



Australian Council of
Deans of Education Inc.

The Honorable Julia Gillard
Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Parliament House ACT 2600

3 December 2007

Dear Minister,

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) is the peak association of the deans of faculties/heads of schools of education in Australian universities and other higher education institutions. We congratulate your Party on winning government and you as the new Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. We keenly support the Labor commitment to an education revolution and will do our utmost to assist that agenda.

At this time, we draw your attention to two urgent matters for your consideration concerning teacher education, namely: (1) establishing a national system of teacher education course accreditation, and (2) school practicum requirements introduced by your predecessor, the Hon. Julie Bishop.

- (1) Considerable effort has been made by stakeholders towards establishing a well constructed and highly regarded system of national accreditation of teacher education. Parties involved include the ACDE, the State/Territory accreditation and registration bodies through AFTRAA, *Teaching Australia*, and the Improving Teaching and School Leadership Capacity (ITSLC) Working Group of MCEETYA. For over ten years, ACDE has argued for a national system of accreditation and has been very pleased to play a part in recent discussions. We have become concerned, however, that officers in your Department are now proceeding independently to develop their own version of standards.

To this end, we ask you, as a matter of urgency, to

- allow the ACDE to brief you on needs and issues in national accreditation
- have a stop put to current departmental efforts to circumvent efforts by the States, Territories and the Council of Deans of Education towards a genuinely collaborative approach to a national system of accreditation including its governance, processes and standards.

- (2) The second issue concerns the decision to create in the Schools portfolio a group responsible for funding a portion of the teacher education practicum program contingent upon meeting an arbitrarily imposed minimum number of days of placement. This condition lacks any evidentiary base and was not suggested by the bipartisan report of the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education, *Top of the Class* (2007), which recommended a fund to improve the quality of placements rather than the quantity. We were surprised to find this Higher Education program administered through the Schools portfolio, and have become concerned at the ad-hoc regulations created in relation to pilot projects to increase the length of the practicum. The current interpretation we have been offered of the new Administrative Guidelines (17 October 2007) is that payment for pilot projects in 2008 -- which may or may not turn out to improve quality or support an increase in the quantity of school practicum -- obliges teacher education providers to implement the increased number of placement days from 2009.

In an evidence-based policy environment, we suggest that the pilot projects be regarded as genuine investigations conducted in 2008 directed towards quality enhancement in 2009. For this reason, we seek your reassurance

- that the practicum pilot projects are non-binding trials directed at quality enhancement rather than binding commitments to particular solutions to be implemented in 2009
- that the question of an appropriate minimum number of days of placement be the subject of the ongoing discussions around accreditation standards referred to in (1) above.

We believe that each of these interventions, rather than delaying the achievement of national accreditation and enhancement of professional practice, will enable more speedy and sustainable progress based on the collaboration and commitment of the States, Territories, Commonwealth and Deans of Education.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Willis', written in a cursive style.

Sue Willis (Prof)
Dean, Faculty of Education, Monash University
President, ACDE

cc Professor Peter Dawkins
Secretary, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Chair, Joint Project Steering Group (Pre Service Education)