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# VCOSS submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

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The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review*.

VCOSS is the peak body for social and community services in Victoria. VCOSS supports the community services, industry, represents the interests of Victorians facing disadvantage and vulnerability in policy debates, and advocates to develop a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

Access to high-quality education can transform lives. Education provides protective factors that can prevent or moderate the impact of social disadvantage – however, schools need to be equipped to support the diverse needs of their students for this to happen.

This Review is an opportunity to improve initial teacher education (ITE) so that the workforce has greater skills and confidence to create inclusive school cultures and deliver inclusive classroom education.

## Part A – Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters

### **How can we increase ITE completion rates so that quality ITE students graduate and pursue careers as quality teachers?**

While students may be eligible to enrol in a Commonwealth Supported Place to access a HECS-HELP loan, there are peripheral expenses that still prevent some students on low incomes from taking up the opportunity to study. For example, some students cannot afford to buy textbooks, a digital device, pay for rent, childcare or transport.

It becomes even more difficult for students to afford to study when they are unable to undertake paid employment during placement periods.

Current social security payments don't cover the costs of meeting the basics. Government should lift the rate of income support payments, including for student payments, so learners can afford to undertake further education, including student placements. For low-income

earners not eligible for Commonwealth income support, consideration should be given to providing these students with access to a scholarship fund to ensure cost is not a barrier to completing their studies.

## Part B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

### Are ITE programs preparing graduates for teaching diverse student cohorts, including through cultural competency and inclusive education?

#### Students with disability

Approximately 10 per cent of Australian school students have a disability. The majority attend mainstream schools (89 percent).<sup>i</sup> It is important that initial teacher education better equips the future teaching workforce with skills and knowledge to create inclusive learning environments for students with disability.

The case for improvement is underscored by a range of educational attainment and employment indicators.

For example, young people with disability aged between 20 – 24 years are 17 per cent less likely to complete Year 12 or equivalent compared with peers who are not disabled (68 per cent to 85 per cent).<sup>ii</sup>

Education attainment strongly influences employment participation. Data shows that:

- Only 48 per cent of working-aged people with disability are in employment, compared to 80 per cent of people without disability.<sup>iii</sup>
- Just under 40 per cent of young people with disability aged 15 – 24 years are in employment, compared to 63 per cent of young people of the same age without disability.<sup>iv</sup>

To better equip the teaching workforce, ITE needs to explicitly include:

- The human and legal rights of students with disability. At a minimum, all graduating teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.
- Foundational skills that provide teachers with a robust and practical framework to support a broad range of students with disability.

- A comprehensive understanding (including practical application) of how to provide reasonable adjustments for individual students to meet their learning needs.

Additionally, ITE should:

- Build greater understanding of how negative community attitudes and individual bias can impact on school culture, teaching practice and student outcomes, and create a culture in which new teachers enter the profession with high expectations and aspirations of students with disability.
- Equip teachers to understand that students with disability may hold multiple, intersecting identities which may impact their individual learning needs. For example, a student with disability from a culturally and linguistically diverse background whose first language is not English will have a different set of individual learning needs to a student with disability whose first language is English.

There is also a need for ITE to improve the skills, knowledge and confidence of new teachers to support the learning needs of other students who experience – or are at risk of – marginalisation, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This needs to be embedded in the core learning of the ITE (for example, in different pedagogical approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy) rather than through a single, stand-alone unit or subject.

### Student voice

When students are empowered to ‘own’ their learning and development and have a voice in decisions about learning, teaching and schooling, this leads to greater student engagement in education, higher self-worth and increased academic motivation.<sup>v</sup>

The ITE should support prospective teachers to understand the principles of amplifying student voice and student empowerment. Practical placements may also provide an opportunity to learn about different student-led models such as the Victorian Student Representative Council’s ‘Teach the Teacher’.<sup>vi</sup>

Some students may experience discrimination or oppression because of gender, class, ethnicity and cultural background, religion, disability and/or sexual orientation. It is important

that ITE builds an understanding of this, and how different aspects of a student's identity may expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation and - in the context of student voice - silence some voices. Family Safety Victoria has developed a Family Violence Diversity and Intersectionality Framework to assist family violence workforces to understand and develop an intersectional approach to their practice. This type of resource could be relevant for ITE.

This submission was prepared by Talisha Ohanessian and authorised by VCOSS CEO Emma King. For enquiries please contact Deborah Fewster at [deborah.fewster@vcoss.org.au](mailto:deborah.fewster@vcoss.org.au).

A fully-accessible version is available online at [vcoss.org.au/policy](https://vcoss.org.au/policy).

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia: in brief*, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia 2020: in brief*, 2 October 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia-2020-in-brief/contents/education>>, accessed 9 July 2021.

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia*, 2 October 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/people-with-disability/prevalence-of-disability>>, accessed 9 July 2021.

<sup>iv</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia. Working full- or part-time*, 2 October 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dis/73-1/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents-1/employment/employment-rate-and-type#Working%20full-%20or%20part-time>>, accessed 9 July 2021.

<sup>v</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Amplify: Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership*, 2019.

<sup>vi</sup> VicSRC, *Teach the Teacher*, <<https://www.vicsrc.org.au/teach-the-teacher>>, accessed 9 July 2021.