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Changes, Challenges and Successes Facing Secondary Pre-service Teacher Education in Australia

DAWN JOSEPH
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Dawn Joseph, Deakin University, Australia

Abstract: In December 2008, the Australian Government was presented with a report from a Review of Australian Higher Education known as the ‘Bradley Review’. The report clearly articulates many challenges that lie ahead; it questions the structure, organisation and financial position of Australia to effectively compete in the global economy. This paper provides a succinct discussion of some of the challenges and dilemmas encountered at a metropolitan Australian university in Melbourne within the Faculty of Arts and Education in the School of Education. The courses will be reaccredited in 2016 and has to comply with the new Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), the Australian Teaching Standards Framework (AITSL) and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). By employing narrative inquiry, reflective practice and document analysis as methodology, I discuss the Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary)/Bachelor of Arts course (degree), the largest secondary pre-service teacher education course at a university in Melbourne presenting some strategies and inviting international dialogue in relation to some of the challenges faced regarding increased numbers of students and lower entrance scores. Limitations of the current course are acknowledged and generalizations cannot be made to other education courses at universities across Australia. However, some new initiatives in the faculty are offered.

Keywords: Pre-Service Teacher Education, Australian Higher Education, Australian Qualification Framework, Arts Secondary Teacher Course

Background to the Australian Education System

Australian education systems fall into three main sectors (schooling, vocational education and training and higher education). Although the six States and two Territories each have their own education system, they generally follow the same model and receive extra funding from federal government (Schooling and Education 2015). Schooling is compulsory from the age of five and fifteen to seventeen, depending on the State or Territory and date of birth. “The Australian school system has a great reputation, with high quality teachers, a diverse curriculum, students from many different backgrounds and learning spaces that bring out the best in everyone” (State Government Victoria Department of Education and Training 2015). In the main, schooling is provided by the State or Territory governments or by private education providers. Public schools also known as Government schools are free to attend for Australian citizens and permanent residents, whilst independent schools and religious school charge fees. Post-compulsory education is structured within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which regulates a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training (VET) and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and the higher education sector (university). Not all students opt to attend university. Some students prefer to study a diverse range of trades and other occupations in business and industry through the VET and TAFE sector. Since the 1940’s, the government financially supported Australians to attend university.
“By the 1960s, a majority of university students received financial support for their tuition fees through Commonwealth Scholarships” (Rodgan 2015). In the 1970’s tertiary education was made more accessible to working class and middle class Australians and university fees were abolished in 1974. In the 1980’s colleges were designated as universities or merged with each other or existing universities to form Australia’s unitary higher education system (Pickford 2014). In this way, more students gained access to higher education with the government offering the Higher Education Contributions Scheme (Commonwealth Consolidated Acts. 2015). However, in 2005 the Commonwealth government deregulated university fees, permitting universities to increase fees by a maximum of 25% (Norton 2014). This did not diminish enrolments; rather, in 2014 domestic enrolments exceeded one million for the first time (Norton 2014). Though higher education contributes significantly to revenue in Australia, the Australian government in 2014 announced budget cuts, decreasing the Commonwealth’s contribution to undergraduate student places (Bexley 2014), placing much pressure on universities. With further cuts threatening higher education, universities in Australia could come to be seen as private institutions rather than public ones, because of fee rises. The notion that universities are public institutions is fast driven by government cutbacks where it no longer is seen to be doing the public good.

**Deakin University: Secondary Pre-Service Teacher Education**

My paper situates itself amongst forty universities in Australia who are self-accrediting institutions where the government is primarily responsible for funding higher education (Australian Government Department of Industry, 2013). Deakin University is Australia’s ninth largest with over 50,000 students (Deakin University 2013a). It was originally established in 1974 as a regional university offering a broad range of courses for rural and regional students in the state of Victoria. In the 1990’s the university merged with the Warnambool Institute of Advanced Education and the Victoria College in Melbourne establishing Deakin as one multi-campus institution that caters for local (rural, regional and metropolitan) and international students. I joined the university in 2001 as an academic in the Faculty of Arts and Education, School of Education (SoE) at the Melbourne Campus. From January 2008-February 2013, I held the position of course director for the Bachelor Teaching (Secondary)/Bachelor of Arts [BTeach/Arts]. I led the largest secondary course (program) in terms of numbers, staffing, and subject development. I teach in the area of Arts Education, my discipline is music. More recently I continue to mentor the incoming course director. This paper discusses some of my changes, challenges and successes (viability, demand, student load and enrolments against targets, success and retention, selection, support systems and the cloud environment) I encountered as course director. I present a brief discussion of the new Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), the Australian Teaching Standards Framework (AITSL) and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), to help understand the Australian education systems in relation to accreditation. The points raised in this paper may be similar to that experienced at other universities. Hence, no generalizations can therefore be made to other courses or universities. Rather, I offer a snapshot of what is taking place in relation to external reforms and internal pressures in Australia and offer some initiatives that have worked at my university. In doing so, I hope to encourage international
dialogue regarding challenges and dilemmas course director’s face in relation to accreditation for teacher education courses at higher education institutes.

Higher Education in Australia: External Reforms

All teacher education courses in Australia have a five-year cycle and are accredited by a state regulatory body. As Deakin University is geographically located within the state of Victoria, the BTeach/Arts teacher education course is accredited through the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). The course has to meet and satisfy the new national standards (VIT, 2014). As past course director I was faced with matters regarding increased numbers of students; lowered entrance scores and the added need to have student academic support services in place. The new course director with my support will now be responsible for reaccrediting the course in 2016. The course will need to comply with recent national major reforms such as the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2012). In 1995, the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) was first established to underpin the national system of qualifications. Later, in 2011 the AQF was revised to “ensure that qualification outcomes remains relevant and nationally consistent” (AQF 2013, 9). In 2011 the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) introduced the AQF to provide standards and quality assurance for Australian qualifications for education. TEQSA has the “powers to regulate university and non-university providers, monitor quality, set standards, provide clear information” (Gora 2010, 78). The AQF plays a key role in tertiary education and training by “defining the characteristics of qualifications and assigning them to a specific sector for accreditation and quality assurance” (Australian Government 2008, 193). The AQF descriptors (see AQF 2013, 16) provide the basis for which the BTeach/Arts undergraduate course is accredited. Students achieve learning outcomes at level seven stipulated for Bachelor qualifications. The AQF comprises the learning outcomes for each AQF level and qualification type. The learning outcomes are constructed as a taxonomy of what graduates are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning. They are expressed in terms of the dimensions of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills at a specific level (AQF 2013). In the case of the BTeach/Arts, seven level outcomes are to be delivered in Australian tertiary institutions in 2015.

The BTeach/Arts course has to also align with the introduction of a nationwide set of professional teaching standards. The Australian Professional Standards for Teaching regulated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provide more details than the AQF in terms of what the graduate is expected to know and do. AITSL also define the professional knowledge and practice of graduate teachers in Australia. The standards are pertinent for graduate teachers as they are organised into four career stages (Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead). They also guide the preparation, support and development of teachers throughout their professional lives. The most significant aspect of the standards is that they define the professional knowledge and practice of all Australian teachers superseding individual State standards and practices (AITSL 2014). In recent decades, there has been a trend in the production of professional standards describing competencies for teachers in different
nation states around the world (Ceulemans, Simons and Stryf 2012). For example in England (see Training and Development Agency for Schools 2007), USA (see National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2001) and Australia (see National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching 2003) for the professional teaching standards. The prevalence of professional teaching standards may be seen as an increased emphasis by national governments to dictate the quality of the performance of teachers. They are also seen as “a powerful tool in the development of teaching as a profession” (Yinger and Hendicks-Lee 2000, 94). The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2011a) describe the professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement at the first of the four career stages. These begin with the professional expectations (Graduate Standards) of those graduating from initial teacher education programs such as the BTeach/Arts course. The Graduate Standards have led to new procedures for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs across Australia (AITSL 2012b). Since 2013, there is now a consistent framework for registration of teachers in all Australian states and territories.

Secondary Teaching: BTeach/Arts

The BTeach/Arts course is underpinned by the necessary discipline knowledge and competencies required for secondary teachers. Pre-service teachers gain broad skills and understanding of the practice of educators in one or more fields of study within a Bachelor of Arts degree. The four-year course comprises of thirty-two credit points. One credit point is equivalent to one unit of study (a unit is known as a subject) and is taken across a semester (eleven weeks). The course is known as a double degree. Two years of study for the BA and two years for the BTeach. The course runs parallel with sixteen credit points in the SoE and sixteen units across the Faculty of Arts and Education (making up the BA component of the course). Students enroll in six core education units in the SoE. They also must undertake a minimum of eighty days of practicum (placement) starting in their first year. The placement component is embedded in the six core education units. Satisfactory completion of the practicum is compulsory in order for the student to progress through the course. Though the structure of the course is highly sequential, students have a wide choice of electives to choose from. Students have to meet a minimum number of prerequisite content units (from the BA) before they can undertake any curriculum units (methodology) in the BTeach. In addition, students have to be conversant with the Standards for Graduating Students as required by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). Graduates from the BTeach/Arts can work in a wide range of jobs locally and internationally these may include schools, government departments, community education institutions, and non-government organisations (Deakin University 2013a).

Every five years the course is re-accredited. This process involves ongoing conversations with academic and administrative staff as well as students. As past course director, I was responsible for the coordination, management and renewal of the course. Thus, held accountable to multiple internal and external committees (Teaching and Learning Committee, Advisory Board, Professional Experience Subcommittee, VIT) in terms of the health of the course and projected changes to the course. Hence, was responsible for the overall leadership of the course. The focus of the paper centers around the changes and challenges faced in relation to meeting
faculty targets, accrediting the course and providing support structures to accommodate increased numbers of students with lower entrance scores as well as student who may come from low socio-economic backgrounds. In 2014, there were approximately 470 students enrolled in the course.

Methodology

Drawing on reflective practice, document analysis and “personal narrative” (Chase 2005, 652), I provide a succinct discussion of some of the challenges and dilemmas encountered in the Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary)/Bachelor of Arts course as I reflect on some significant concerns in the course (Ghaye 2010). Schön (1983) argues that we undertake reflection in and on our action in order to gain new understandings of our practice in order to improve and make changes to it. Reflection is a personal task, thus serves as a way to shape and transform the new course when it is presented for reaccreditation in 2016. Using narrative inquiry as my methodology as the paper is concerned with the representation of my experience (Sinclair Bell 2002, Connelly and Clendenin 1999), my narrative “becomes the frameworks within which experience is reflected upon, shared and reconstructed in the light of new insights, perspectives, experiences and understandings” (Beattie 2000, 5). My narrative is situated, particular and personal (Bowman 2006). I draw on government documents, the Australian Qualification Framework and Deakin University’s Course review to inform my discussion. As researcher and past course director, I write myself into the narrative “so that the reader is clear about their [my] disposition” (de Vries 2014, 65). By using discourse of narrative I share my story “where the knower is connected to the known, and knowledge making is recognized as an active creative, interpretative process, in which the telling and retelling of one’s story provides a framework for the construction of professional knowledge in teaching” (Beattie 2000, 5).

Findings and Discussion of the BTeach/Arts Course

In 2008, the Bradley review of Higher Education commissioned by the Australian Government resulted in a target set by the Australian (federal/commonwealth) Government that by 2020, 20% of undergraduate enrolments should be from applicants from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. In the light of this, the Government provides funding to help universities achieve this target, through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPP) (Deakin University 2014b). In this section of the paper I provide a snapshot of some of the challenges, successes and changes I encountered in my role as course director for the BTeach/Arts course. The challenge has been dealing with national reforms and meeting low socio-economic status targets. The course is highly viable, showing consistency over the past 5 years, boasting 85.4% as 1st preference acceptance rate at Deakin University. The Victorian Tertiary Admission Centre (VTAC) is a centralized admissions center in Australia for tertiary courses, where this course has shown a very high preferences rate over the past 6 years with an 80% average acceptance rate for the course. The international enrolment tends to be very low, this could be due to poor marketing or simply students do not meet the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). International students require an overall score of 7 (with no
band score less than 7 in reading and writing, and 7.5 in speaking and listening) to be considered for this course. To a large extent, international students in the School of Education generally apply for postgraduate courses such as the MTeach and not the undergraduate BTeach/Arts course. The course has consistently exceeded targets for Commonwealth Supported Places (a study assist program funded by the government) and has met faculty load over the years. In the next section I discuss a few pertinent challenges in relation to entry into the course.

Some of the Challenges Facing the Course

Application for the course generally takes place through the Victorian Tertiary Admission Centre (VTAC). The VTAC handbook outlines the requirements for all courses. There are generally two types of applicants: current year 12 students/school leavers and non-year 12 students. To boost access to higher education, the Federal Government abolished the cap on university places in 2007. Karimshah et.al (2013) and Bowers-Brown (2006) see this decision as providing more chances for low socio-economic status (LSES) students to enter higher education. The removal of the cap has resulted in increased targets for enrolment in the course impacting on selection practice. This then had implications and ramifications in relation to staffing, resources and timetabling. Although increased targets allow for more students to undertake tertiary studies, this does not necessarily result in increased enrolments for LSES applicants.

The planning unit of the university and management in the Faculty of Arts and Education sets targets for the course. Selection is based on a ranking of applicants, which is regulated by a re-ranking process in the faculty. A recent selection practice implemented by Deakin University is a Special Entry and Access Scheme (SEAS), designed to give preferential access to applicants that fall into the SEAS category. Applicants that fall under the category of mature age, non-English speaking background, difficult family circumstances, disadvantaged socio-economic background, rural or isolated applicants, under-represented schools, and recognition as an Indigenous Australian all gain extra ranking points. The SEAS initiative by the university is hoping to increase the percentage of LSES enrolments in order to meet the national target of 20% by 2020. This target is an outcome from the Bradley review of Higher Education commissioned by the Australian Government (2008).

The qualitative Personal Information (PI) form is a positive initiative that aims to meet the 20% target when applying through VTAC. The PI form is only required for non-school leaver applicants. The aim of the form is to provide selection officers information about the applicant’s motivation to study in the area of becoming a teacher. The form provides information about the applicant’s previous work experience and or studies. The PI form also provides selection officers with ‘other relevant’ information that supports their case to become teachers. For example, in the case of the Arts, applicants may have worked in a private studio, a gallery or a theatre doing community Arts or they may have worked as a teacher aide/assistant or volunteered at a school. Such information shows that they are keen to become teachers, have work experience with children, worked in school settings, and worked in teams and my have developed good interpersonal skills. The PI form also includes why applicants wish to return to study if they have intermittled due do work or family commitments or a change of career. The form list referees to
support the claims applicants make. The PI form allows LSES applicants to explain their circumstances giving them the benefit to strengthen their case for special consideration.

LSES applicants who do not have a substantive academic record to gain entry into the course may sit the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT). The STAT is a nationwide independent test, which “assesses competencies commonly considered important for success in tertiary study” (TISC 2013). However, the cost for undertaking this test raises a financial concern for all applicants especially those that are LSES. Increased enrolment targets for the BTeach/BA course invariably leads to lower entry standards. Hence, larger numbers of students with low academic backgrounds enter the course requiring support structures.

**Successes and Changes**

In the light of the above situation, universities are challenged to provide high quality programs and support systems that impact on student retention and success rates. I discuss some initiatives within the faculty (Professional Experience Office, the Ask and Seek program and the Peer mentoring program) and the university (The Deakin University Participation & Partnerships Program and cloud learning). The BTeach/Arts course maintains high retention rates (83.3% in 2012) and has a very high success rate of 83%, keeping pace with the university rates. In addition, the success of the course may be attributed to a number of factors for example: all units have good academic ‘teaching and learning teams’, all units maintain high standards and provide excellent cutting edge material that prepares pre-service teachers for the 21st century. In terms of success, the 2012 data show 73% of the graduates are in full time employment and only 8% are seeking work. At the annual course review in 2012, it was suggested that an independent study unit of Vocational Education and Training and International Baccalaureate be considered. Suggestions by the external Advisory Board also included a research strand within the course so that students can undertake Level 8 units. This provision builds capacity for research and ongoing learning into courses at the university and will be crucial in the 2015/16 reaccreditation of the course.

The Professional Experience Office (PEO) plays an important role with the large numbers of students and also those from LSES. The school experience shapes student’s attitudes and beliefs about effective teaching (Ng, Nicholas and Williams 2010). Therefore the PEO take into account student needs and interest when placing them in secondary schools. Students are given a wide range of opportunities to undertake placements. They can go locally, regionally or globally to a school or may arrange a placement other than schools such as theatre or dance company or a gallery. The PEO is in competition with other universities regarding placements of pre-service teachers. The rejection rates from schools accepting placements has increased due to the pressure in the work force of teachers willing to host pre-service teachers. To combat this situation in 2013 a practicum liaison team of 28 (recently retired Principals and Assistant Principals) members employed as casual academics fulfills the role of visiting students whilst on placement. This initiative gives the university a significant edge, achieving a 100% placement for all education students where the rate for our students visited by the team and academics has increased from 20% to approximately 95%. The overriding success of the team has been in its ability to build strong relationships with all stakeholders and attract new partnerships (schools
and within the community). The PEO staff work alongside the course director and academics to ensure that the embedded practicum is suited to the units being delivered and also aligns with the secondary curriculum teaching methods.

**Faculty Initiatives**

In order to manage increased numbers of students with lower enter scores, the Access and Equity Learning Group of the university established a new initiative called the ‘Ask and See’ program. In 2009 this program originated as a pilot to improve first-year student retention and success rates. Since 2010, this support service provides assistance to students who struggle with the academic requirements of their courses assisting them to make the learning experience successful. Many find the transition to tertiary education challenging. The staff consult on a one-to-one basis with students who find difficulty balancing the competing demands of study, socializing and part-time work. The ‘Ask and See’ team provide help with assignment planning and give academic support to students who consider ‘dropping out’ of tertiary study altogether. The ‘Ask and See’ team also take referrals from academic staff; they work proactively and constructively with academic staff to assist students who may be falling behind. This initiative for all courses in the School of Education has shown an increase from 404 students in the first year to 2185 in trimester one in 2013. This radical increase puts added pressure on the ‘Ask and See’ team, it also questions the need for why so many students require support to succeed in the course. The ‘Ask and See’ is a successful and expanding student-based program now embedded as an aspect of study for students in the faculty. Though it has proven to be helpful for students, it beckons the question: how will these graduates cope in the real world or classroom where there are little support structures?

In addition to the ‘Ask and See’ initiative, a peer-mentoring program was launched in 2013 to support new students with the transition to university life (Deakin University 2013b). The formal program runs for six weeks at the beginning of each trimester and involves students from their second year to Masters level to peer mentor up to seven or eight mentees. Mentees are largely new students, but also include returning students looking for further support in negotiating tertiary studies in order to achieve success. The program also provides opportunities for mentors to develop graduate attributes such as communication, teamwork and leadership skills that are imperative when they go on placements and enter the workforce as early career teachers. According to the peer-mentor co-ordinator, most education mentors have sited placement highly among the concerns of first year students. Mentees reported they appreciated seeing some of the things mentors brought to the meeting; such as placement assessments and bits and pieces they had collected over their placements. Mentee students benefit from the help and advice of mentor students who has ‘been there before’ in relation to the course. It was apparent from the peer mentor co-ordinator “they feel safe to ask a peer what they may consider a silly question, rather than approach initially intimidating academic staff” (personal communication). Of the 96 registered mentees in the inaugural year of the program nine were BTeach students and three mentors from the course were recruited to support those students. With the positive feedback from students, the peer-mentoring program will continue to offer
students support with their social and academic transition during their first year at the university (Deakin University 2013b).

**University Initiatives**

The Deakin University Participation & Partnerships Program (DUPPP) is another successful initiative funded by the Commonwealth Government. DUPPP aims to improve the success and retention rates of undergraduate students from LSES backgrounds. The program provides bursaries, scholarships, laptops and mobile Internet access for students who demonstrate a need. In addition, student housing rental grants are available for LSES students. Within this program the ‘First in Family’ students is now able to attend university with support. The Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program fund the program. The program is “expected to be targeted, evidence-based, collaborative, and evaluated against clear Government quantitative targets” (Deakin University 2014b).

In addition to the above initiatives and successes the university prides itself with a focus on ‘cloud learning’, enhancing the university’s digital frontier. In this space students can access information about their course, they are able to connect with each other and with staff any at time and in any place. Using any platform that has the Internet connectivity (computer, I Pad, smart phone or iPhone) students can access their units (subjects), which include the course learning outcomes and standards. Through the cloud they have access to integrated learning support such as academic literacies, library and career development. The use of the cloud is “to enable students to communicate with the course team and their peers, as well as connect with industry bodies and volunteering opportunities” (CloudDeakin Refresh 2014). By moving into a cloud space each student have their own personalized hub called ‘DeakinSync’, this provides them with quick and simple access to all the tools and information they need to succeed in their course. A key challenge to help students succeed is for lectures to be online with narrated PowerPoint’s so that students can access the material in the cloud at any time and in any place. The presence of the Cloud for all unit material allows unit content within the BTeach/Arts course to be mapped against the Graduate Learning Outcomes. This is an effective way for student portfolios to be mapped against Graduate Learning Outcomes and the Course Learning Outcomes.

**Concluding Comments**

As past course director of the largest secondary teacher education course (BTeach/Arts), I presented a snapshot of the challenges and dilemmas I faced. This is a limitation in itself as I only present my perspective as the study is only undertaken at one university in Melbourne (Australia). Hence my view may be seen as bias. As course director I am limited in the sense that I have to adhere to the rules and regulations of the faculty and that of the university’s governance and curriculum unit. In preparing for reaccreditation, I had to work within the boundaries of the Advisory board and had to meet all requirements of the Victorian Teacher Institute. In the light if this, generalisations cannot be made to other secondary courses in Australia or internationally. This paper discusses some of the key challenges facing Australian Higher Education courses in relation to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), Australian TertiaryEducation
Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and Australian Teaching Standards Framework (AITSL). The AQF is regulated by TEQSA. Though the AQF have the power to “regulate university and non-university providers, monitor quality, set standards, provide clear information” (Gora 2010, 78) teacher education courses are also regulated by the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching (AITSL). I focused on a key outcome from the Bradley Report in that “Australian universities have a new incentive to enroll students from low socio-economic status” (Brooke 2011, 84). In a recent report from Queensland University of Technology, Green (2012, 2) found “people from low SES backgrounds are significantly under-represented while those from high SES backgrounds are significantly over-represented”. Associated with this outcome, the AQF and Australian Professional Standards for Teaching reforms were discussed as they contribute to the success and retention rate of LSES students. As part of the recommendations Phillips (2012, 15) reports universities are to “look beyond the current ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank) framework to encompass alternative pathways and channels. This should involve putting in place flexible arrangements for facilitating LSES student access to, and support within, higher education learning programs”. Bamber & Tett, (2001) found much weight is placed on student’s ability to adjust to tertiary life, however they found by providing support many more will achieve completion and postgraduate qualification. At Deakin University programs such as ‘Ask and Seek’, Peer-Mentoring, Deakin University Participation & Partnerships Program and the support through the cloud, have resulted in positive outcomes to help with success and retention for all students not only LSES students. Such initiatives have proven worthy and may be explored at other higher education institutions.

Writing specifically about LSES in Australia, Karimshah, et.al (2013, 6) makes the point that risk factors contribute to attrition they also argue that “knowing why students leave does not directly explain why they stay”. The university has to maintain standards in order to meet the AQF and AITSL standards. Hence more pressure is placed on the faculty and staff to help student’s progress in order to meet the standards required for the course. When SEAS applicants are accepted, the pressure rests with the faculty to raise student’s standards through support systems. Michell (2011, 92) argues, “fewer than three per cent of Australians from low SES backgrounds will have postgraduate qualifications”. Although the faculty has the ‘Ask and See’ program, the Peer Mentoring Program where 10.6% of the students are from the BA/BTeach and Study Support programs (see Deakin University 2014a), Michell (2011, 92) points out that Australian universities should call on the experience and knowledge of graduates from LSES students to “inspire, promote, mentor, befriend and encourage current and prospective student from similar backgrounds”. With an increase number of students, the faculty has to employ more sessional staff; this impacts on faculty budget and added workload for fulltime staff to mentor sessionals. Another challenge the course faces relates to a lack of space for classes, as there are major timetable clashes with core units. Though classes take place from 8am to 8pm most units are competing for a teaching space across faculties. This continues to be an ongoing issue for the BTeach/Arts. In response to student feedback about missing classes when on placement, all unit material now has a strong and comprehensive online presence made available in the cloud. The cloud platform has initiated new ways of thinking about how to manage issues of teaching and learning with larger and varied cohorts. The university is moving away from the elitist notion that higher education is only accessible to the wealthy and high academic achievers. It is
providing a fair and equitable system by doing the public good where the notion of inclusive and equitable access to higher education is not a new phenomenon.

The points raised in this paper may be similar to that experienced at other higher education institutions. I invite international dialogue in relation to some of the successes, changes and challenges Australian universities face and welcome new ways of thinking about how to manage key issues highlighted in this paper. A key challenge course directors may face in future at Australian universities will be to meet the National Teaching Standards and AQF. Where undergraduates will be assessed in each of the seven AQF standards and thirty-seven areas of focus within each standard at the Graduate level (AITSL, 2012). One aspect of the Graduate Standards is a new benchmark requirement that Graduate teachers will have to attain. Their literacy and numeracy skills will be equivalent to the top 30% of the Australian population. It is anticipated that a literacy and numeracy assessment tool will be developed by AITSL and implemented in 2015 (AITSL, 2014). With increasing student enrolments the university envisions changes to teacher education courses to support those students who have low literacy and numeracy skills so that they reach the benchmark requirement. In many other parts of the world the support received from government for education systems is essential as it contributes to the overall development of the country across many sectors including education. In Australia, government support for higher education contributes to the intellectual, economic, cultural and social development of the country (Australian Government Department of Industry 2014). Though the Australian government supports higher education through policies, funding, and a variety of programs, education reforms and the recent cut backs from the government will determine how universities will prepare today’s teachers for tomorrow’s classrooms.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Dr. Dawn Joseph:* Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
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