Literacy and numeracy test a band-aid solution for teaching students - we need minimum entry standards



The results of the Federal Government's Literacy and Numeracy test for teaching students shows we need rigorous entry standards for teaching students, the AEU said today.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the test was no substitute for ensuring that teaching courses were restricted to strong academic performers.

"This test is a band-aid solution to the problem that universities have been allowed to set the bar too low to enter a teaching degree," Ms Haythorpe said.

"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.

"Research by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) – commissioned as part of the government's 2014 review of teacher training - clearly showed high-achieving school systems focused on minimum entry standards to teaching courses.

"High-performing school systems such as Singapore recruit all teachers from the top 30 per cent of academic achievers and we need to be doing the same.

"Minister Birmingham says he wants students to be in the top 30 per cent for literacy and numeracy, so why not require entrants to teaching courses to be in the top 30 per cent of academic achievers?"

"Students who have a strong secondary school academic record already have strong literacy and numeracy skills, and these are the students we need to target for teaching degrees.

“The NSW government has already taken action by requiring all beginning teachers to have 'Band 5s' (ATAR scores of over 80) in three subjects including English before they can be employed in schools.

“Academic ability is not the only thing that makes a good teacher, but we need to recognise that stronger academic performers are more likely to make effective teachers.

“This is particularly important as the profession grows more complex and demands on teachers increase.

“If we want to have high quality teachers in our schools we need to select the best graduates for teaching courses, ensure that courses are rigorous, and give beginning teachers support and professional development when they begin in the classroom.

“The current system is producing too many graduates who are unable to find work, yet we still have shortages of teachers in the crucial areas of maths, science and languages.

“ATAR scores for teaching courses have been dropping steadily for a decade. Less than 50% of Australian Year 12 students receiving offers for places in undergraduate teacher education courses had ATAR scores above 70, and the number with ATARs below 50 has doubled in the past three years alone.

“Teaching courses have double the proportion of students with ATARs between 30 and 50 (6% compared to 3% average for other courses).

“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."

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