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Article

An Investigation of Alternative Pathways to Teacher Qualifications in Australia

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Abstract

In alignment with global educational trends, Australia has adopted a pluralistic approach to initial teacher education (ITE), encompassing traditional university-based programs, employment-integrated models and vocational training routes. This diversification of pathways has emerged as a strategic response to persistent workforce challenges, including chronic shortages, uneven distribution of qualified educators, and limited demographic diversity within the profession. Rather than supplanting conventional ITE models, these alternative pathways serve as complementary options, broadening access and enhancing system responsiveness to evolving societal and educational needs. The rise in non-traditional routes represents a deliberate response to the well-documented global teacher shortage, frequently examined in comparative educational research. Central to their design is a restructuring of traditional program elements, particularly duration and delivery methods, to facilitate more flexible and context-sensitive forms of teacher preparation. Such approaches often create opportunities for individuals who may be excluded from conventional pathways due to socioeconomic constraints, geographic isolation, or non-linear career trajectories. Significantly, the diversity introduced by alternative entry candidates has the potential to enrich school learning environments. These educators often bring a wide range of prior experiences, disciplinary knowledge, and cultural perspectives, contributing to more inclusive and representative teaching practices. The implications for student learning are substantial, particularly in disadvantaged communities where culturally and professionally diverse teachers may enhance engagement and academic outcomes. From a policy perspective, the development of flexible, multifaceted teacher education pathways constitutes a critical component of a sustainable workforce strategy. As demand for qualified teachers intensifies, especially in STEM disciplines and in rural, regional and remote areas, the role of alternative pathways is likely to become increasingly pivotal in achieving broader goals of equity, quality and innovation in teacher preparation.



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Keywords: teacher shortage; initial teacher education; change of career teachers; employment-based pathways; accelerated pathways to teaching

1. Introduction

Alternative entry pathways to teaching qualifications have become increasingly prevalent globally, reflecting a trend towards diversifying routes into the teaching profession. These pathways aim to address teacher shortages, attract professionals from diverse career backgrounds, and promote a broader cultural and demographic representation within the teaching workforce. While specific programs vary across nations, they share common objectives: advancing the certification process (Darling-Hammond, 2017), offering more

flexible options for aspiring educators to obtain teaching qualifications and registration, and mitigating teacher shortages by placing accomplished, albeit not yet fully qualified teachers, in classrooms.

In the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Canada, alternative pathways encompass school-centered training, residencies, and transition programs for prospective teachers, particularly those contemplating a career change. The US offers national initiatives such as Teach for America, a model adopted by several countries within the Teach for All network, which specifically recruits teachers for high-needs schools (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In addition to national initiatives in the US, state certification programs, although varying in focus and structure, aim to attract a more diverse cohort of teachers compared to traditional teacher education pathways (Feistritzer, 2011). In the UK, initiatives, such as Teach First, are positively impacting teacher shortages, especially in disadvantaged schools, while simultaneously fostering a more diverse teacher workforce (Teach First, 2025).

The key distinction between these alternative pathways and those offered in many other countries lies in their structural details, specifically their duration, the nature of supervised or unsupervised teaching, and their pedagogical focal points. Canada's approaches include bridging programs for internationally educated teachers and specialized programs for indigenous teacher education, involving a four-semester education program prior to classroom entry (Ontario College of Teachers, 2021).

Alternative entry pathways typically combine intensive coursework with practical classroom experience, enabling potential teachers to qualify more rapidly than through traditional means. While some, such as the UK's Assessment Only Route (Department of Education, 2025), cater to experienced educators seeking formal qualifications, others, like the teacher residency programs in the US, are designed for those new to the profession. The level of classroom immersion varies, with some pathways offering immediate, unsupervised placement in schools, while others provide a more gradual transition to teaching pedagogy and practice.

Despite the structural variations in alternative entry pathways to teaching across the globe, these pathways share a common goal of broadening access to the teaching profession, while maintaining high standards of teacher preparation (Zeichner, 2016). These pathways represent a significant shift in teacher education, reflecting the evolving needs of educational systems and the diverse backgrounds of potential educators.

Australia, like many countries globally, is confronting a significant shortage of qualified teachers, a challenge that is particularly acute in secondary education. This deficit arises from multiple contributing factors, including rising student enrolments, diminished interest in initial teacher education (ITE) programs, an aging workforce, and high attrition rates, especially within the first five years of teaching. The implications of this shortage are profound and far-reaching. As reported by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (Australian Government, 2022), Australia faces a projected shortfall of 4000 secondary school teachers by early 2025. This shortage adversely impacts educational outcomes and the wellbeing of students and staff, underscoring the need for effective, scalable solutions.

The teacher shortage is most pronounced in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, languages (other than English), and schools in challenging locations such as rural and remote areas. Schools serving students in low socioeconomic communities are disproportionately affected, as they face greater difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers who often prefer to work in metropolitan areas and higher socioeconomic communities with better facilities, more abundant resources and greater opportunities for professional development.

Traditionally, teacher preparation in Australia has involved either a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree or the successful completion of an undergraduate (Bachelor's degree) in a field other than education followed by a two-year postgraduate Master of Teaching degree. Less common is the one-year Graduate Diploma of Education following the completion of a bachelor's degree in a field other than education. These university-based initial teacher education programs are designed to provide foundational knowledge in pedagogy, curriculum and practical teaching. However, these pathways have not sufficiently addressed workforce demand or diversity in the teaching profession.

In response to this challenge, multiple alternative pathways have emerged for individuals seeking to become qualified teachers in Australia. These pathways are targeted to high-achieving individuals from other fields (career changers) and internationally qualified teachers and aim to address the disparity between the demographic characteristics of the teaching workforce and those of the student population. With a median age of 46 years, and 18.7 percent of the workforce aged 60 years or over, the workforce is aging. Seventy percent of the workforce are women, while the percentage of female students in Australian schools is 49 percent (ABS, 2023). First Nations (Indigenous) students make up 6.6 percent of the total population of students in Australian schools (ABS, 2025), while data from the 2022 census indicated that the percentage of teachers in the workforce identifying as indigenous was slightly over 2.0 percent and declining (AITSL, 2024a). The aim of many of the alternative entry pathways to teaching qualifications in Australia is to generate a workforce that more strongly aligns with the diversity of the student population. By attracting and recruiting candidates from backgrounds that reflect this diversity, including those from disadvantaged areas and regional, rural and remote locations, the diversity of teachers will more strongly align with the country's diverse education needs and demographic diversity, while attracting more individuals to the teaching profession.

Alternative pathways in Australia offer accelerated routes to teaching qualifications, financial support or remuneration and/or work-based learning opportunities. The pathways vary in length, structure, and eligibility requirements, with many designed to address specific subject area shortages and geographical needs. These pathways often allow unqualified teachers to begin their teaching practice while concurrently studying to achieve their teaching qualification and subsequent teacher registration. Regulatory oversight ensures that these teachers demonstrate competence against the Graduate Level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs). These standards, set by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), assess teacher competencies across three domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement, which are then further categorized into seven standards (AITSL, 2018).

The standards are important in addressing teacher quality and subsequent accreditation and provide competency indicators for schools and Initial Teacher Education programs (Getenet, 2025). All Australian teaching programs must demonstrate where each of the standards is taught, practiced, and assessed at the Graduate level in their courses. To graduate and obtain teacher registration, graduating teachers must demonstrate their proficiency in each of the seven standards (AITSL, 2018). In addition to its regulatory function, the Graduate Standards can be used to identify areas where pre-service teachers or teachers in alternative initial teacher pathways require further development.

This review of alternative entry pathways to teaching qualifications explores key opportunities that have emerged in recent years in Australian education, examining their potential to address current and future workforce needs in Australian schools.

2. Federal Government Initiatives for Alternative Initial Teacher Education Pathways

Most alternative routes to teaching require an undergraduate degree in a non-education field, such as Arts or Science, supplemented by additional training focused on pedagogical skills and teaching practice in schools. While selection tools and approaches vary across providers, all aim to ensure suitability for teaching and classroom readiness.

2.1. High Achieving Teachers' Program (HAT)

In 2020, the Australian Government established the High Achieving Teachers (HAT) Program as an alternative pathway into teaching for high-achieving individuals from diverse backgrounds. This employment-based initiative targets accomplished individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, and experience needed in Australian schools. Successful applicants begin teaching in primary and secondary schools that are experiencing workforce shortages while concurrently completing their accredited teaching qualification. Throughout their teaching placement, these potential high-achieving teachers receive intensive training, support, and mentoring from both their tertiary institution and school. The program focuses on leveraging the expertise these individuals bring from their previous careers, benefiting students and school communities. Schools are encouraged to positively support HATs' transition to teaching.

2.2. National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP)

Since 2022, the Australian Federal Government has implemented the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP), establishing partnerships with ten universities across Australia. This initiative aims to address the growing need for teachers with backgrounds in STEM, First Nations aspiring teachers, people with disabilities, teacher aides transitioning to teaching roles, and individuals based in remote locations. Set to commence in 2025, this pilot program aims to provide approximately 1500 places for beginning teachers. Like the HAT program, NTWAP provides remuneration for successful applicants during their teaching placements. The success of the program hinges on the strong partnership between universities, which provide selection, enrolment and mentoring and placement schools, which offer the opportunity for both professional practice and mentoring support.

2.3. Teach for Australia (TFA)

Teach for Australia is another Australian Federal Government initiative addressing teacher shortages and educational inequity, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Modeled on Teach for America, this program has a 13-week residential initial training program, followed by a two-year contracted placement in a school. TFA Associates are paid while they work, which enables applicants from a wider cross-section of the community, including those from less advantaged backgrounds, to consider teaching as a profession. In addition, recruiting applicants from outside major metropolitan and regional centers and placing them in rural and remote locations throughout Australia, often in their own communities, helps support teacher shortages in these geographical areas, while also providing more diversity in the teaching workforce (Rice et al., 2023). As part of its Rural and Remote Education Strategy (2021–2024), the New South Wales State Government endorsed promoting TFA Associates to fill teacher positions in urgently needed positions in the state's outback (New South Wales Department of Education, 2021).

Since its inception in 2009, TFA has placed over 1800 teachers in 300 schools across Australia, significantly impacting teacher shortages and educational equality. Over 40 percent of TFA Associates have been placed in schools with a particular focus on STEM, while

nearly half of all placed teachers have served in regional, rural or remote locations, thus addressing teacher shortages in these areas (Teach for Australia, 2025).

While actively beginning their unsupervised teaching in schools, Associates simultaneously complete the Master of Teaching (Secondary) post-graduate degree, now offered through the Australian Catholic University. Ongoing mentoring by experienced teachers in their schools complements the support they receive from their university lecturers, tutors and university-based mentors. Teacher residency models such as the Teach for Australia program have a strong focus on leadership development. Research shows TFA Associates have performed comparably to other early-career teachers in terms of student outcomes and are more likely to take on leadership positions (Goldhaber et al., 2020). In addition to its post-graduate degree, Teach for Australia also supports the undergraduate Bachelor of Education (Secondary) teaching degree, which is offered by Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory.

3. Australian State-Based Initiatives for Alternative Initial Teacher Education Pathways

In addition to Australian Federal Government initiatives, several of Australia's six states and two territories have introduced their own alternative pathways to teacher qualifications and registration. For example, the north-eastern state of Queensland offers the Turn to Teaching Internship Program (TTT Program), a two-year course specifically targeting career-change individuals. Applicants with an undergraduate bachelor's degree in a field other than education are eligible to apply. Within one year of commencing the course, the TTT Program places potential teachers in their own classrooms, while providing ongoing support from both the university and the placement school. Resembling the Australian Federal Government initiatives, this program offers financial support throughout its duration and prioritizes applicants who can teach high-demand subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science, and Technology. The TTT Program also values applicants willing to teach in special educational settings, including rural and remote locations. Upon successful completion of the two-year course, teachers are offered a permanent teaching position in a government school within the state of Queensland.

In Western Australia, the School of Education at Edith Cowan University offers the Education Direct program, which again attracts students from non-traditional pathways, with the aim of increasing diversity in the teaching workforce. Research findings comparing the retention of Education Direct students with other more traditional entry pathways into teaching, show comparable academic success and retention rates (Pilkington & Lock, 2012), however the authors note that students for the Education Direct pathway must be carefully selected, and strong partnerships and support structures must exist between the university and the schools that students are placed in, to ensure they remain in the profession (Pilkington & Lock, 2012) and do not contribute to the high attrition numbers of early-career teachers in Australia.

The Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney (TSAS), in the state of New South Wales, is a school-based, 'clinical' model of teacher preparation involving extended immersion in the school environment, combining online study with school experience. The success of this model requires strong partnerships between the higher education provider and partnership schools. The TSAS alliance was formed with five independent schools in 2019, as a response to concerns about teacher quality, classroom readiness, and retention. The TSAS pathway is offered at undergraduate and postgraduate levels by providing employment to students for one to two days each week. Students are regularly supported by an experienced mentor teacher in their schools to ensure their teaching practice is sustained and progress is made.

In Victoria, the University of Melbourne offers a Master of Teaching (Secondary) Internship qualification which prepares students, referred to as interns, for teaching their own classes unsupervised, after a brief intensive period of pedagogical theory. This two-year, employment-based pathway focuses on addressing teacher shortages in subject areas including STEM and languages (other than English) and geographically rural and remote locations. Master of Teaching Interns are permitted to teach on restricted authority, with a Permission to Teach (PTT) while completing their academic teaching qualification. Personalized mentoring support is provided both in school from experienced teachers and from University of Melbourne mentors, known as Clinical Teaching Specialists, who regularly visit interns in schools, providing additional support and a bridge between interns' academic responsibilities and professional practice.

In a recent innovation to this program, applicants now have the choice to study one year full-time on campus and complete the internship in their second year. This option provides additional support for those students who prefer a more structured and supervised first-year placement before beginning to teach their own classes independently.

The Nexus program, offered by LaTrobe University in Victoria, is a two-year, employment-based pathway, allowing unqualified individuals to teach their own classes while unsupervised. This program offers potential teachers a two-year Master of Teaching degree, mentoring support and some options for online learning. Through the Victorian Institute of Teaching, students are granted Permission to Teach status while they complete their academic qualification. Similarly to most of the other Federal and State Government initiatives, the Nexus program has a focus on filling teacher shortages, especially in STEM subjects, languages and special education. This course offers a paid internship in the second year of the program, when students are remunerated for the teaching they do in schools. Again, this alternative entry pathway targets specific subjects that are difficult to staff and regional and rural locations that struggle to attract teachers to fill staffing vacancies.

4. Career-Change Teachers

The term career-change teacher refers to teachers who do not enter teaching directly from school, but from previous employment. Career-change teachers have qualities that are appreciated in the education sector, including contemporary knowledge, skills and expertise, and a sense of purpose and commitment that has been developed in their previous profession (Dadvand et al., 2023). For career-change teachers with a STEM background, their industry experience can improve student learning by making it more applicable and meaningful.

Alternative pathways to teaching qualifications that combine intensive study with remunerated teaching positions in schools offer flexibility for potential teachers with dependents and/or financial commitments. For individuals seeking to transition from other careers into teaching, post-graduate Master of Teaching programs offer a structured pathway into the profession. Several Australian universities, particularly those in major cities, offer courses specifically targeting career-change teachers. These programs capitalize on the prior knowledge and experience of career-changers, leveraging their professional skills and industry experience, while providing an accelerated route into the classroom. Areas of need, such as STEM subjects and languages, are often supported by the previous professional experience that career-change teachers bring to the classroom (Dadvand et al., 2024).

While the specifics may vary, these programs generally focus on providing intensive pedagogical training to develop teaching skills, strengthening the connection between theory and practice. To be classroom-ready to teach their classes unsupervised, given the limited hours of preparation and pedagogy provided in these accelerated programs, academic support and school mentoring must be factored into their planning and preparation.

Once they have made the decision to change careers or occupation and commence teaching, the desire to commence their new career immediately is strong. A learning 'on the job' approach connects theory studied in their intensive training with practice. Mentoring plays a crucial role in these programs, ensuring that career-change teachers are well supported in the early years of their professional practice as they are developing their expertise and professional teaching identity (Dawborn-Gundlach et al., 2025).

Identified as being almost twice as likely to leave the teaching profession as first career teachers (Dadvand et al., 2024), career-change teachers must be supported through their induction and transition to integrate into their new workplace and develop their professional identity as a teacher (Dawborn-Gundlach et al., 2025; Rose & Sughrue, 2020)

5. Vocational and Para-Professional Pathways

The Vocational Education Teacher (VET) sector also offers alternative routes into teaching in Australia, particularly for practical subjects. This sector aims to diversify the educational workforce, bringing valuable industry experience into schools (Rice et al., 2023). Supporting individuals without university qualifications into teaching, such as those in para-professional roles, applicants from non-traditional undergraduate backgrounds can gain credit towards further study in education. such as teachers' aides/assistants and credit towards further study in education. The Vocational Graduate Certificate in Education and Training allows VET trainers to transition into school teaching while recognizing prior learning and experience. For successful applicants, this certificate leads to provisional teacher registration.

Applicants with para-professional roles and other vocational routes are important for ensuring that under-represented groups, especially in remote and indigenous communities, are represented when considering the alignment of the teaching workforce and the student population in schools.

Vocational and para-professional pathways often involve their own unique challenges related to professional identity, and may require targeted mentoring and support (Gist et al., 2019). While they are designed to recruit teachers without an undergraduate degree, the focus of vocational and para-professional pathways to teaching is about providing a more inclusive range of options for entering teaching. Addressing teacher shortage issues through this pathway enables a broader range of knowledge and experience in the teacher workforce.

A Victorian Government initiative supporting change-of-career teachers with a disability to transition into VET teaching is currently being piloted. Experienced tradespersons, some of whom may have been injured at work, are being encouraged to share their skills, knowledge and experience through a teacher training program aimed at providing more teachers in secondary schools. In this initiative, there is a partnership between the Victorian Government is working with WorkSafe to identify and train potential new teachers (Rice et al., 2023).

The Technical and Further Education (TAFE) publicly funded vocational education and training institution operating in New South Wales (NSW), also offers individuals who aspire to become VETs a fast-tracked, remunerated 'Paid to Learn' program. Successful graduates of this program, which focuses on practical, job-related skills, are offered a position as a TAFE teacher in NSW. Programs such as Paid to Learn are increasing both the number of teachers and the breadth of subjects that can be confidently offered in secondary schools.

In recent years, the number of career-changing teachers who have entered vocational teaching has increased (Rice et al., 2024). Analogous to other career-change teachers, these

teachers have relevant and extensive industry experience and provide a further option to relieve the teacher shortage while also increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce.

6. Online Alternative Entry Pathways

The proliferation of alternative entry pathways into the teaching profession in Australia has been accompanied by a significant shift towards online and blended learning modalities. This evolution in educational delivery methods offers enhanced flexibility and accessibility, particularly benefiting prospective students residing outside major metropolitan areas. For instance, in the state of Victoria, prestigious institutions such as the University of Melbourne, Swinburne University of Technology and La Trobe University have implemented robust online options for teacher education programs. These distance learning opportunities are especially appealing to aspiring educators in regional and rural locales, as they facilitate the acquisition of teaching qualifications without necessitating relocation to urban centers. This approach serves a dual purpose: it not only broadens the demographic reach of teacher education programs but also fosters the retention of potential educators within their local communities. Consequently, this strategy may contribute to addressing the persistent challenge of teacher shortages in non-urban areas while simultaneously strengthening the connections between emerging educators and the regional contexts in which they may ultimately serve.

7. Financial Remuneration and Commonwealth Supported Places at University

The financial situation for many tertiary students in Australia is characterized by a complex interplay of economic pressures and support mechanisms. Most students find it necessary to engage in casual employment to supplement their income and manage the financial demands of higher education. While scholarships and bursaries are available, the demand for such financial assistance significantly outstrips the supply, leaving many eligible and disadvantaged students without adequate financial support.

Economic considerations are equally pertinent for career changers contemplating entry into the teaching profession. This demographic may face unique economic challenges as they transition from established careers to student status, necessitating careful financial planning and extra support structures. In recognition of their specific needs, some scholarships are strategically targeted towards supporting students from under-represented backgrounds to obtain teaching qualifications. These include students from rural or remote locations, and low socio-economic backgrounds. Making teacher education more accessible to a broader range of students by relieving some of the financial barriers to enrolling in ITE courses not only addresses teacher shortage issues but would also facilitate a more representative and culturally responsive teaching workforce.

The recognition of Indigenous representation in the teaching profession has gained significant traction across various Australian states and territories in recent years, particularly in regions with higher numbers of First Nations students. This growing awareness has catalyzed a series of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous educators and leveraging their unique perspectives to enrich Australian classrooms. These efforts reflect a broader understanding of the critical role that Indigenous teachers play in fostering culturally responsive education and promoting educational equity. The growing Government provided support for Indigenous students pursuing Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses is particularly evident in states and territories such as Queensland, The Northern Territory, and New South Wales. These regions have implemented strategic measures to address past underrepresentation of Indigenous educators, especially in areas with higher numbers of indigenous students (Rice et al., 2023). Increasing the number of Indigenous

educators signifies a transition to a more inclusive workforce while also acknowledging the intrinsic value of Indigenous knowledge systems, bridging the gap between traditional educational frameworks and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. This approach aligns with broader national objectives of reconciliation and the integration of Indigenous perspectives across all facets of Australian society.

While financial challenges persist for many students in ITE programs, there is a discernible trend towards more targeted and inclusive financial support mechanisms. These efforts aim to not only alleviate the economic burden on students but also to strategically shape the composition of Australia's future teaching workforce.

8. Alternative Pathways in Australian Teacher Education: Opportunities and Challenges

The landscape of teacher education in Australia has undergone significant transformation in recent years, marked by the emergence of increasingly diverse pathways to teacher qualification. Despite the relatively small-scale enrolment in these alternative routes, preliminary findings have yielded interesting insights into their potential impact on the teaching profession and educational outcomes.

8.1. Attracting Potential Teachers

One advantage of alternative entry pathways to initial teaching education is their capacity to attract a diverse cohort of high-achieving candidates who might not otherwise have considered teaching as a career. The combination of intense learning, proximate entry into their own classrooms, and remuneration for their teaching enables the consideration of more potential individuals to consider teaching as a career. Online teaching courses have provided more flexibility for potential teachers to qualify without having to make radical lifestyle changes such as relocating to the city. Alternative entry pathways have demonstrated success in recruiting later-entry individuals, especially in subject areas experiencing teacher shortages. These teachers bring valuable real-world experience and skills to the classroom, enriching the educational environment for school communities and especially for students (Dadvand et al., 2023).

8.2. Professional Preparedness and Quality Assurance

Contrary to initial concerns, research indicates that the teaching quality of educators entering through alternative pathways is comparable to that of traditionally trained teachers. Moreover, a study by Unruh and Holt (2010) suggested there were no discernible differences in pedagogical outcomes or professional preparedness between alternatively and traditionally certified teachers in Australia, particularly within the first five years of teaching. This finding challenges preconceptions about the potential limitations of accelerated teacher preparation programs and associated student outcomes.

In a small-scale study mapping ITE programs with the professional standards for teachers, Getenet (2025) identified the importance of the professional teaching standards for determining teachers' competencies and their requirements for professional development to improve their expertise. Finding the right balance between theoretical knowledge and practical experience is difficult and new practitioners may struggle to find the balance between the immediacy of their professional practice, preparing lessons, marking work, attending meetings and the academic requirements to satisfy their teaching qualifications (Dawborn-Gundlach et al., 2025).

8.3. Economies of Scale

Although alternative pathway enrolments currently constitute only approximately five percent of initial teacher education (ITE) enrolments in Australia, their strategic significance

within the broader educational structure is important (AITSL, 2024b), with initial evidence suggesting positive outcomes in relation to teacher workforce diversity, retention rates, and student academic achievement.

Despite their limited contribution to overall teacher supply, these pathways may exert a disproportionate influence in moderating acute teacher shortages, particularly in STEM disciplines and geographically remote or regional areas (McPherson et al., 2024; Teach for Australia, 2025). Alternative pathways should not be considered as substitutes for traditional university-based ITE programs, but as complementary programs that expand the scope of teacher preparation, offering increased flexibility and accessibility for individuals who may be underrepresented in conventional pathways (McPherson et al., 2024). Such diversification has the potential to enrich the profession by introducing a wider range of skills, experiences, and perspectives while addressing persistent workforce challenges. However, the expansion of these programs requires quality control, the development of strategies for integration with existing accreditation, registration, and career progression frameworks (Department of Education, 2023), and the assimilation and support of teachers, teaching unsupervised prior to finishing their initial teacher education qualifications.

8.4. Induction and Mentoring

When teachers enter the classroom with limited pedagogy due to the intense and short-term nature of their initial training, the importance of a strong induction, positive and frequent mentoring both at the school level and by the ITE provider (Dadvand et al., 2024), access to resources and tailored professional development (Getenet, 2025) are critical to ensure the new teacher feels supported and prepared to confidently assume their teaching responsibilities. Strong partnerships between the university and the school, providing teaching experience, must be ongoing to ensure new teachers have consistent support and ongoing professional development (Pilkington & Lock, 2012). Providing intensive induction and frequent mentoring can be financially difficult for schools, especially those in disadvantaged areas, but losing teachers due to a lack of support and guidance can be more distressing for the teachers who remain and ultimately for student learning.

While alternative entry programs appear to be focused on recruiting teachers to areas of staff shortage, it is important to consider how to support these teachers through the critical early years of their teaching to provide a stable teaching workforce (Rice et al., 2023). The loss of investment when teachers leave the profession, low staff morale and student learning are casualties of teacher attrition (McPherson et al., 2025).

8.5. Evaluating the Success of Alternative Entry Pathways

Although it would be beneficial to understand the relative success of each of the alternative entry programs mentioned in this paper, success is a difficult concept to measure, especially when many of the programs have been operating over a short time frame. Measuring success by considering increasing enrolment figures is contentious, as the current teacher shortage and increased marketing and recruitment campaigns have likely impacted awareness of these programs, while enrolment requirements in some courses have changed and evolved to attempt to renew teacher shortages in primary and secondary, metropolitan, regional, rural and remote schools throughout Australia. In addition, once teachers in alternative entry courses complete their teacher qualifications, contact with the university and contracts with their placement schools are often terminated. Some teachers in these programs remain in their contracted schools, while others move to schools they perceive will provide a more appropriate cultural fit or easier geographical location for their work/life balance. Thus, maintaining contact with teachers is problematic if they do not provide the university with contact details, if they change schools.

The true gauge of success is in the quality of the teachers that these programs have prepared for teaching and the positive experiences of their graduate teachers. Again, research in this area is limited, particularly longitudinal research studies identifying the experiences of teachers in these programs and the effectiveness of their professional practice throughout their course and in their early years of teaching. Subsequently, further investigation is required on the impact of alternate entry programs on teacher effectiveness and teacher retention in Australia.

9. Conclusions

Australia, in line with global educational trends, has developed a pluralistic approach to initial teacher education (ITE), encompassing traditional university-based programs, employment-integrated models, and vocational training routes. Within this educational landscape, alternative pathways have emerged as important in addressing teacher workforce challenges. These include chronic shortages, uneven distribution of qualified educators across geographical regions and subject areas and limited demographic diversity within the teaching profession. Rather than serving as a replacement for conventional ITE models, alternative pathways should be considered complementary, to broaden access and enhance system responsiveness to changing societal and educational needs (Dawborn-Gundlach, 2025).

The expansion of these non-traditional routes represents a deliberate response to the well-documented global teacher shortage, an issue that has received considerable attention in comparative education research. Central to the alternative pathway model is the strategic restructuring of traditional program requirements, particularly the duration and mode of delivery, to enable more flexible and contextually responsive forms of teacher preparation. Such models often facilitate entry into the profession for individuals who may be excluded by conventional pathways due to socioeconomic constraints, geographic isolation, or non-linear career trajectories.

Importantly, the diversity introduced by alternative entry candidates has the potential to enrich the learning environments of schools. These educators often bring with them a wide range of prior experiences, disciplinary knowledge, and cultural perspectives, thereby contributing to more inclusive and representative teaching practices. The implications for student learning are significant, particularly in disadvantaged communities where the presence of culturally and professionally diverse teachers may enhance engagement and academic outcomes.

From a policy perspective, the development of flexible, multifaceted teacher education pathways constitutes a critical component of a sustainable workforce strategy. As demand for qualified teachers continues to intensify, especially in STEM disciplines and in rural, regional, and remote areas, the role of alternative pathways is likely to become increasingly important, offering opportunities for increasing workforce capacity while maintaining alignment with broader goals of equity, quality, and innovation in teacher preparation.

Given the increasing number of options available to them, it is essential that prospective teachers engage in informed and reflective decision-making when navigating available pathways. This entails critical evaluation of program structure, accreditation standards, financial commitments, and long-term career implications. Such evaluative practices are critical not only for individual career planning but also for ensuring that teacher education systems remain adaptable and equitable for all potential teachers.

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