

TEACHER EDUCATION FUNDING NAÏVE - ATN

The nation's largest educator of new teachers, the five universities of the Australian Technology Network (ATN), has decried the current Federal funding formula for education as 'naïve'.

In its submission to a House of Representatives inquiry into Teacher Education, the ATN warns that Australia already has a severe shortage of professors and lecturers in the education faculty.

It's also told the inquiry that inadequate funding is preventing trainee teachers from gaining valuable classroom experience.

This year, the five universities of ATN – UniSA, QUT, UTS, RMIT and Curtin – have between them almost sixteen thousand education students... about twenty-percent of the national total.

The ATN's Director, Vicki Thomson, says the inquiry into Teacher Education is examining many issues of interest to the universities, but its real test will be in how it pursues the critical issue of funding.

Ms Thomson says proper indexation of Commonwealth education funding (annual increases to cover inflation) is essential for Australia to train enough teachers to meet future demand.

“As well as failing to keep up funding in real terms, the ‘relative funding model’ formula used by the Government to allocate HECS revenue has changed to the disadvantage of the education faculty. Economic modelling by UTS has estimated the potential loss at more than \$48 million.”

Ms Thomson says this has already created a severe staff shortage leading to larger classes and less student/teacher contact.

“Our academic staff take on scholarship as a life-style, pursuing discovery and continually renewing their education knowledge by research and interaction with academics around the globe. We want to properly remunerate them for this high-level commitment, but at current funding levels a Professor running a program for hundreds of university students is paid less than the average school Principal.”

The universities are concerned that poor financial rewards have already taken their toll: most education staff are aged in their 50's, and current funding arrangements allow little scope to attract new staff.

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