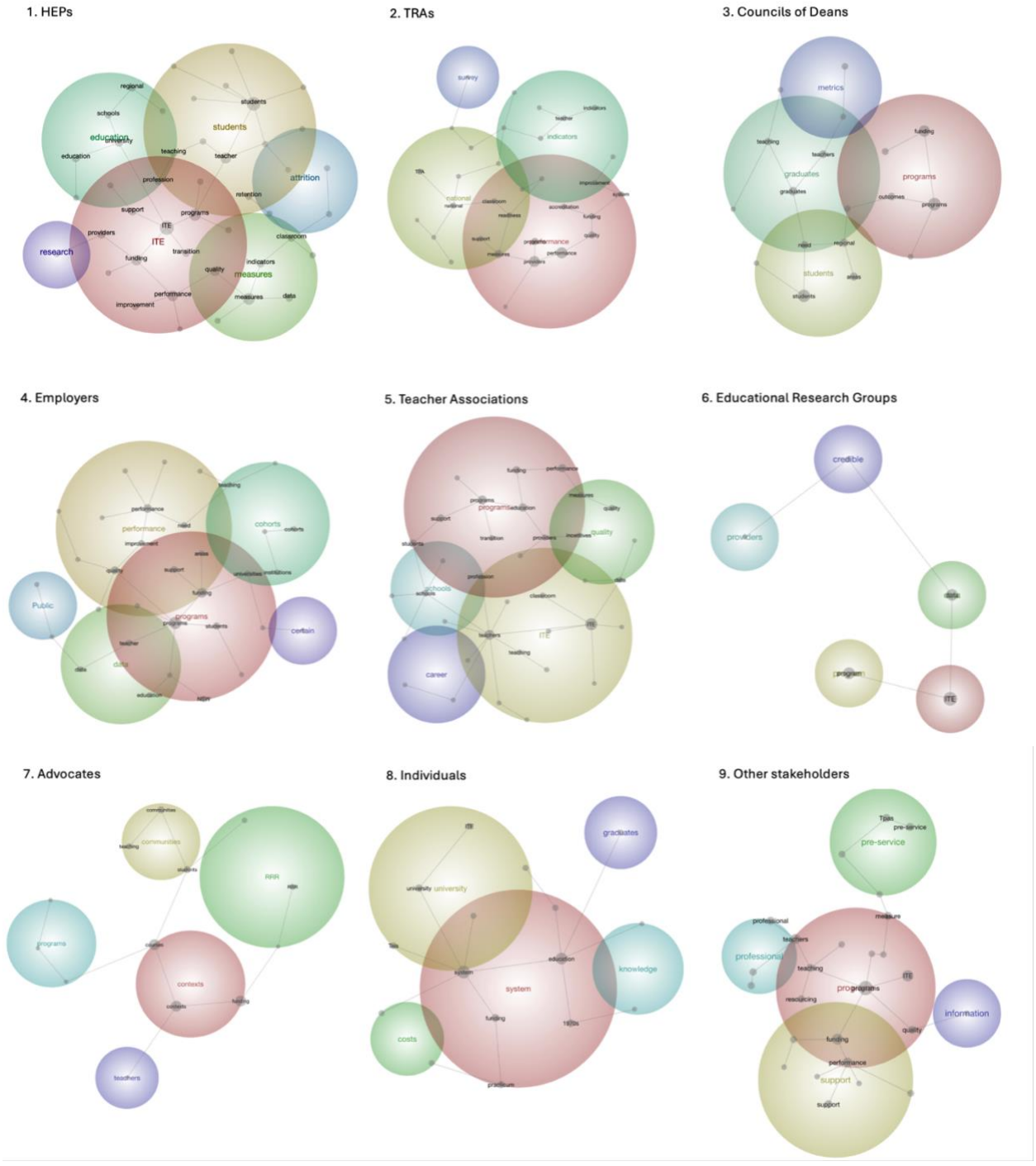
Group	Stakeholders*
HEPs	Australian Catholic University National School of Education, Australian Catholic University, Charles Darwin, Charles Sturt, Central Queensland University, Edith Cowan, Flinders, Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia, La Trobe, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Monash, Queensland University of Technology, School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith, Southern Cross, Swinburne, the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work, Teacher Education Academics at the University of Technology Sydney, Teachers and Teaching Research Centre at University of Newcastle, the University of Newcastle School of Education, and the Universities of Canberra, Queensland, South Australia, Southern Queensland, Tasmania, Sunshine Coast, and Wollongong.
TRAs	The combined Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
Councils of Deans	Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), the Network of Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Education (NADLATE), NSW Council of Deans of Education (NSW CDE), Victoria Council of Deans of Education (Victoria CDE), and Queensland Council of Deans of Education (Queensland CDE)
Employers	NSW Department of Education, State of Victoria, Northern Territory Department of Education, National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Schools NSW, Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.
Teachers' associations	Australian Council of State School Organisations, Australian Council of TESOL Organisations, Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network, Australian Education Union, Australian Primary Principals Association, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers Association NSW, Independent Education Union of Australia.
Educational researchers	Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) Board
Advocates	Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, Dyslexia Victoria Support, Regional Education Commissioner
Individuals	Blinded (n = 2)
Other	Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium, National Advocates for Arts Education, Transforming Education Australasia.

* An additional two universities (UNE, anonymous) and one teachers' association also made public submissions, referenced in the final "Strong Beginnings" report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel.

Unfortunately, these submissions do not appear on the government website and could not be included in our analyses.

Results

Figure 1. *Leximancer themes in response to TEEP Reform Area 2 for each stakeholder group*



Higher Education Providers

The most significant theme to emerge from the submissions of higher education providers was 'ITE' (284 hits; sub-concepts: programs, performance, funding, providers, support, transition, profession, improvement), with commentary focused on the costs and consequences for ITE programs of the proposed reforms regarding funding. Most providers strongly welcomed the provision of transition funding, preferring measuring improvement against internal benchmarks, while the University of Queensland differed in arguing that "*ITE programs already strive for continuous improvement... we do not need a funding carrot*". There were fewer and mixed perspectives regarding the proposal for excellence funding, with the University of Southern Queensland suggesting "*a tailored approach rather than a one size fits all model that recognises... success in metropolitan and regional locations*".

Notwithstanding broad support for transition funding, most providers expressed concerns that incentivising ITE performance could have unintended consequences. The Melbourne Graduate School of Education suggested "*perverse incentives... where the rich get richer",* for example, while Monash noted that "*linking performance to funding will likely disadvantage those providers who need more support rather than less and lead to the teaching profession in Australia becoming less and not more diverse*". The University of Queensland suggested that "*linking quality and funding sets up an unnatural competitiveness among ITE providers and may lead to a "gaming" of the system"*, and the University of Canberra similarly suggested that such funding would "*encourage [providers] to regard each other as competitors and not colleagues in the service of a valuable profession*". Queensland University of Technology turned to the literature, noting "*no evidence that performance-based funding... will improve the quality of ITE programs and/or provide a solution to current teacher workforce challenges*".

The next most significant theme was classified as 'Students' (252 hits) and focused on the validity of the four proposed categories of quality indicators as they related to ITE students. With regards to student selection indices, there was widespread agreement that diverse students were needed in ITE to meet the needs of diverse school communities. The University of Wollongong shared that many students on their regional campuses were "*the first in their families to attend university, and we have seen the enormous benefit [for] regional communities*", for example, while Charles Darwin University submitted that "*developing the NT's own teacher workforce is critically important for First Nations teachers, co-teachers and teachers' assistants, especially in remote and very remote communities*". In contrast, many providers queried the validity of ATAR as a performance indicator for selection. For the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, "*simply raising ATAR will not assist quality teaching, this will just increase inequalities and decrease the diversity of entry*", while for Charles Sturt University, "*the suggestion that an ATAR above 80 is somehow an indicator of a 'high-quality candidate' or teacher quality is not supported by research*". For the University of South Australia, "*there is concern that the measures will disproportionally and negatively impact First Nations students, regional and remote students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds*".

With regards to retention indices, three groups of comments emerged. Firstly, as noted by the submission from Edith Cowan University, students may choose to leave their degree for many reasons unrelated to ITE program quality: including the realisation that "*teaching is not a profession they would*

like to pursue". The Australian Catholic University noted that the use of first year retention as an index of quality "*contradicts other reports, such as the QITE review, which encourage the first year to be a time for pre-service teachers to determine if teaching is a suitable career path and to leave early in their candidature if it is not*", while several providers noted that early professional experiences are particularly important in scaffolding such decision-making. Secondly, several providers highlighted that it is the diverse candidates most needed in the profession who are at greatest risk of attrition: thus, using retention as a marker of ITE quality could disincentivise providers from seeking more diverse cohorts. Finally, and perhaps noting that the initial TEEP Discussion Paper had referenced both 6-year dropout and 6-year completion rates when discussing attrition, several providers argued that non-completion should not be used as a measure of dropout for part-time students.

With regards to classroom readiness, many providers expressed concerns regarding the use of student report measures and not more objective measures of readiness, such as the outcomes from the teacher-moderated Teacher Performance Assessment. Southern Cross University argued that "*student satisfaction data is not a measure of teacher education effectiveness, rather it is a measure of 'learner fulfilment*", for example, while the University of Wollongong similarly suggested that although "*QILT data 2022 shows that Teacher Education has comparable or better student satisfaction and impressions of skill development scores to other discipline areas, including Psychology, Arts and Sciences, Economics, Law, and others... these scores must be seen as measures of satisfaction and not teacher capacity*". The University of Canberra highlighted concerns with the self-report items themselves, noting that "*the proposed Graduate Outcome Survey items [ask] graduates whether their degree prepared them for their job as a whole, and not specifically about their preparation for classroom teaching*".

Finally, with regards to transition indices, providers expressed concern that early-career employment outcomes largely reflect sector trends outside their control. La Trobe University highlighted that "*the first years following the conclusion of a teaching degree is also determined by the quality mentoring offered by systems and employers*", for example, while the Queensland University of Technology noted that "*teacher attrition is impacted by multiple factors, most notably, wages, conditions and work intensification*".

'Measures' was the third largest theme to emerge from provider responses (222 hits; sub-concepts: measures, quality, indicators, data, classroom, outcomes). Providers highlighted the risks of selecting and publishing performance data using measures that are not fit-for-purpose. Edith Cowan University argued that although they were "*supportive of measures that provide accurate, robust and defensible indicators of ITE quality, the suggested sources of evidence... are proxies for quality rather than robust and defensible indicators*". Queensland University of Technology similarly argued that "*The proposed performance measures focus on input and output indicators rather than quality*", while The University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work strongly recommended "*that more thought is given to how these measures (in most cases tangentially linked to the outcomes they are measuring) might be reported",* suggesting that *"the norm-referenced reporting of the results in bar charts which give no credence to the context of each University is dangerous and misleading*". The University of Newcastle asked: "*are these performance measures sufficient to drive quality improvement in ITE? It is reasonable to publish data… however, [indicators] must measure intended outcomes*".

The fourth most significant theme was 'Education' (160 hits); this focused on successes and challenges in educating a broad range of ITE students. The University of Southern Queensland suggested that the recommended reforms may "*push universities to… focus only on enrolling those students who belong to known "high completion" cohorts while limiting the selection of those cohorts traditionally under-represented. This will impact regional and remote communities and could also lead to a less diverse teacher workforce*". For Flinders, such moves would have downstream consequences: "*if school students do not see education as 'for them'… we will feed a negative spiral of experiences with education*".

The penultimate theme, 'Attrition' (31 hits), overlapped with 'Measures' and 'Students' in focussing on who attrits and why. The final theme, 'Research' (19 hits), focused on the limited public funding to support research in ITE, with the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre at Newcastle noting that "*Over the past 20 years, education has received just 1.6 per cent of all grant dollars provided by the ARC".*

TRAs

The most significant theme for TRAs was 'Performance' (74 hits, sub-themes: performance, providers, measures, quality, programs, funding, national, accreditation, system, improvement, support), with both TRA groups querying the need and purpose of the proposed reform. The ATRA noted that "*stakeholders are consistently pleased with the quality and performance of graduates from these programs and graduate teachers are confident in their classroom readiness*", for example, while AITSL argued that "*the performance categories in the Discussion paper require clarity on the purpose and use of the proposed metrics as well as an explanation regarding the omission of some data sources*".

'Indicators' was the second most significant theme (38 hits; sub-concepts: practices, teachers, teaching, education, learning, evidence, student, curriculum) and overlapped with 'performance'. For the ATRA, "*employment in context of workforce shortages demonstrates little about graduate teacher quality or ITE program quality*". Instead, they recommended that school leaders be canvased, citing a 2022 study of Western Australian public principal perceptions in which "*94% agreed that their graduate had a positive impact on student learning"*. AITSL drew on international research showing "*important caveats for performance measures, including graduate sorting and select-type biases*".

Councils of Deans

The most significant theme for councils of deans was 'Students' (43 hits, sub-concepts: students, area, regional, need), with respondents focused on the validity of student selection, retention, and transition measures and the implication for student diversity. The Australian CDE noted that "*not all... indicators are within the remit of ITE providers to influence. This is particularly true of the transition measures related to the sustainability of employment and employment of graduates in areas of need [which are] influenced by decisions that are made by the employers of ITE graduates and the graduates themselves"*. The NSW CDE similarly argued that "*only the first [performance indicator] is under the control of ITE providers… providers may be actively penalised for taking on disadvantaged students, or*

for working with less resources", while the Queensland CDE argued that "*the ramifications [of performance funding] outweigh any perceived gain*": for example, *"performance-based funding is likely to deplete regional ITE programs and therefore worsen teacher shortages in regional Australia*".

The second most significant theme, 'Programs' (42 hits, sub-concepts: programs, funding, outcomes), focused on existing measures of ITE program quality and impact. The Australian CDE noted that "*ITE providers who are presenting programs for Stage 1 accreditation [already] develop a plan to demonstrate impact of their program and to report on the outcomes*". They further note that new performance measures "*can be used to monitor and understand various aspects of ITE programs [but] cannot be used or aggregated to offer a summative judgement".* The Victorian CDE similarly highlighted that continuous improvement is already a part of program accreditation: thus, ITE providers "*do not need financial incentives to undertake decisions that improve performance. This measure seems counterintuitive*".

The third theme, 'Graduates' (23 hits, sub-concepts: graduates, teachers, teaching), focused on ITE and employer responsibilities for graduate readiness. The NSW CDE noted that "*post-employment support should be provided by employers and accreditation agencies*", for example, with the proportion of early career teachers offered induction decreasing from 65% to 59% over 2020-2022. The Victorian CDE argued that "*all ITE providers are required to ensure all graduate are 'ready to teach'… at a graduate level*" with "*exhaustive measures at both a state and federal level to ensure quality*". The final theme, 'Metrics' (6 hits, sub-concepts: metrics), was very small and was not considered further.

Employers

The most significant theme for employers was 'Programs' (55 hits; sub-concepts: programs, funding, students, support, teacher, universities, NSW), with a focus on the risks of performance measures to ITE program success. Like Higher Education Providers and Councils of Deans, employers noted the possibility of perverse incentives. For the NSW Department of Education, "*reward funding also risks universities treating ITE students as a competitive market… This is unlikely to lift the whole system performance for ITE and may create perverse incentives for providers*". Catholic Schools NSW highlighted risks to teacher supply if some universities reconsider involvement in ITE. The National Catholic Education Commission highlighted concerns with the mis-construal of program completion data as retention data, noting that "*many students are part-time and may take eight years to graduate for a variety of acceptable reasons*", with a further note that "*an individual with a high ATAR does not necessarily develop into a good teacher*". The Northern Territory Department of Education echoed this perspective: "*measures which are linked to financial incentives need to be flexible enough to recognise that excellence is not always directly relative to academic performance*".

The second theme was 'Performance' (37 hits, sub-concepts: performance, quality, improvement, needs, areas) and focused on how ITE performance should be captured and funded. Overlapping with 'Programs' were questions about funding, with the National Catholic Education Commission stating that "*No compelling evidence is provided which substantiates a causal relationship between performance funding and quality outcomes*". The Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra

and Goulburn was more reserved, suggesting that "*all providers [should] report directly on the standards to the systems they support*", but "*making funding contingent on course quality has many problematic elements*". Catholic Schools NSW were "*concerned about the potentially reductive and negative dimensions of public reporting of performance measures*", asking instead how funding might be designed to support programs, while the NSW Department of Education suggested "*Incentivising and funding collaboration and communities of practice*".

The third theme was 'Data' (17 hits, sub-concepts: data, education), with employers querying the sophistication of data and advocating for longitudinal measures beyond ITE. The NSW Department of Education noted that the state TRA "*already collects data annually from NSW ITE providers*", yet argued for "*a more sophisticated, coordinated and longitudinal approach to collecting qualitative data over time, cognisant of the school contexts that graduates are employed in*". The National Catholic Education Commission suggested that "*retention should be tracked until after the five-year mark when many early career teachers choose to leave the profession*".

The fourth largest theme was 'Cohorts' (15 hits, sub-concepts: cohorts, teaching, institutions), with a particular focus on diverse and equity cohorts. For the Northern Territory Department of Education, "*standardised performance measures pose an inherent risk of unintended consequences for ITE providers as they do not consider size, location, candidate suitability or school communities they serve*". For the NSW Department of Education, "*rural and remote students typically have lower retention rates, but we need to attract this cohort into teaching*", while for Catholic Schools NSW, using retention as a metric "*could create inequity and favour smaller, elite cohorts over other ITE providers*". The final two themes, 'Public' (5 hits, sub-concept: public) and 'Certain' (4 hits, sub-concept: certain), were both small and are not discussed further.

Teachers' Associations

The most significant theme to emerge from teacher association submissions was 'ITE' (105 hits, sub-concepts: ITE, teachers, classroom, teaching, graduate) and related to ITE system quality. The Australian Education Union "*do not support linking ITE funding to publicly available standardised performance measures, and do not [believe such measures] would "encourage continuous improvement in ITE*". The Independent Education Union suggested that "*funding would be better allocated to schools for the continued development of graduate teachers and meaningful high impact professional development"*, while the Australian Primary Principals Association similarly suggested that "*systems at the local level have a role to play in the education and ongoing development of graduate teachers*".

The second most significant theme was 'Programs' (96 hits, sub-concepts: programs, education, performance, students, performance, funding, support, providers, transition), with a focus on program funding and quality. For the Australian Council of State School Organisations, "*A transition period with relevant monetary support is required for an ITE program to perform at its best and best serve its student population*". The Australian Council of TESOL Associations argued that transition data "*are subject to forces that are beyond ITE program and provider control*", while the Australian Early Childhood Teacher

Education Network similarly argued that "*the standardised performance measures… incorporate factors that reach beyond the control of universities*".

The third theme was 'Quality' (45 hits, sub-concepts: quality, data, measures, incentives), with distinctions drawn between performance funding and quality improvement. The Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network suggested that "*financial incentives will only effectively improve quality when they are educative and not punitive*", while Australian Council of TESOL Associations "*strongly opposes resourcing based on performance data... perverse incentives are inevitable and inherent in any such funding model*".

The fourth theme, 'Schools' (33 hits, sub-concepts: schools, profession), focused on the interaction of ITE and schools. The Independent Education Union of Australia believed that "*funding allocations must be fair and transparent and focussed on the delivery of quality practicum*", for example, while the Australian Education Union cautioned that "*excellence funding… would only serve to reinforce existing inequalities between teacher education students, education systems, schools, and ITE providers*". In the final theme, 'Career' (7 hits, sub-concepts: career) teacher associations noted that prospective and current teachers would look to the state of the profession and not just ITE when making career choices.

Educational Research Groups

The only educational research group to discuss Reform 2 in their submission was the Australian Educational Research Organisation (AERO) Board. Themes were disparate and had four or fewer hits each (Figure 6), with the largest being 'ITE' (4 hits; sub-concepts: ITE) and 'Data' (3 hits; sub-concepts: data). Like other stakeholders, the board favoured the provision of transition funding to support ITE providers in amending their curricula yet suggested that several performance indicators could have "*reverse incentives regarding retention and attrition*". They went on to argue that "*while this data is not credible evidence of ITE program quality or fidelity… it does provide employing and funding authorities with important information about the emerging profession*".

Advocates

The most significant theme for advocates was 'Contexts' (10 hits, sub-concepts: contexts, courses, funding), reflecting tensions between the proposal for standardised performance measures and the need for contextually appropriate ITE offerings. For the Regional Education Commissioner, for example, "*it is important that the development of any standardised performance measures takes account of the distinct needs and contexts in regional areas compared to our cities, to ensure that courses for prospective RRR and First Nations teaching students can involve communities in co-design, invoke appropriate and relevant cultural authority, and be properly targeted... Without these perspectives and contexts, there is a risk that performance-linked funding will increase educational disadvantage in our regions*". The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted similarly noted that "*Being job-ready requires specialisation and offering skills to the position that are qualitatively different to the next candidate (e.g., a specialisation in gifted education, or a specialisation in special*

education, or inclusive education); this would not be possible if every ITE provider taught the same courses/content in the same way". The remaining themes, 'RRR' (regional, rural and remote; 4 hits, sub-concepts: RRR), 'Communities' (4 hits, sub-concepts: communities, students, teaching), 'Teachers' (3 hits, sub-concepts: teachers), and 'Programs' (2 hits, sub-concepts: programs), were very small and are not discussed further.

Individuals

Two individuals made submissions to Reform Area 2. The most significant theme was 'System' (22 hits, sub-concepts: system, education, funding, 1970s, practicum, current), and pointed to the interconnectedness of ITE quality, school quality, and funding. Highlighting high student and employer satisfaction scores on QILT, relative to other disciplines such as architecture, one individual challenged the TEEP panel's perspective on ITE as "*based on the assumption that ITE is not working… Despite thirty years of the standardising discourse in education, those who advocate it believe that educational quality continues to decline and that the answer is to ramp up standardisation!*". The second individual focused specifically on professional experience, noting that "*Some of the problems besetting teacher education are systemic and, to my knowledge, have never been confronted"*. The second largest theme, 'University' (13 hits, sub-concepts: universities, ITE, teacher education institutes) focused on the history of education in universities and shared considerable overlap with 'System'. For example, one individual highlighted that "*the last 20 years have seen an increasing stranglehold of oversight of ITE at both state and national levels*". The remaining three themes, 'Graduates' (6 hits, sub-concepts: graduates), 'Costs' (4 hits, sub-concepts: costs), and 'Knowledge' (2 hits, sub-concepts: knowledge) were small and were not considered further.

Other Stakeholders

The most significant theme for other stakeholders was 'Programs' (22 hits, sub-concepts: programs, ITE, funding, teachers, performance, measure, teaching, quality, resourcing), with stakeholders querying the necessity and validity of performance measures to assess ITE program quality. The National Advocates for Arts Education suggested that "*introducing another level of performance measurement would add to the already stretched workloads of teacher educators and ITE providers*", while the Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium "*suggest that TPAs in their current form are a valuable measure of performance and fit well within a measurement architecture of ITE*". Transforming Education Australasia queried the validity of the new measures, with "*teaching conditions, resourcing, government policy [impacting] not only the quality of a ITE student's collective experience of ITE but also the high level of teacher attrition, burnout, etc*".

The second most significant theme was 'Professional' (10 hits, sub-concepts: professional, ongoing), and focused on mentoring and professional support, which for Transforming Education Australasia, should be funded "*at the school level along with induction programs offered for all early career teachers*". The third theme was 'Pre-service" (9 hits, sub-concepts: pre-service, TPAs), with the Assessment of Graduate Teaching Consortium suggesting that TPAs be used to "*promote evaluative thinking about [pre-service teachers'] practice very early on in the professional learning journey*". The

two smallest themes, 'Support' (6 hits, sub-concepts: support) and 'Information' (2 hits, sub-concepts: information), were both small and were not considered further.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to understand distinct stakeholder responses to the Australian Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) proposal to "*Strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE*" via two pathways: (i) the measurement and public reporting of ITE program quality across four performance categories, including student selection, student retention, graduate readiness, and transitions into employment; and (ii) the provision of transition funding, excellence funding, and/or funding for achievement of agreed mission compacts. Interestingly, and in contrast to other TEEP reform areas (see blinded, blinded), there was considerable convergence of perspectives across stakeholder groups. Common meta-themes related to concerns regarding the validity of the four performance categories and individual indicators as measures of quality, concerns about perverse incentives and unintended outcomes, and queries about the proposed problem that performance levers are intended to fix.

Concerns regarding the validity of performance measures

The dominant concern across all stakeholder groups related to the validity of the performance measures proposed in the TEEP Discussion Paper as indicators of ITE program quality. Several highlighted the value of collecting data on ITE student demographics and experiences, provided sufficient resourcing was provided, but urged caution in how these data were interpreted. These stakeholder responses should also be considered in relation to research that shows such indicators are largely influenced by values and situational factors (Gaertner & Brunner, 2018).

First, Higher Education Providers and employers suggested that high school academic performance as measured by ATAR is a poor proxy for ITE program quality or future teacher success. While the TEEP Discussion Paper highlighted associations between ATAR and student attrition, national (Wright, 2015) and international (Burroughs et al., 2019) research findings regarding academic performance and teacher quality largely support these stakeholder perspectives. Studies considering teacher education students' university performance have found small but inconsistent associations with future classroom success (see Burroughs et al., 2019 for review). Australian research has found no association between teacher education students' ATAR and their future teaching effectiveness, however, as there are many variables that contribute to teacher effectiveness in different contexts (Wright, 2015).

Second, several large stakeholder groups including Higher Education Providers, Councils of Deans, and employers noted that students frequently attrit for reasons unrelated to ITE program quality. Early attrition often occurs after students' first professional experience in schools, for example, and is beneficial to the student and the system if those not well suited to teaching have early opportunities to change degree pathways. Others noted that the data used by the TEEP panel and referenced extensively by the Federal Education Minister, Jason Clare, reflects course completion within 6 years – a poor measure for part time students – and not attrition or dropout. While the final TEEP report made reference to this latter concern, assuring readers that students still enrolled will not be

included in attrition data, providers may remain concerned that 6-year completion and overall retention data have been conflated by the Minister in several media appearances (Dawson et al., 2022).

Third, providers queried the use of student-reported course satisfaction and preparedness for employment as indicators of classroom readiness or ITE program quality. Teaching is a complex and difficult job, and it is not surprising that new graduates might feel trepidation as they step into their careers. Yet recent research by Gore and colleagues (2024) analysing almost 1000 lessons from over 500 Australian teachers showed that those with less than one year experience were just as effective as those with more experience (up to 24+ years). Similar findings were obtained from Graham et al. (2020) observing 80 Australian teachers for at least four lessons each. Graduate perceptions of readiness therefore need to be interrogated in two ways: first, how well do these perceptions align with success, and second, where specifically do students and graduates feel more or less ready? Australian research has indicated, for example, that relative to other dimensions of their work, ITE graduates felt *less* prepared in working with students from culturally, linguistically and economically diverse backgrounds, students with a disability and those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (Mayer et al, 2017). These represent important areas for additional curriculum support and for ongoing professional learning.

Finally, stakeholder groups including TRAs, Councils of Deans, and employers noted that the proposed indices for transition are affected by the decisions of employers and workplace conditions. For example, a critical teacher shortage can influence retention in the profession by virtue of overwork and burnout: two key factors prominent in Australia today (see Collie & Mansfield, 2022; Rajendran et al., 2020). This problem is likely exacerbated by the current teacher shortage, creating a vicious cycle that may be hard to ameliorate without intervention across education systems.

Concerns regarding perverse incentives and unintended consequences

Numerous stakeholders made explicit reference to perverse incentives and unintended consequences of the proposed reforms. This was considered particularly problematic for smaller and regional universities serving more diverse student cohorts and echoed concerns from Campbell (1976, p.85) that "*the more important that any quantitative social indicator becomes in social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor*". A considerable body of educational literature highlights the importance of representation and diversity among teachers for promoting student belonging among diverse student cohorts (Gershenson et al., 2021; Rice et al., 2023).

Notably, it is not yet clear how the publication of performance indices will affect decision-making by potential ITE students or by providers. Although some proposed indices of student selection relate directly to diversity, including the proportion of First Nations students, regional and remote students, and students of low socioeconomic status, several stakeholder groups identified that other performance measures work in opposition. Providers would be rewarded for enrolling school leavers with high ATARs, for example, despite students from more diverse backgrounds typically entering university with lower admission ranks (Li et al., 2022). They also would be rewarded for lower attrition

rates, where typically it is more diverse students who are at greatest risk of attrition (Li et al., 2022). Such concerns were particularly acute for employers and advocates, including the Regional Education Commissioner and the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted, who noted the need for ITE to be contextually appropriate and responsive to different school communities.

Identifying the problem that performance and funding links are intended to fix

Throughout the TEEP Discussion Paper and subsequent *Strong Beginnings* report are suggestions of a problem in the quality of ITE programs. In the TEEP Discussion Paper, for example, the authors note that "*while ITE accreditation creates an enforceable set of minimum standards, it does not sufficiently incentivise providers to improve beyond this*" (p. 25). The publication of ITE providers' performance on the selected indices of quality was proposed to "*drive ongoing quality improvements if it is used by prospective ITE students in choosing their provider and ITE program*" (p. 39), while transition funding was proposed both to assist Higher Education Providers to embed new mandated core content and to "*lift the performance of their ITE programs*" (p.53). Importantly, the TEEP Discussion Paper acknowledges existing ITE student satisfaction, noting that Education students are "*more likely to report being satisfied with the quality of teaching compared to the average across fields of study".* However, they go on to argue that *"this masks considerable differences in performance between higher education providers against the proposed performance measures*" (p. 41). One question that must be asked, then, is how quality is being defined and whether the proposed performance measures are appropriate or sufficient. The stakeholder feedback analysed in this study, along with previous research (see Brooks, 2021; Ellis & Spendlove, 2020), suggest that quality is not a simple or singular concept that can be easily defined, measured, or 'fixed'. Further, and as noted by stakeholders, the indicators recommended in the final report are largely proxy measures: measuring various aspects of system health and not ITE quality.

Initiatives and proposals likely to have a positive impact

While stakeholder groups expressed concern with the framing of the proposed categories of performance measures for ITE, as well as with some specific indices, there was broad (albeit not universal) support for transition funding to support providers pursuing new program improvement initiatives. Such support is not currently provided to ITE providers: indeed, as noted by one submission, historical changes to ITE funding have left providers cross-subsidizing professional experience in schools. Several employers and teachers' associations also advocated for such funding to be permitted for more flexible initiatives, particularly cooperative system-wide approaches and innovative provider-employer collaborations to support and track graduate teachers and school communities across the career-span. Such initiatives are likely to have strong benefits across the system. We recommend that the proposed excellence funding be repurposed towards addressing these and other systemic challenges experienced within ITE, including the ad-hoc professional experience placement processes and placement poverty for students who can ill-afford time away from other jobs to complete placements.

Conclusion

Our analysis of stakeholder responses to the TEEP Discussion Paper proposal to "*Strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE*" in Australia suggested broad concern that the reforms would not indicate or elevate program quality as intended. Curiously, while most stakeholders

expressed disagreement regarding the validity of the four categories of performance as measures of ITE quality, as well as the specific indices of performance, all four categories remained relatively unaltered in the final recommendations. An additional indicator for the participation of students from non-English speaking backgrounds was added, following suggestions from some higher education providers, the ATRA, and the Australian Council of Deans, but there was little regard for the unintended consequences of these measures considered likely by large and authoritative stakeholder groups and widely documented across the literature (Brooks, 2021; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Questions exist as to why this is the case, given the volume and consistency of concerns expressed. Politically, teacher education is one of few policy levers the Australian Federal Government in Australia has over education standards: thus, the motivation to introduce measurable quality indicators that permeate public discourse is likely to be strong. Given queries regarding the validity and interpretation of most proposed indicators, however, we recommend that stakeholder concerns be considered.

On the question of ITE program quality, TRAs queried the TEEP panel's initial premise of a problem in the sector: noting that ITE already has high stakeholder satisfaction from graduates and employers. Employers and teachers' associations similarly argued that there was no evidence to link performance funding to system success, while employers, Councils of Deans, and teachers' associations all framed graduate success as a system-wide responsibility shared between ITE, employers, regulators, and government. We conclude that the teacher education sector is not averse to quality or accountability. Indeed, most submissions analysed in this study indicated that a continuous quality cycle was important; ITE is highly visible in public policy and will always be accountable for its perceived quality and contribution to workforce needs. The task ahead is for ITE stakeholders to work together on the complex challenge of balancing the need for many (diverse) teachers with the desire for high-quality teaching outcomes.

Paper 4: Responding to Government Reform: Who determines priorities, policies and practices in Professional Experience?

Policy and practices impacting Professional Experience (PEx) in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) continue to lack transparency. Within the Australian context there is agreement that high-quality PEx placements are central to the preparation of 'classroom ready' graduate teachers. However, frequently, this agreement is counterbalanced by the argument that PEx is not as effective as it could be. Interconnectivity and partnerships between schools and universities are central to successful PEx and the development of future teachers which in turn enables more confident graduates who are less likely to attrit. Perennial PEx concerns include the substantial resource burden imposed on all stakeholders; placement poverty, ongoing shortage of high-quality placements and mentors, transition support into the profession, and the place of ITE and PEx in addressing workforce shortages. Against this backdrop, we sought to systematically map stakeholder responses to Reform Area 3 in the 2023 Australian Teacher Education Expert Panel Report – *Strong Beginnings*, which proposed to "improve the quality of practical experience in ITE". Four stakeholder themes were identified: developing future teachers, mentoring practices, financial aspects, and formal partnerships. While all aligned to the *Strong Beginnings* Report, a complexity and diversity of perspectives is evident within these themes. Differences between stakeholder groups emerged in terms of application of resources, preferred approaches, and the degree to which 'centralised' systematic agreements would support consistent and widespread delivery of high-quality PEx. These areas of disagreement suggest that 'agreement' in PEx might be easier in theory than it is in practice.

Keywords: Initial Teacher Education, professional experience, Work Integrated Learning, policy analysis, mentoring.

Responding to Government Reform: Who determines priorities, policies and practices in Professional Experience?

Professional Experience (PEx) plays a pivotal role in teacher preparation programs around the globe, yet its funding, design, structure, assessment, scope and relationship with other components of the educational ecosystem is the least transparent and data on its implementation difficult to curate. What cannot be argued, however, is its importance in the development of our future teachers (Le Cornu, 2016). Successful placements/practicums/professional experiences are known to increase the self-efficacy of our future teachers and can be significant in the development of their self-confidence and desire to stay in the profession (Beers, 2018). Although ITE students only represent 9% of the total teaching workforce in Australia, ITE has frequently been the target of state and federal government policy reform agendas. As a new National School Reform Agreement (Council of Australian Governments, 2023) unfolds, and against a backdrop of heightened concern around the provision and

readiness of the teaching workforce (National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP), 2022), Australia has embarked on a new set of national reform recommendations guided first by the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) Review (Australian Government, 2021) and now through the *Strong Beginnings*: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (*Strong Beginnings*) (Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP), 2023b). PEx has been a substantial focus of these reports, with clear acknowledgment that "ITE students who have positive practical experience placements are more likely to successfully transition into teaching and remain in the profession longer term", but also that "major barriers" exist, including cost and resourcing, ineffective relationships between stakeholders, limited expert mentoring capacity, and lack of financial support for students (TEEP, 2023a, p.64). This paper reports findings from our systematic mapping of publicly available stakeholder responses to Reform Area 3 in the 2023 TEEP Discussion Paper which proposed to "improv[e] the quality of practical experience in teaching" (TEEP, 2023a, p.49). We interrogate the content for commonalities, anomalies and priorities and back map these to the content and recommendations of the final report.

Professional Experience in Australian ITE

As the cornerstone of all Australian Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, PEx is well researched in terms of practicums (Le Cornu, 2016), partnerships (Green & Reid, 2004; White, 2019), contexts (preservice teacher identity development (Morrison, 2013), Third Space (Jordan & Clifton, 2014), coaching (Sulistiyo et al., 2021), case studies (Winslade et al., 2023), preservice teacher resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016), self-efficacy (Clark & Newberry, 2019) and mentoring (Hudson & Hudson, 2018) yet, it remains under-researched in terms of pragmatics - time, operations, financials and large-scale studies (Ledger & Vidovich, 2018). PEx has been subject to persistent political and public scrutiny evidenced through numerous waves of national reform focused on improving educational quality (Alexander & Bourke, 2021; TEMAG, 2014). Each wave of reform has resulted in wide scale recommendations for the profession. The recent release of *Strong Beginnings* – Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) in 2023 represents the latest round of critique and associated policy recommendations.

Professional Experience Policy Reform - Whose Voice Counts?

When investigating policy, it is important to draw on the assumptions that underpin policy reform as well as the policy trajectory and contexts in which policy is formed; context of influences, context of policy documentation, context of practice and outcomes (Ball, 1997; Ledger & Vidovich, 2018). ITE in Australia has been subject to near continuous government 'review' over the past decade, with each review launched because of a perceived 'crisis". Frequently these crises have relied on a series of assumptions, whereby sub-standard ITE is said to result in poor in-service performance (and more recently, attrition) by teachers (AITSL, 2023). This under-performance is then asserted to be a direct threat to Australian's future, which in turn results in concern that Australian students are 'falling behind' in international standardised testing economic and social prosperity.

Three of the most significant reviews of the past decade have been the *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* report (TEMAG, 2014), *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (Australian Government QITE, 2021), and now, *Strong Beginnings* (TEEP, 2023). All three of these

reports have included recommendations for Professional Experience (PEx). Interrogating these recent Australian PEx policy reform documents highlight that, where evidence is used, it tends to be dominated by government reports, policy institutes, literacy and numeracy lobbyists or dominant US and UK models or researchers. For example, the *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* national policy reform (TEMAG, 2014) examined PEx in Section 3.2: 'Integrating Theory and Practice'. Across seven pages there are 13 citations, none of which are peer-reviewed Australian research, nor are any submissions from ITE providers cited. Instead, the report points to four federal/state government policy documents/reports, three submissions from Australian school sectors, two international reports and two international peer reviewed publications, with the remainder made up of individual submissions. Other reports, from a similar time, have managed to incorporate a broader range of evidence and voices. For instance, the first report of the Network of Associate Deans of Professional Experience (Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), 2017) - a steering committee of the ACDE used strong empirical evidence on which policy decisions could be made. However, little reference to this document or subsequent articles aligned to this report (Ledger et al., 2020) have featured in recent policy reviews. Likewise, government and policy institute reports have generally overlooked internationally acknowledged Australian PEx researchers and the contextually relevant, empirical insights they have produced (e.g., Allen et al., 2019; Ambrosetti, 2014; Hudson & Hudson, 2018; Morrison, 2013; White, 2019; Winslade et al., 2023).

The Teacher Education Expert Panel and Professional Experience

Following the QITE review of 2021 and a subsequent Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable with teachers, principals, and other education stakeholders in August 2022, at which time a commitment was made to produce a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) (Australian Government, 2022), the TEEP was appointed to provide advice on key issues affecting ITE. Although the NTWAP and QITE reviews provided almost 40 recommendations, the TEEP were asked to address only four key reform areas: (i) strengthen ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom-ready graduates; (ii) strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE; (iii) improve the quality of practical experience in teaching; and (iv) improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants (Australian Government, 2022b). Its final report, *Strong Beginnings,* was released in 2023. Before the final report was published, TEEP released a Discussion Paper for public comment.

The aim of this study was to examine public stakeholder submissions to the TEEP Discussion Paper focusing on *Reform Area 3,* which focused on *Improving the Quality of Practical Experience in Teaching* via comprehensive system-level agreements between school systems and HEPs, national guidelines for high-quality PEx experiences, specialist schools who would provide PEx expertise, and targeted support for ITE students while completing PEx. Note that the reform area wording refers to 'practical experience' rather than 'Professional Experience (PEx)': in this paper we use the term PEx, consistent with expert literature and Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) terminology yet defer to policy wording where appropriate.

Method

Primarily, this study used content analysis to map publicly available TEEP Discussion Paper submissions to interrogate the content for commonalities, anomolies and priorities and back map these

with the content of the *Strong Beginnings* report. A systematic conceptual coding was undertaken of the submissions using Leximancer v5.0, and supplementary inductive and deductive coding against the recommendations within each stakeholder group. Content analysis intersects quantitative and qualitative methodologies, facilitating analysis of category frequency and content (Obermair et al., 2018). Consequently, content analysis is useful for systematically categorising and quantifying textual data into frames and codes (Obermair et al., 2018) - predefined categories reflecting significant textual themes (Hamad et al., 2016).

Among similar research, content analysis involves retrieving submissions to the relevant consultation from the public domain (e.g., Jongenelis et al., 2023; Stafford et al., 2020). Following an initial perusal of the data, preliminary themes are identified using an inductive approach consistent with constructivist grounded theory (Mills et al., 2006), an epistemological position that grounded theorists adopt are reflective of underlying ontologies and it is important that the methodology is faithful to its original intent of developing theory from data. After determining themes from the inductive process of data analysis, the study identified coding categories: systematic conceptual coding (using software), constant comparison, discourse sensitivity, attention to divergent data, and conceptual conclusions (Jongenelis et al., 2023). This is developed into a coding framework by the researchers; instances of disagreement are resolved via researcher discussion, and the remaining data is then deductively coded. In the present study, Leximancer, an artificial intelligence-based text mining software, was used to analyse textual content, extract information and create visual data outputs. Informed by Bayesian theory, the software identified code frequencies and relationships via an emergent and unsupervised synthesis of input (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Codes were inductively extracted (themes) from the dataset (true discovery mode), which were verified by the researchers. Visual maps of themes and relationships were also generated. Themes were organised by colour, whereby brightness correlates with prominence and closeness indicates semantic similarity.

Human analysis involves three stages, which were followed here: data cleaning, manual identification of higher order themes, and resolution or consolidation of automated and researcher-generated themes (Cheng & Edwards, 2019). After the automatic generation of code clusters from the dataset, the researchers organised generated codes into higher order themes to map onto the foci of the study (Cheng & Edwards, 2019) and remove irrelevant, conflicting or otherwise extraneous codes. Then, concepts are inspected to resolve inaccurate or context-inappropriate code linking.

Procedure

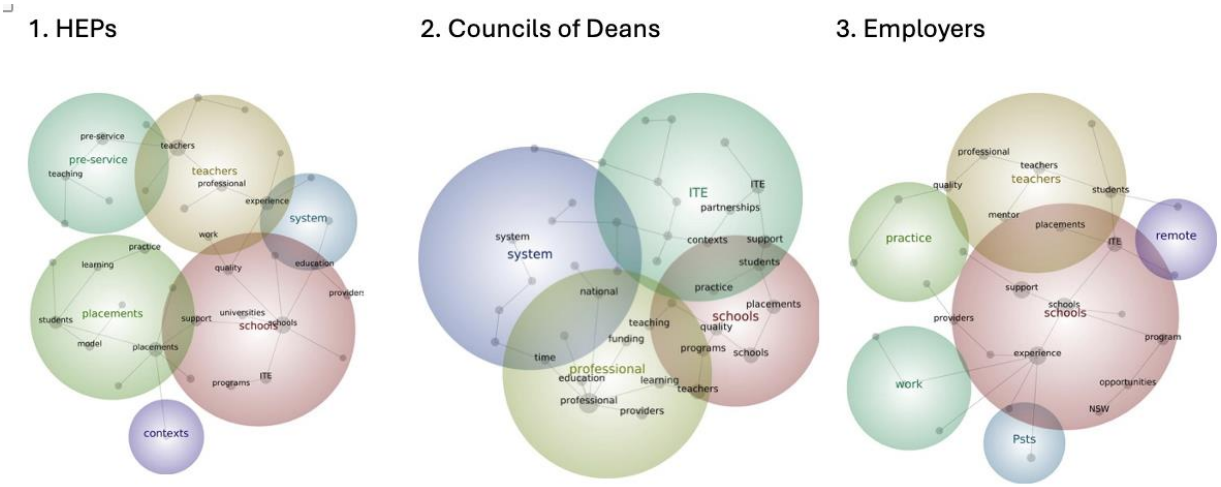
TEEP submissions were downloaded from the public domain, collated and dissected into separate entries by reform area (N=108). Submissions containing insufficient data were excluded (e.g., respondent did not specify reform area or make recommendation, respondent only included close-ended response to survey questions, response was of insufficient length). From the included responses, cover letters, abstracts, forewords, general introductions and conclusions, author affiliations, appendices, references, reproductions of the original TEEP document, graphs and figures (where not applicable to the primary response) were omitted (n=20). Reform-specific introductions and conclusions were retained. Cleaned data were then uploaded to Leximancer (*n*=88) for processing.

Gaussian analyses were used to generate an inductive report of initial overall codes (true discovery mode) per reform area and following grounded theory methodology. Stakeholder group analyses were conducted to provide a qualitative overview of stakeholder perspectives; areas of focus, agreement and disagreement. Leximancer-generated codes revealed discussion points, and how these are congruent or incongruent among the submissions. The researchers reviewed emergent codes for irrelevance, conflict or extraneity. Supplementary deductive content coding was then conducted to manually highlight patterns of agreement or disagreement among a priori cluster of stakeholder groups. For the current study, data from Reform 3 *Improve the quality of practical experience in teaching* analyses were extracted and findings interpreted. The findings were backwards mapped against the final TEEP report to highlight commonalities, anomalies and priorities. These critical findings were discussed based on Ball's (1994) and Vidovich's (2009) policy analysis framework which identifies contexts of influence, context of policy text production, context of practices and outcomes. Findings from the content analysis across the key stakeholder groups would expose: i) underlying assumptions of the policy reform (context of influences), ii) intended outcomes of the reform (context of policy text construction), iii) policy into practice (context of practices) and iv) policy outcomes (unintended and power differentials). Conclusions were drawn on the findings from the content and policy analysis.

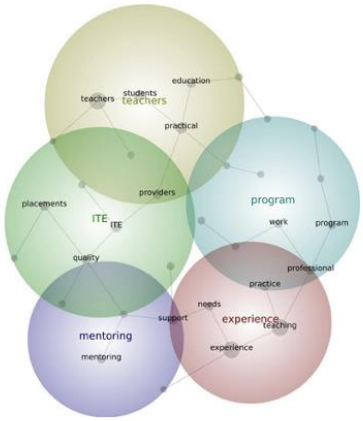
Results

Stakeholder responses to Reform Area 3: *Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching* were varied. An array of themes was identified for each stakeholder group; Higher Education Providers, Teacher Regulatory Authorities, Councils of Deans of Education, employers, teacher associations, advocacy groups, individuals, and other stakeholders which are reported below.

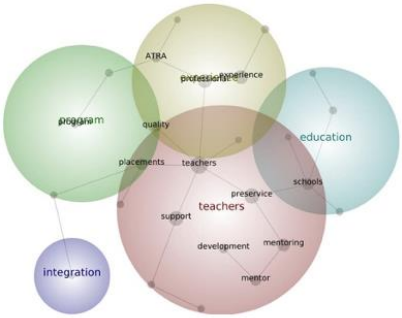
Figure 1. *Themes in response to TEEP Reform Area 3 for all stakeholders*



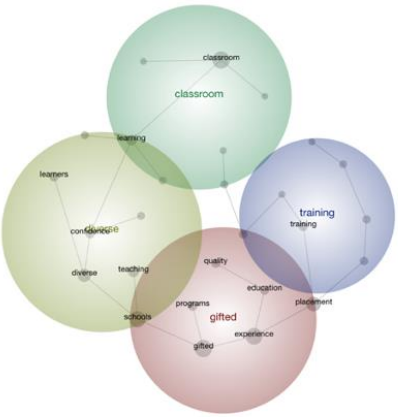
4. Teacher Associations



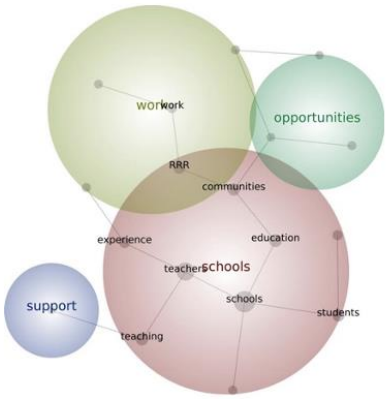
5. TRAs



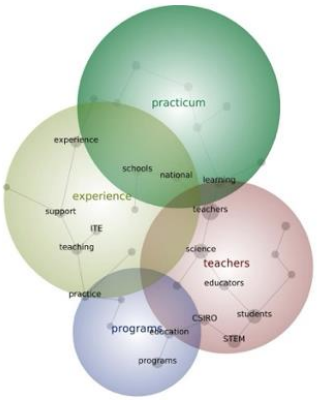
6. Advocacy Groups



7. Individuals



8. Groups



Higher Education Providers

There were 26 higher education providers who contributed to Reform Area 3, including 17 universities, eight university departments or groups, and one college. Within the submissions from Higher Education Providers (HEPs), the terms ‘schools’ (356 hits), ‘teachers’ (311 hits), and ‘placements’ (309 hits) were dominant with other themes such as ‘pre-service’ (179 hits), ‘system’ (49 hits), and ‘context’ (14 hits) represented to a lesser degree (Figure 1). Subconcepts across these themes included: professional, students, support, quality, learning, providers and students. For schools, the key themes related to costs, resources and that system level agreements are imperative. HEPs commented that

costs and resources required to implement high quality PEx were substantial, particularly in the face of Commonwealth Supported Place reductions on a per student basis because of the Jobs Ready Graduates funding changes. One submission – representative of several submissions - stated that "*that the quality of professional experience could be improved by direct funding to universities for the costs associated with providing student placements".* Costs for rural and remote placements were also indicated as an area of concern. Some HEPs acknowledged that there is cost to all stakeholders including universities, schools and PST that *"…has been steadily increasing with the rising cost of wages, combined with additional support provided to students to entice them to undertake placements in regional, rural and remote settings".*

Submissions called for mentor teachers to be well resourced to be able to support preservice teachers. Others went further recommending that supervision be tied to the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers higher proficiency levels of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers, and that there be obligations on all schools to offer supervision in partnership with ITE providers, utilising these standards. HEPs also suggested that system level agreements between themselves and school sectors/systems need to address challenges in the school matching process and deliver more effective placements. Details of the form that these agreements should take were not always clear, however, examples included the NSW's 'Hub Schools' program. Submissions revealed there is an inconsistent approach to securing placements. Some ITE providers rely on a large random generic distribution of emails to schools working on a percentage return to elicit interest, whilst others adopt a more targeted relation focused approach to individual schools. This was an area that was deemed requiring attention across the submissions. Finally, references to technologies were found within the submissions, suggesting a greater uptake of emerging technologies to better prepare students for PEx. One submission argued that "*By using these technologies, pre-service teachers can gain a deeper understanding of the realities of teaching and develop the necessary skills to be effective educators".*

Teacher Regulatory Authorities

Teacher Regulatory Authorities (TRAs) function as a professional community of practice for strategic collaboration and sharing regulatory information and practice regarding the teaching profession. There were two TRA submissions: one from the combined Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities, including NSW Education Standards Authority, Queensland College of Teachers, Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia, Teachers Registration Board of South Australia, Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania, Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory, and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (note that the Australian Capital Territory Teacher Quality Institute and Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand did not contribute), and one from the AITSL.

In relation to TRAs, the most prominent theme was 'teachers' (42 hits). Themes with fewer hits were 'school' (19 hits), 'guidance' (8 hits), 'ITE' (7 hits), Standards' (6 hits) and 'AITSL' (6 hits) (Figure 1). Other areas addressed were mentors, program, and education. TRAs recognised the increase in supervising teacher workloads, and associated issues regarding capacities and capabilities and, more important to placement quality were on-the-ground factors including school resourcing, mentor teacher training and support (remuneration, time), and the extent to which a school culture values and invests in

PST education. Due to this, additional funding is required to support high quality professional experience.

Feedback from the TRAs consistently outlined that incentives are needed to support schools to deliver quality professional experiences to include the reduction in teacher workload to allow for time to be spent with the PST in professional conversations, observations, feedback, planning and learner development and outcomes. TRAs felt that AITSL should provide guidance on ensuring supervising teachers provide structured support to ITEs during placement. TRAs felt that PEx is already well integrated with the academic component of ITE, and the incorporation of the TPA is just one demonstrated example of the clear link between the practical element and the theory in practice within an ITE program. TRAs also felt a need for system level agreements and indicated that any guidance material must be responsive to the recognition that initial teacher education is initial, and preservice teachers must be guided and supported as such. They purported there is a role for AITSL to create a national framework for quality professional experience placements and provide guidance on ensuring supervising teachers offer structured support to PSTs during placement, with the broader strategic goal to embed the role of supporting pre-service teachers in the career pathway of teachers.

Councils of Deans of Education

The Council of Deans stakeholder group comprised NSW Council of Deans of Education, Victorian CDE, Queensland CDE and Australian CDE, additionally we included the Network of Associate Deans of Professional Experience (NADPE) and Network of Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching (NADLT) as these bodies are steering committees within ACDE. The key themes that emerged for the Councils of Deans submissions were 'Professional' (110 hits) and 'Schools' (109 hits). Subconcepts included: providers, learning, education, teaching, funding, national and time (Figure 1). The theme 'Professional' contained recommendations from the Councils regarding high quality PEx with reference to the burden of the costs associated with high quality PEx for all stakeholders – schools, higher education providers and ITE students. They also argued that funding support for higher education providers and ITE students is inadequate. The Councils of Deans groups were particularly concerned with the funding support available, and the cost-of-living pressures associated with completing Professional Experience. NADPE provided reference to an evidence-based review of current PEx practices in Australia (Ure et al., 2017) and follow up article exploring PEx in Australia: An appraisal of Policy and Practice (Ledger et al., 2020) both outlining recurring issues with PEx and possible solutions. Queensland CDE stated:

Professional experience is already very expensive for teacher education providers and schools, and in fact is the most expensive component of any teacher education program. Importantly, funding has not kept pace with the real cost of providing high quality professional experience or work integrated learning, for HEIs and for schools.

This was supported by statements from NSW CDE who commented:

We agree that professional experience as it stands is a costly exercise, and we express concern that it is not currently adequately funded and similarly the perspective of the Victorian CDE "[ITE students] do not have the ability to do four/five weeks practical experience without getting income for that time."

While there was broad support for system level cooperation regarding funding and high-quality supervision the Australian CDE suggested that rather than setting up additional national frameworks, "further national guidance to strengthen the quality of *Professional Experience* could be provided in amendments/elaboration to *Standard* 5 of the *Accreditation Standards* and *Procedures".* There were multiple calls for government funded longitudinal research. Queensland CDE indicated that the university consortiums and collaborations are highly encouraged in that these "support continual teacher education improvement that is evidence-based and longitudinal". Finally, aligned to the HEPs, a range of specific contributions from the CDE and NADPE called for new and emerging technologies to be used to "*enable pre-service teachers to engage in authentic, immersive, and interactive learning experiences*".

Employers

Employers included the NSW, Northern Territory, and Victorian Departments of Education and the National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Schools NSW, and Catholic Education Canberra-Goulburn (see Figure 1). As expected, 'Schools' was the primary theme (94 hits) and echoed other stakeholder groups' calls for better resourced PEx opportunities, while also suggesting a range of initiatives to improve PEx in schools. Subconcepts were schools, teachers, PSTs, practice, remote and work (Figure 1). Employers welcomed the presence of ITE students in schools, arguing that interactions with schools, including through formal placements, should start early and be a consistent feature of ITE programs. Catholic Schools NSW argued that "further integration of the practical experience within the academic component of ITE is needed", while also highlighting regulatory "restrictions in NSW on the start of practical experience" that prevent some ITE students undertaking placement in the first year of their degree. However, employer groups also recognised the challenges associated with providing high-quality Professional Experience, including issues of resourcing, increases in the number of ITE students, and the impact on schools of lengthening PEX placements. The NSW Department of Education urged the panel to "consider how increased practical placements will impact the workload of supervising teachers and professional experience coordinators in schools". They continued, stating "NSW welcomes further work on how to remedy resourcing issues associated with practical placements". NSW based employers (NSW Department of Education and Catholic Schools NSW) both noted the potential of employer/HEP cooperative programs, such as NSW Hub Schools, noting that this has provided "consistent high quality professional experiences for pre-service teachers, supervising teachers and ITE providers" and allowed for "shar(ing) knowledge and support a network of schools to build their expertise in professional experience".

Additionally, in employer submissions, the theme of 'teachers' (73 hits) focused on three key aspects: workload and workforce limitations and the need for adequate training and support. The National Catholic Education Commission noted that any "strategy to increase the quality of ITE professional experience needs to include an effective, manageable, and scalable process for the training of mentor teachers". They continued, explaining that "Programs and funding for training and release should be provided to expert teachers for explicit targeted training in effective mentoring for both ITE and early career teachers". It was also argued that mentor teachers would benefit from the "inclusion a part time coordination role with teacher relief for professional experience and mentoring for pre-service and early career teachers".

Teacher Associations

Teacher Associations included Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, Australian Council of State School Organisations, Australian Council of TESOL Organisations, Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network, Australian Education Union, Australian Primary Principals' Association, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers Association NSW, Independent Education Union of Australia, the Australian Special Education Principals' Association. 'Teacher' (134 hits) and 'Experience' (132 hits) were the primary themes, other themes included ITE, program and mentoring. The subconcepts identified were practical, students and education (Figure 1). Teacher Associations including the Independent Education Union of Australia, Australian Education Union and Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia identified factors relating to teachers and experience as key themes. They specified factors such as renumeration, training and time release as crucial for mentor teachers. They included funding for schools and paid practical placements as also being crucial to successful high-quality PEx.

The HALT Association of NSW also called for PEx to be of high quality, and identified expert mentor teachers who are at Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALT) level through APST accreditation processes as key. This recommendation may however be hard to fulfill given the limited numbers of HALT teachers in NSW. Two associations called for PST to spend more time in schools, for example six months of each year of study, or "*First year paraprofessionals transitioning into the profession and final-year induction in schools".* However, it was also noted that substantially more resourcing would be required to make this possible.

Advocacy Groups

The advocacy stakeholder group included submissions from the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), Dyslexia Victoria Support, and the Regional Education Commissioner. 'Gifted' was one of two main themes identified amongst Advocacy Groups' submissions (27 hits) alongside 'classroom' (especially classroom learning and classroom teachers), with sub-concepts of experience, placement, schools and programs. Other themes were 'diverse' (21 hits) and 'training' (6 hits) (Figure 1). At the same time as acknowledging the role of PST education, feedback emphasised ensuring PSTs' PEx placements included working with gifted students (and other diverse student groups) and practical suggestions for achieving this. For instance, the AAEGT suggested giving PSTs "opportunity to work with diverse students both in and out of classrooms in special programs, or activities where PSTs work with gifted students [as] an alternate way to ... extended placement", recommending that ITE providers and schools work together to target schools that are effective at gifted education provision for placement, such as selective schools and schools for twice-exceptional students. The AAEGT also spoke more broadly of developing PST confidence through supporting PSTs to cater for the diversity of students. Specialist PEx placements to support PSTs' experience of diversity was also apparent in the submission from the Regional Education Commissioner. The Commissioner advocated for placement opportunities as part of a Rural, Regional and Remote network of training providers, training hubs and communities as well as "'rural teacher training' pathways".

The theme with the second highest number of hits was diverse, with context (rural, remote, regional), student body (gifted, behaviour, language) and teacher preparedness for these contexts and

students. These intertwined areas were clearly identified as needing attention and preparation before placement. One submission provided a model for rural education to follow:

> *the Australian Rural Health Education Network has led to a thriving community of practice, where best practice in placement design and student support are shared. There is no corresponding scheme to support the development of a rural and remote teacher workforce, and no apparent process to translate the learnings from the RHMT program to how we support the development of ITE graduates through quality placement experiences.*

Individuals

Themes identified by five individual submissions are presented in Figure 1. Of the four themes identified, the most reported theme to emerge related to schools (36 hits), with professional (3 hits), opportunities (3 hits) and support (2 hits) completing the submissions (Figure 1). As expected from individuals, submissions reported unique and personal impacts of the report. One individual stated that schools needed to re-think their approach to PEx, as "the core work of schools – teaching, learning and assessment - always take priority". Another, with experience as both a teacher and university mentor expressed their belief that "practical experience [for ITE students] must be increased with more hours of mentoring". This same individual felt strongly that "Education should be valued for teaching thinking skills and a love of lifelong learning not just jobs". Restricting disadvantage to regional, rural and remote (RRR) communities factored strongly in individual submissions and were echoed in many of the other key stakeholder responses. By identifying the criticality of in-situ partnerships to the professional development of pre-and in-service teachers, one submission suggested the creation of positions in "RRR schools with the specific brief to build the capacities of teachers". Such clusters or school networks would also raise the profile of teachers within and across these communities. The support of ITE students was also reported as relevant to individual schools, with one submission reporting that student teachers often feel like "outsiders and visitors to the school". One individual reported their belief that support of PST's by more experienced teachers serves to enhance feelings of belonging and allows greater opportunity to "carefully learn and hone their skill of teaching".

Other Stakeholders

Other stakeholders comprised three groups: CSIRO, National Advocates for Art Education (NAAE) and the Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium (AfGTC). There were three themes identified, the most reported theme to emerge related to teachers (26 hits), then experience (20 hits), programs (10 hits) and practicum (6 hits) (Figure 1). There were concerns raised about the challenges associated with resourcing. The NAAE stated that "the pressure on the teaching workforce and turnover that is likely to occur over the next 10 years means there may be less, not more experienced teachers willing and able to accommodate ITE placements". Additionally, the AfGTC raised the issue of more professional learning for mentor teachers and PEx coordinators with calls specifically for "guidance about moderation of the assessment of preservice teachers". This was reinforced by a desire to increase equity in assessments to "and enable increased alignment between the assessments conducted by mentor teachers and what the *PSTs* are completing in their TPA".

Discussion

This study aimed to systematically map stakeholder responses to Reform Area 3 of the TEEP Discussion Paper. The findings cited above highlight commonalities, anomalies and priorities for each of the eight stakeholder groups. In this discussion we consider the four most significant themes for stakeholders. These were: (i) developing future teachers (Recommendation 8 - Establish system-wide coordination of practical experience delivery) (ii) mentoring practices (Recommendation 11- Ensure professional recognition for mentor teachers), (iii) financial aspects of PEx placements (Recommendation 10 - Provide systemic support and investment in practical experience) and (iv) formal partnerships (Recommendation 8 - Establish system-wide coordination of practical experience delivery and Recommendation 9. Develop national guidelines for high quality practical experience). When the themes were mapped to the recommendations from *Strong Beginnings,* we found that the alignment varied. Themes one, two, and four aligned closely to the recommendations in *Strong Beginnings*. However, for theme three - financial aspects of PEx placements, while this aligned to Recommendation 10 in a general sense, there was a slight difference when the nuance of submissions was considered against the final report. *Strong Beginnings* noted 'system level agreements, whole-of-system delivery models and targeted support for beginning teachers' (TEEP, 2023b, p.14) whereas stakeholder submissions were more explicit in calling out the need for more direct financial inputs, including steps to remediate longstanding concerns around placement poverty and the current limited financial recognition of the role of the mentor teachers.

Developing Future Teachers

The development of future teachers is a critical concern for educational stakeholders, highlighting the importance of pre-placement preparation through ITE content. This was evidenced across all eight stakeholders (HEPs, TRAs, Councils of Deans of Education, employers, teacher associations, advocacy groups, individuals, and other stakeholders). This theme is significant not only for ITE providers but also for host schools, as both play pivotal roles in nurturing the development of PSTs (Le Cornu, 2016). TRAs commented that PEx and theory are well integrated within ITE programs. Furthermore, we note there was an emphasis on utilising the AITSL standards to guide PST development, a practice endorsed by TRAs and HEPs nationwide. These standards are essential for structuring both written and verbal feedback (Sadler, 2010), thus supporting the trajectory and growth of PSTs. Another discussion among stakeholders was the proposal to allow PSTs to engage in placements earlier in their degree programs. Although this idea is not new, recent submissions underscore its importance. The current policy reform, for example, in New South Wales the requirement for three Band 5 scores in the Higher School Certificate as an entry requirement to teaching degrees, has shifted the first placement from the first to the second year of many undergraduate programs. A call to establish earlier placements reflects stakeholder preferences for early experience in schools. This is supported by earlier reviews that state that "an earlier practicum means ITE students can better contextualise their learning" (Department of Education, 2022).

A noteworthy submission discussed the moderation of PSTs during placements. While ideal in theory, this poses a logistical challenge given that approximately 30,000 PSTs participate in placements annually across the nation. This challenge underscores a broader debate about the core responsibilities

of mentor teachers and raises questions about who should bear the responsibility for supporting PSTs' learning and growth. This tension highlights the need for clear delineation of roles and collaborative efforts between ITE providers and host schools to ensure the effective development of future teachers (Ferns et al., 2023).

Stakeholders also alluded to factors that contribute to building PST competence such as the use of technologies to enhance preparedness and adaptability, opportunities to work with gifted and talented students, specialist placements, placements in regional, rural and remote locations and how the extended duration of PEx placements can impact PSTs. Some stakeholders suggested that diverse opportunities would develop PST's confidence. The importance of this is supported by evidence that self-efficacy can vary based on the cultural and contextual settings of placements (Clark & Newberry, 2019; Morrison, 2013).

Mentoring Practices

Although not surprising, mentoring emerged from responses across six stakeholder groups (HEPs, TRAs, employers, teacher associations, individuals and other stakeholders). Many submissions identified indicated that within the school-based education system there was a lack of recognition of the mentor teacher role and that resourcing of mentors in terms of both the provision of time away from regular duties and professional learning opportunities was desirable. Time away from regular duties was seen as crucial to allow the mentor teacher to fulfill the role adequately. Time has been the topic of several studies (Weatherby-Fell & Eady 2023, James et al., 2023) with findings showing that mentor teacher repeated reflect on the need for more time to complete their mentoring and supervisory duties effectively. Likewise, professional learning opportunities featured in multiple responses with calls for sharing knowledge, targeted training, recognition of mentor teachers' expertise as keys to success in mentoring and evaluating PST while on PEx. Acknowledging the role, as one that is beyond a supervisor and focuses on the skills of professional dialogue and feedback and learner development in schools (Ambrosetti, 2014; Hadley et al., 2023; Hudson & Hudson, 2018), may result in an uplift of quality placements and add prestige to the role.

Financial Aspects of PEx Placements

The discussion around financial aspects of PEx placements was a significant theme among five stakeholders: HEPs, Councils of Deans of Education, employers, teacher associations, and TRAs. It is unsurprising that financial concerns were frequently highlighted, given the substantial resources required to facilitate effective PEx placements (Ledger et al., 2020). HEPs and the Councils of Deans of Education particularly emphasised the limited financial support available to them. They argued that inadequate funding hampers their ability to offer high-quality PEx experiences. This concern is echoed by teacher associations and TRAs, who stressed the need for better financial provisions to support mentor teachers. Effective mentoring is crucial for PSTs' development, yet the current financial constraints often leave mentor teachers without proper compensation or relief from their regular teaching duties. This debate for renumeration is longstanding, with calls for financial support evident in literature for more than twenty years (Walkington, 2003). Additionally, the stakeholders advocated for funding that would allow for teacher relief, enabling teachers to dedicate time to engage in professional

learning as a mentor and engage in mentoring PSTs without compromising their primary teaching responsibilities. This financial support is seen as essential for attracting and retaining skilled mentors. There is already evidence that professional learning for mentor teachers enhances supervision practices (Winslade et al., 2023), renumeration for mentor teacher participation in this professional learning will likely ensure that PSTs receive enhanced guidance and support to enable their professional growth.

Formal Partnerships

The theme of partnerships, or Hubs, was prominently highlighted by two key stakeholders: Higher Education Providers and employers. Extensive research underscores the significance of partnerships involving PEx, identifying them as a sustainable method for enhancing teacher education practices (Green & Reid, 2004; White, 2019). These studies reveal that partnership/hub models can foster more effective teacher preparation while also acknowledging the challenges and tensions that arise from mandating such partnerships (White, 2019). When school-university partnerships are established correctly, they can significantly benefit teacher education. For instance, the NSW Department of Education PEx Hubs, cited by two stakeholders, illustrate how a well-brokered partnership can lead to substantial improvements in PST training. Endorsing system level agreements was discussed by HEPs, TRAs and Councils of Deans and were seen as a mechanism to potentially resolve HEP-school placement allocations. The Australian Council of Deans advocated for "amendments/elaboration to *Standard* 5 of the *Accreditation Standards* and *Procedures"* to enable high-quality supervision. To achieve these benefits, a systems thinking approach is essential, integrating all components of ITE to create a cohesive and supportive framework (Monteleone et al., 2023; White, 2019).

Conclusion

Ball's (2015) concern that "policies are contested, mediated and differentially represented by different actors in different contexts" (p. 311) is evident in the diversity of stakeholder responses to the TEEP Discussion Paper. The analysis of stakeholder responses also supports the call from Ledger et al. (2020) for "policy and legislative changes such that the goals and objectives for Professional Experience can be achieved without an overreliance on the goodwill and moral obligations of both academic and teaching staff" (p. 127). PEx underpins all ITE programs, it has appeared as a significant component that needs addressing in multiple government reports and their associated recommendations for ITE, yet until recently investment in PEx has seen little systemic reform or innovation occur. Recently proposed budget commitments to fund PEx may mitigate placement poverty concerns and provide evidence of current governments' desire to support strategies that strengthen education workforce initiatives.

The content analysis highlighted underpinning assumptions, policy and practice gaps, time and impost on stakeholders and privileged some voices. The calls for development of future teachers, enhanced mentor teacher support, increased financial investment, ongoing establishment of formal partnerships encompass the broad stakeholder perspectives. To a lesser degree there was desirability for system-wide coordination of PEx. Although respondents supported systematic investment in PEx, concern arose in terms of partnerships, sustainability, supporting rural and remote placements and how 'centralised' a systematic agreement needs to be before it becomes constraining. Differences have, and

will, occur between stakeholder groups in terms of preferred programs, resourcing, and supporting innovative practices. These areas of disagreement suggest that 'agreement' in Professional Experience might be easier in theory than it is in practice.

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