

STATEMENT FROM INDEPENDENT AND FAITH-BASED EDUCATION SECTOR ON TEACHER TRAINING SHORTAGES AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Date of release – 11th December 2023

We, the below signatories, release this statement to draw attention to significant teacher shortages within independent and faith-based schools, and propose a solution that involves (re)allocating Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) to support innovative teacher training programs in the independent and faith-based higher education sector.

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge the steps the Australian Government is taking to address teacher shortages in Australia. This includes the announcement on 6 November 2023 of \$160 million for Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships to support new undergraduate and postgraduate teaching students to meet the costs of their study. However, we do note that in exchange, once graduated the students will teach in only government schools or government-run early learning settings for four years full-time equivalent for those who undertook undergraduate study and two years full-time equivalent for postgraduate students.

We are therefore concerned that these and other measures do not extend to, or address, the critical need for teachers within the independent and faith-based school sector, especially given there has been a significant increase in these schools (approximately 20% per year since 2011), against a national backdrop of increasing teacher shortages.

Currently, independent and faith-based higher education providers are partnering with schools to deliver a range of innovative programs to address the supply of teachers. This has involved an expansion of practical and on-site school partnership models in independent and faith-based schools, pioneering new approaches with school communities which utilise on-site training, close mentoring and paid internships. These rapidly expanding partnerships now exist in over 100 schools across the country and include such programs as the Clinical Teacher Training Hubs, Embedded Practice Program, Teaching School Hubs Program and the Christian Initial Teacher Education Alliance (CITEA) Victoria. The teaching schools also include remote indigenous candidates (such as the CEWF Teaching School Hub and the NT Christian Schools Hub).

The successful results are clear, with the partnerships (the first launched in 2017) currently training hundreds of classroom ready teachers, attracting higher ATAR applicants (average scores of 85), demonstrating an 85% retention rate (20-30% above the national average) and resulting in strong student and school satisfaction with graduates (shown in the Student Experience Survey in Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching).

The reality is however that many of these successful teacher training projects face significant issues of inequality and are at serious risk of collapse. For example, many of the Indigenous trainee teachers in the programs in regional areas have acknowledged that they would have never studied at university or become a teacher without this partnered clinical teaching model. However, to do so, their training fees are upwards of \$60,000 without CSP's (compared to the approximately \$15,000 paid by Commonwealth subsidised city students at public universities). Providing CSPs to independent higher education providers will therefore ensure the sustainability of these programs, train new teachers in clinical environments, as well as provide support to disadvantaged groups.

There are only a small number of independent higher education providers that receive an ongoing allocation of CSPs for teacher training and many receive none at all, despite there being many unused CSP places in public universities. As such, the Government has an opportunity to increase or transfer unused CSPs to the independent and faith-based higher education providers as another lever available to address teacher shortages and to support independent and faith-based schools.

Independent higher education providers have demonstrated their ability to deliver for Government when entrusted with CSPs, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the Higher Education Relief Package, where 1,000 undergraduate short course places were delivered. Applications from providers were for 4.5 times the allocated places, which reflects the interest and capacity of independent providers to deliver CSPs for Government and to address Government priorities, such as teacher shortages.

While we understand and look forward to the final report on the Australian Universities Accord that will be provided by 31 December 2023, and publicly released in February 2024, it is important that we highlight the criticality of teacher shortages in independent and faith-based schools, which we know is also a priority for the Australian Government. Many of these successful teacher training programs will not survive long enough for the Accord outcomes to be reviewed and implemented.

As such, we are seeking the Government to promptly extend these arrangements and provide additional CSPs to independent and faith-based higher education providers to address the teacher shortage through ensuring the sustainability of these at-risk critical teacher programs that are delivering quality teachers to the independent and faith-based school sector. Such an allocation of CSPs will also ensure that a targeted and holistic approach is occurring to deliver on a national priority for Government of teacher training, enabling student choice to undertake study at an institution of their preference, which may also be consistent with their faith.

Signed (signatories below)



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