New research shows why we need minimum entry scores for teaching courses



The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership report into Initial Teacher Education further strengthens the case for minimum entry scores for teaching courses, with more data showing that ATAR scores continue to decline, the AEU said today.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the Federal Government had failed to address the key issues of minimum entry standards and the oversupply of graduates from teaching courses.

“Education Minister Simon Birmingham must follow the example of the NSW Government and put clear minimum entry standards in place for undergraduate teaching degrees, a measure which has the support of AITSL chair Professor John Hattie.

“Previous Education Minister Christopher Pyne did nothing to address the decline in academic standards for entrants to teacher training – even saying that teachers could be great “regardless of ATAR scores”.

“He failed to stop universities enrolling as many students as they want in teaching degrees, despite the growing number of graduates who cannot find teaching work.

“Minister Birmingham needs to take action to fix a flawed system which is producing significant numbers of graduates who cannot get immediate teaching jobs, at the same time as we have chronic shortages of maths, science and language teachers.

The report shows that entrants to undergraduate teaching courses have lower ATARs than the average university student with:

- Double the proportion of students with ATARs between 30 and 50 (6% compared to 3% average for other courses)
- 41% with ATAR 70 or less compared to 25% for other courses
- 30% with ATAR of 81 and over compared to 53% for other courses
- 9% with ATAR of 91 plus compared to 27% for other courses

Retention rate for students moving from first to second year have also fallen from 77 per cent in 2011 to 72 per cent in 2012.

Students admitted with low ATARs are less likely to continue with their course and there is a clear correlation between ATAR scores and success at university.

“Entry scores for teaching degrees have dropped steadily over the last decade, and we have now reached a point where they are significantly lower than for other courses,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“This is a far cry from successful school systems like Singapore which recruit teachers from the top 30 per cent of high school graduates.

“It is also clear from the data that universities are using other pathways to allow students with low ATAR scores to enter teaching courses. The report shows that 18.5% of those coming through another pathway have an ATAR of between 30 and 50.

“While those students may have other qualities that will make them good teachers, it is a concern that this is being used to lower academic entry standards even further.

“We cannot expect young people who struggled at school to become high performing teachers within a few years.

“Teaching courses should be about turning high achieving students into high performing teachers, not helping students who struggled at school learn the basics before they enter the classroom.

“We need minimum entry standards for teaching degrees because as long as universities can enrol unlimited numbers of students in teaching degrees, this issue will remain.

“This has also led to an oversupply of graduates who cannot find work in schools.

“The report also shows that only 45 per cent of Primary teaching graduates and 42 per cent of Secondary teaching are in full time work in schools four months after graduation, a drop on the previous year. Over 30 per cent of graduates were not working in schools.

“The oversupply of teaching graduates has led to increases in fixed-term contracts and casual work for beginning teachers, something which will make teaching a less attractive career in the long-term.

“In the long-term we need to make the transition to all teaching degrees being two-year postgraduate qualifications, so that beginning teachers have the training they need for the classroom.

“The teaching profession is more complex than ever and recent graduates are telling us they have not had the training to cope with challenges such as teaching students with disability.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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