Another drop in ATAR scores for teaching courses shows Coalition must act on tougher entry standards to lift quality



Latest figures showing more students than ever were admitted to teaching degrees with ATAR scores of under 50 in 2016 shows the Coalition must act on minimum entry standards, the Australian Education Union said today.

The percentage of students entering courses using an ATAR score who have an ATAR of under 50 has almost doubled since 2013, from 7.3% to 14.3%, with the Coalition failing to take any measures to address failing entry standards or the oversupply of graduates.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the Federal Government needed to impose minimum entry standards for teaching degrees to maintain the long-term quality of the teaching workforce.

“The long-term drop in ATAR scores is alarming, and will affect our education system if it is not addressed,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“Entry scores for teaching degrees have dropped steadily over the last decade, and are now significantly lower than for other courses.

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

“The Coalition wants to cut needs-based Gonski funding after 2017, and says they will focus on teacher quality ahead of resources. Yet they have failed to do anything to address this issue or limit the number of students entering teaching degrees.

Figures for 2016 admissions released by the Federal Education Department show that:

- 1062 students were admitted to teaching courses with ATARs under 50, up from 894 in 2015.
- In 2013, 7.3% of teaching students admitted with an ATAR had a score of under 50, in 2016 that figure has almost doubled to 14.3%.

- In 2016, a further 2986 were admitted with ATARs between 50 and 70, which means that over half of all teaching students admitted with an ATAR in 2016 had an ATAR of less than 70.

“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,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“The NSW Government has put clear minimum entry standards in place, requiring teachers employed in public schools to have three ATARs of over 80, including English. This is the model that the Federal Government should follow.”

“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”.

“The Coalition has 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.

“We know that 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.

“It is also clear from the data that universities are using other pathways to allow students with low ATAR scores to enter teaching courses.

Last year’s Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership report into Initial Teacher Education 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 or experience that will make them good teachers, it is a concern that this is being used to lower academic entry standards even further.”

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