



FROM	Michelle Laurenson (Faculty Delegate Education)
TO	Faculty Board for Education
DATE	5 February 2013
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SUBJECT	Student Submission for Proposed Master of Teaching

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Masters of Teaching. Over the past three days, VUWSA has been surveying the 2012 Trimester Two and Three Class Representatives across all Faculties at Victoria as well as those students currently enrolled in teaching qualifications. This submission specifically addresses whether students support the introduction of a Master of Teaching, and highlights subsequent concerns to this effect.

We have prepared the following submission from the individual submissions of 114 Class Representatives. The profile of these reps was mixed. Close to one half (n=50) of these were either currently enrolled in a teaching qualification or were considering moving on to one, once they had finished their Bachelors. The Faculties most represented in response rate were: FHSS (n=53), Science (n=20), Education (n=17), and Law and Commerce (n=13).

Is there Student Support for a Masters of Teaching?

One third of respondents clearly support the introduction of a Masters of Teaching. Otherwise, nearly half of those responding were unsure, while others did not support the new qualification.

Overall, there is a moderate base of support among current students by whom the change is seen as a positive move within the teaching profession. At the same time, however, the student body at large can also be seen as rather uncertain on this issue. The latter is perhaps understandable given the lack of exposure and experience among respondents as regards both teacher training and the teaching profession as a whole. A considerable reservation though was expressed over the fact that students enrolled in teaching qualifications, like other postgraduate students, would no longer be eligible for student allowances.

Would a Masters of Teaching Deliver an Improvement in Teacher Training?

Close to a half of respondents thought the Masters of Teaching would better prepare students as beginner teachers than would the current Graduate Diploma, while over half thought the changed qualification structure would raise the standing of the teaching profession within the student body as a whole. However, a considerable number of comments expressed reservations on this issue. Most notably, there was some scepticism as to the extent to which the Masters Degree would actually differentiate itself from the Graduate Diploma such that the latter was already seen to provide a complete and positive experience in teacher training:

I think it is very important for teachers to be able to think critically and know how to do research but i feel these things would have been in the GradDip

From what I have heard about the GDipTeach from friends who have completed it, it seems to encompass a wide range of subjects which focus on preparing a student to teach, and urges them, based on this study, to decide what kind of teacher they desire to be. To me that sounds exciting, challenging, real and complete.

Questions were also asked of the relevance of a research intensive postgraduate degree to the teacher training in general, even if it would otherwise prove valuable to those more inclined to academic learning:

Teaching is a skill that is developed by real world skills, a Masters qualification won't help this

For those committed and serious adult students who are trying to better themselves through a career change, or who have finally found their vocation and want to pursue teaching, this move towards turning the GDipTeach into a MTeach will be an unfortunate barrier on the way to achieving their dreams. However, for those who have realised their bliss is in studying and want to pursue the academic path in Education along with the practical rewards of being a teacher the MTeach and its components sounds invaluable.

In some cases it was also doubted of the ability of a teaching qualification to provide the total postgraduate experience from a research perspective:

I think more emphasis should be on the subject that the individual studied for 3-5 years, rather than the 1 year they practiced articulating that knowledge to younger students. I think a grad/dip should be sufficient for students that have already finished degrees and want to make it easier for them to become as a teacher (in that subject). A masters in teaching also implies they have researched and possibly found new knowledge for the subject. Rather than a year of core papers ticking off the boxes that will make them a teacher. My current masters is a very intensive 2 year course, by relabeling this grad/dip, I feel that they are not equal weighting as a masters. Unless the work load is increased or taught differently, and is similar to a thesis, then keep the grad/dip as I don't believe it should have the same "naming value".

The concept of students doing a master's in a discipline in which they have essentially no previous academic experience goes totally against the point of a "Master's" degree

It is perhaps with these thoughts in mind that one comment sought a more comprehensive structure for the degree:

Structure MTeach as a three year degree. Structure MTeach to require pre-requisite papers, enforcing previous nonteaching degree applicants to undertake no less than 2 years to gain their MTeach degree.

Would Ineligibility for the Student Allowance Discourage Students from Pursuing Teaching Qualifications?

When questioned on whether ineligibility for the student allowance would discourage students from pursuing teaching qualifications, close to three quarters answered that students would either be extremely discouraged or discouraged. Only five responses answered such that students would not be discouraged at all by this situation.

Comments to this effect highlighted points such as the importance of the student allowance to certain groups, and the difficulty of balancing work and study given a more demanding Masters qualification. It was also noted where ineligibility for the student allowance effectively “cancelled out” the potential benefits of the proposed degree:

The lack of financial security student allowances bring could be a very serious barrier for students, as working throughout a harder Masters workload to get enough money to live on will be very difficult and stressful.

I feel that it will shut off the option to a lot of people who have families to support, or who are from low income backgrounds.

A lot of people I know rely on their student allowance to get through the very immediate funds for uni such as books, accommodation, food etc. Things they cannot do without. Having to wait so long to become a teacher and having to pay for those costs by yourself will mean only those more well-off students will become teachers.

Student living costs are exponentially high due to the very high cost of living for all within New Zealand - preventing those from having a student allowance will hinder those from lower socio-economic groups within society as they will not be able to fund study properly. The notion that student allowance will not be accessible to those undertaking a teaching qualification is ridiculous and very short-sighted as teachers play a key role in development of young citizens.

Although the MTeach may be a great idea, the fact that student will not be able to receive the student allowance will drive many away. Therefore in the short term I think it is a bad idea although a better outcome would be to reinstate student allowance eligibility for postgrad student, after which the program could be judged on its own merits.

The ideas behind expanding the degree and learning more skills have the potential to be good (though flexibility should be allowed for within each student's program) but the lack of eligibility for student allowances, as students struggle to get enough to live on, presents a serious barrier and is likely to discourage many.

MTeach will provide the necessary foundation to produce competent and accountable 21st century teachers, cutting student allowance sends a message to the public that the Government does not value quality learning for building a brighter future.

A further concern is that of actual employment opportunities following what would be a considerable financial outlay, an issue that becomes more pressing with the impending arrival of charter schools:

I think that better financial support systems need to be developed in order for this change to work correctly rather than just restricting the profession of teaching to 'rich' people. We also need to think about what will happen if they introduce charter schools where teachers aren't required to have

qualifications- will this combined with the cost and further debt completely put people off of pursuing this qualification?

Recommendations:

From the student feedback, it is recommended that the faculty consider the following:

Articulating more specifically both the ways in which the Masters of Teaching fulfils the overall postgraduate experience and the relevance of that experience to effective teacher training. Special emphasis needs to be place on the aspects of research and “collegiality”.

Giving serious consideration to the extent to which ineligibility for a student allowance threatens the potential benefits of the proposed qualification. Most significant here is the threat to the diversity of future teacher intakes.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to feedback on the proposed Masters of Teaching. We hope the student perspective provides some space for interesting discussion.