

Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in NSW: Policy and Procedures

June 2018

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1 Background

The *Education Standards Authority Act 2013* (the NESAs Act) and *Teacher Accreditation Act 2004* (the TA Act) authorises the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESAs) to be the responsible decision-maker for overseeing and approving the accreditation of initial teacher education programs in NSW.

In accordance with Section 19 of the TA Act, the NSW Minister for Education approves the professional teaching standards in relation to Provisional Accreditation afforded to graduate teachers. These standards are the national requirements described in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures, December 2015* (the national *Standards and Procedures*) together with NSW supplementary requirements approved from time to time by the NSW Minister. The national *Standards and Procedures* include the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the Graduate career stage (Graduate Teacher Standards).

Initial teacher education programs that are approved by NESAs are included on the AITSL accredited programs list and are recognised by other jurisdictions as being nationally accredited.

2 Purpose

Section 12 of the NESAs Act gives NESAs regulatory functions to approve initial teacher education programs. In this policy, use of the term 'accreditation' has the same meaning as NESAs's regulatory power to approve.

The policy describes the requirements and processes for initial teacher education programs offered by NSW providers to be accredited. A program that is accredited by NESAs confirms that its graduates have the necessary foundations to teach in NSW schools. A person who successfully completes a NESAs-accredited program satisfies the qualification requirement under the TA Act to be eligible for Provisional Accreditation.

The NESAs Board has delegated NESAs's regulatory function to approve, suspend and revoke the accreditation of initial teacher education programs to the Initial Teacher Education Committee (ITEC).

3 Scope

The policy is directed at NSW providers of initial teacher education programs. For instance, higher education institutions formally established or incorporated under NSW legislation.

Interstate providers, which are formally established outside of NSW's jurisdiction, that intend to deliver programs in NSW or to be undertaken by NSW residents are to be accredited by the teacher regulatory authority in that provider's home jurisdiction. Graduates of accredited interstate programs are eligible for Provisional Accreditation to teach in NSW schools under mutual recognition legislation or agreements.

Interstate providers that offer programs to NSW residents, largely through online or flexible delivery modes, can apply to NESAs for voluntary certification as meeting NSW supplementary

requirements for accreditation in order to facilitate formalised professional experience arrangements with NSW employers.¹

4 Principles

The following general principles underpin the policy:

- accredited initial teacher education programs are an essential element of the teaching profession in NSW and are the product of providers working collaboratively with NESA, employing authorities, schools and other major stakeholders to ensure that graduates meet the professional teaching standards, as required under the TA Act;
- initial teacher education providers, being either self-accrediting institutions or non-self-accrediting institutions regulated by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA), are subject to rigorous processes to assure quality, diversity and innovation in their initial teacher education programs; and
- that the principles of the national accreditation system for initial teacher education programs as described in the *Standards and Procedures* are acknowledged as driving high quality provision of initial teacher education in Australia.

5 Requirements for accreditation

NSW providers of proposed initial teacher education programs are responsible for preparing and submitting an application to NESA. The application undergoes a rigorous assessment process described in Section 6 of this policy to determine whether the program should be accredited by NESA.

5.1 Accreditation requirements

An initial teacher education program will be accredited by NESA through the provider demonstrating that it meets national accreditation standards and NSW supplementary requirements.

Providers must provide evidence in an application for program accreditation that the Program Standards described in the *Standards and Procedures*, including the Graduate Teacher Standards, are met. The *Standards and Procedures* are supported by the *Guidelines for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs, June 2016* which provides advice on the accreditation assessment criteria.

Providers must also provide evidence that a program meets NSW supplementary requirements to be accredited. These NSW supplementary requirements provide specific elaborations of particular Program Standards or Graduate Teacher Standards or descriptions of knowledge linked to NSW priorities, and are specified in the following policy documents:

- *NSW Supplementary Documentation: Elaborations in Priority Areas;*
- *NSW Supplementary Documentation: Subject Content Knowledge Requirements;*
- *NSW Supplementary Documentation: Professional Experience in Initial Teacher Education;* and
- *A Framework for High-Quality Professional Experience in NSW Schools.*

¹ See *Certification of Interstate Initial Teacher Education Programs Policy, January 2016*.

5.2 Consulting NESA on proposed changes to accredited program

It is the provider's responsibility to ensure that an accredited program continues to meet requirements described in Section 5.1 of the policy during the period in which it is accredited.

During the accreditation period, the provider is to consult with NESA regarding proposed changes to the accredited program to clarify whether the changes are relatively minor ones that relate to updating documentation and a provider's commitment to continuous improvement, or more significant ones that require NESA scrutiny and possible ITEC approval. Any proposed significant changes to a program would need to be approved before they are applied.

6 The program assessment process

ITEC is NESA's regulatory committee responsible for making decisions concerning the accreditation of programs, based on the advice of Accreditation Panels and NESA staff.

Programs will be assessed in accordance with arrangements made between NESA, AITSL and TEQSA.

Early childhood/primary initial teacher education programs that are designed to qualify graduates to teach in NSW schools as well as prior-to-school early childhood settings will be assessed in line with arrangements made between NESA, AITSL, TEQSA and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

This section sets out the key stages in the assessment process for a program to be accredited at Stage One or Stage Two.

Accreditation Stage One

For new programs that are being submitted for accreditation for the first time (ie Stage One), the application should detail the provider's proposal of how the program will meet the accreditation requirements and their plan for demonstrating the program's impact on the outcomes of their teacher education students.

Accreditation Stage Two

For accredited programs that are being submitted for another accreditation period (ie Stage Two), the application should focus on the provider's analysis and interpretation of their evidence for demonstrating impact in relation to initial teacher education student performance and graduate outcomes.

6.1 Design of program and application to NESA

The design and development of initial teacher education programs requires considerable consultation by the provider with internal and external stakeholders before its delivery. In concurrence with its internal approval processes, providers are expected to have initial discussions with the NESA Initial Teacher Education Directorate staff about the proposed introduction of a new or amended program. Continued communication with NESA staff throughout the development of the program and the accreditation application will help ensure an effective assessment process.

Providers should submit an application for program accreditation no later than eight months before the program's planned delivery (or at least eight months before the expiry of a program's current period of accreditation). Providers may submit a suite of programs to be assessed concurrently if they are of the same type or have common components.

The provider's application consists of completing the templates (which are publicly available on NESA's website) for accreditation stage one or stage two, and attaching supporting evidence.

6.2 NESA staff check the application

Upon receipt of the application, a NESA officer will undertake a document completeness check including that it accords with program accreditation requirements. The NESA officer may seek further documentation from the provider where required or will confirm that the application can proceed to an Accreditation Panel for assessment.

6.3 Assessment of the application by the Accreditation Panel

An Accreditation Panel will be established by NESA staff, a Panel Chair confirmed and a proposed Accreditation Panel meeting scheduled. The NESA officer will act as the Accreditation Panel's Executive Officer. More information about Accreditation Panels is found at Section 9.2 of the policy.

Each member of the Accreditation Panel will be provided with a copy of the application at least four weeks prior to the scheduled Accreditation Panel meeting to assess against the program accreditation requirements. At the scheduled meeting, the Accreditation Panel will systematically discuss their assessment of the program against the program accreditation requirements (currently set out in Section 5 of the policy) and identify areas of consensus and where additional information or clarification is required.

The Accreditation Panel may communicate with the provider during or after the meeting (either by telephone, videoconference or face to face), or undertake a site visit to assist with their assessment of the program (eg seek further information in support of the program application). If a site visit is planned, it will be discussed and negotiated with the provider and may involve discussions with the provider's senior executive, the Dean/Head of Education, relevant teacher education staff, current and past students of the program, relevant school-based staff, and other personnel.

After the Accreditation Panel meeting, the NESA Executive Officer in consultation with panel members, prepares a Draft Accreditation Report detailing the outcome of the Accreditation Panel's assessment. This may include requests for further information or clarification or amendments to the program documentation. The Draft Accreditation Report is approved by the Panel Chair in consultation with panel members prior to being sent to the provider.

The provider is required to respond to the Draft Accreditation Report, typically within a six week period. This may involve providing further information or clarification, amending the program documentation (eg revising unit outlines or application templates where specified) or supplying new documentation. The provider's response is provided to the NESA Executive Officer who reviews it to confirm that the Accreditation Panel's requests seem to be addressed before submitting it to the Accreditation Panel for review.

The Panel Chair in consultation with panel members will determine whether the requests have been adequately addressed.

If the Accreditation Panel is not satisfied that the provider's response addresses all matters raised in the Draft Accreditation Report, the Panel Chair in consultation with panel members may decide that a second and final opportunity for a response from the provider is necessary or decide to reconvene the Accreditation Panel where the provider's response includes significant revisions to the application.

6.4 Panel Chair recommendation

If the Panel Chair in consultation with panel members is satisfied that the provider's response addresses all matters raised in the Draft Accreditation Report and that all Program Standards and other accreditation requirements have been met, the Panel Chair will provide a recommendation to the NESAs Executive Officer for ITEC accreditation of the program.

The NESAs Executive Officer will prepare the final Accreditation Report for the ITEC. This will include the Accreditation Panel's assessment of the program addressing all accreditation requirements including meeting the Program Standards and demonstrating a positive impact on student learning, and the Panel Chair's recommendation.

6.5 Decision by ITEC

The ITEC considers the final Accreditation Report and the Panel Chair's recommendation. The ITEC will make one of the following accreditation decisions:

- approve accreditation of the program for a maximum period of five years (which may be subject to conditions as described in Section 7.1 of the policy); or
- where the ITEC is not satisfied the program meets all accreditation requirements, it may not approve the program and may make recommendations for the next stage of the program's assessment process (eg seeking a further response from the provider before the program can be resubmitted to the ITEC for approval, or in the most serious of cases that the assessment process end).

6.6 NESAs informs the provider of ITEC's decision

For programs that ITEC accredits, the provider will be formally notified in writing of this decision. The program will be included on the NSW list of accredited programs on the NESAs website and AITSL will be informed to update the national accredited programs list.

The provider is required to submit a final copy of the program application and all documentation as approved by the ITEC to NESAs. This is to be held as a State Record.

For programs that the ITEC has not approved, the provider will be formally notified of the decision in writing and if applicable, the written notice will include the ITEC's recommendation for the next stage of the program's assessment process (eg seeking a further response from the provider before the program can be resubmitted to ITEC for approval). NESAs's written notice must include the reasons for the ITEC's decision and the provider's right to apply for internal review of the decision (see Section 8 of the policy).

7 Conditions, suspension and revocation of program accreditation

Under section 20(3) of the TA Act, NESA can place conditions on, suspend or revoke an accredited program at any time. The policy confirms that ITEC is the responsible decision-maker for these types of decisions in relation to initial teacher education programs.

7.1 Program accreditation may be subject to conditions

The ITEC may place conditions for a specified timeframe on an accredited initial teacher education program, for example when:

- an accreditation requirement is not met (eg the program is piloting new initiatives still in development at the time of the program application),
- it is practical and necessary to accommodate national and/or NSW reforms in initial teacher education, or
- it is practical and necessary to support the ITEC's quality assurance of programs.

Conditions must relate to the program meeting or continuing to meet identified accreditation requirements (see Section 5.1 of the policy), and is to specify a timeframe when the condition is to be complied by, which the ITEC considers to be proportionate and necessary. If appropriate, the ITEC may amend the condition and its specified timeframe.

Conditions come into effect through NESA's written notice to the provider, which must include the reasons for the ITEC's decision and their right to apply for internal review of the decision (see Section 8 of the policy).

An accredited program that is subject to conditions will still be published as being accredited on the list of accredited programs on the NESA website. Providers are able to publically advertise that the program is accredited with NESA.

7.2 Suspension or revocation of an accredited program

A decision by the ITEC to suspend or revoke a program's accreditation is only available when they are satisfied that the program does not meet, or no longer meets the accreditation requirements (see Section 5.1 of the policy), which is based on an assessment and recommendation by the Program Accreditation Review Panel (see Section 7.3 of the policy).

Suspension must specify proportionate and necessary conditions and timeframes that the provider must meet before the program's accreditation can be reinstated by the ITEC.

Revocation will be limited to the most serious of cases where the ITEC has decided, based on the Program Accreditation Review Panel's recommendation, that an accredited program has failed to meet accreditation requirements in spite of NESA's intervention, and placing conditions or suspension to the program's accreditation is found to be inappropriate.

The ITEC's decision to suspend or revoke a program's accreditation means that the program is not an 'approved course', as defined in the TA Act from the date that the provider is notified in writing. Teacher education students who are scheduled to complete and receive a qualification from the program during the period in which its accreditation is suspended or revoked, may not be eligible for Provisional Accreditation under Section 30(2)(b) of the TA Act.

For programs subject to suspension, if the provider satisfies the conditions and NESAs reinstates the program's accreditation, teacher education students who complete the program and will receive a qualification after the date of reinstatement will be eligible for Provisional Accreditation.

If a program's accreditation is suspended or revoked, enrolled teacher education students must be notified in writing and the consequences of the accreditation status. The program's change of accreditation status will be published on the NSW list of accredited programs on the NESAs website.

7.3 Assessment by the Program Accreditation Review Panel

Staff from the NESAs Initial Teacher Education Directorate monitor accredited programs through annual reporting processes. Providers should contact NESAs for advice and support to help them meet their program accreditation requirements.

Where NESAs staff identify that an accredited program may not be meeting its accreditation requirements and/or conditions, they will discuss these issues with the provider. If the issues are of a serious nature and NESAs staff identify the need for intervention, they will liaise with the provider to develop a plan to address the issues within a specified timeframe. NESAs staff will provide a report to the ITEC who has the discretion to place a condition on the program's accreditation as a result.

If after the specified timeframe, NESAs staff identify that the accredited program has not addressed the issues in the plan, NESAs staff will inform the provider in writing that the program will be assessed by a sub-committee of the ITEC, the Program Accreditation Review Panel (see Section 9.3 of the policy), which can make a recommendation to the ITEC about the program's accreditation, including placement of conditions, suspension or revocation.

NESAs's written notice to the provider must include:

- the reasons why the Program Accreditation Review Panel is assessing the program's accreditation; and
- the provider's opportunity to respond to the Program Accreditation Review Panel and provide any supporting material it considers relevant to the assessment, within a timeframe that is not less than 28 days of the written notice.

The Program Accreditation Review Panel will consider all available evidence, together with the provider's response to make a recommendation to the ITEC. As part of their assessment, the Panel may request further information or clarification by the Provider.

At a scheduled meeting, or if the matter is urgent at an out-of-session meeting in person or by teleconference, the ITEC will consider the Program Accreditation Review Panel's recommendation to make a determination about the program's accreditation.

NESAs will inform the provider in writing of the ITEC's decision about the program's accreditation. The written notice must include:

- the reasons for the decision; and
- the provider's right to apply for internal review of the decision if they are dissatisfied with the outcome (see Section 8 of the policy).

8 Right to review certain decisions

Review of a decision by the ITEC is delegated by the NESA Board to a suitable NESA senior executive officer who was not involved in the original decision.

Under Section 27 of the TA Act, the ITEC's decision to refuse or failure to accredit a program, or to suspend or revoke a program's accreditation is subject to internal review under the *Administrative Decisions Review Act 1997* (the ADR Act).

8.1 NESA's internal review process

The internal review process involves the following steps.

NESA informs the provider in writing of the ITEC's decision.

The provider may request an internal review of the decision within 28 calendar days of them being notified in writing. Requests are to be marked 'Confidential – Initial Teacher Education', addressed to the Chief Executive Officer and sent by email to ceo@nesa.nsw.edu.au or by post to GPO BOX 5300, SYDNEY NSW 2001. The provider's request is to include their contact details and any supporting material considered relevant to the internal review.

The NESA officer assigned to internally review the case will contact the provider to give them opportunity to provide further evidence to support their request for a review. If the internal review is a decision covered under Section 27 of the TA Act, the NESA officer will consult with the provider on requirements set out in the the ADR Act, including that notification of an internal review decision will be made within 21 calendar days of the provider's request (or such other period that is agreed with the provider).

The NESA officer will make a decision based on all relevant evidence associated with the matter.

An internal review may result in the original decision being affirmed or varied. The original decision may also be set aside and another decision made in substitution.

NESA will notify the provider in writing of the internal review decision.

8.2 Review by the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT)

Where a provider wishes to appeal an internal review decision for a matter covered under Section 27 of the TA Act, an application must be filed with NCAT within 28 calendar days of the date of notification by NESA of the internal review decision.

9 Roles and responsibilities

9.1 Initial Teacher Education Committee

Functions and responsibilities

ITEC has the following delegated regulatory functions:

- Advise the Minister on the approval of policies governing the accreditation of initial teacher education programs in NSW.
- Approve, or not, the accreditation of initial teacher education programs delivered in NSW consistent with accreditation policies and procedures, including accreditation with conditions.
- Approve, or not, the certification of interstate initial teacher education programs delivered by interstate providers to NSW residents.
- Revoke or suspend the accreditation of initial teacher education programs under certain circumstances.
- Convene and oversee Accreditation Panels to review applications for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs.
- Collect data and promote research with a local, national and international focus in relation to best practice in the development of graduate teachers and their demonstration of the Graduate Teacher Standards.

Membership composition

Members of ITEC include:

- One member of the NESAB Board appointed as the Chair.
- One representative of the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee.
- Four representatives of the NSW Council of Deans of Education.
- Four practising teachers (including principals) with an understanding of initial teacher education including professional experience, ensuring a breadth of representation; for example, primary, secondary, government and non-government, rural and socio-economic status.
- Two representatives of teacher employers, one Government and one non-government.

At least one member of the ITEC will have expertise in Aboriginal education.

ITEC members are appointed by the Board for a three year term with a maximum tenure of up to two terms of three years (with the possibility of a third term where required for Committee continuity).

Members of ITEC have a high level of professional and educational expertise and significant expertise in dealing with complex policy matters relating to initial teacher education. There is an appropriate mix of skills, knowledge and experience on ITEC.

9.2 Accreditation Panels

Accreditation Panels are established to assess initial teacher education programs that are forwarded for assessment and accreditation. The ITEC oversees the membership of Accreditation Panels drawn from members of the profession who have undertaken a national

training program and supplementary training provided by NESA covering NSW-specific requirements.

An Accreditation Panel generally comprises between four and six members, ensuring that at least the following experience is represented:

- a classroom teacher who is accredited at least at the level of Proficient Teacher although preferably at Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher level;
- two teacher educators from different providers;
- a school executive or principal who acts as an employer of teachers or delegate of that employer;
- at least one person from a different state or territory who has undertaken national panel training as nominated by AITSL in consultation with NESA staff; and
- other community or specialist personnel (eg curriculum expert) where relevant.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who have undertaken national panel training will be prioritised for each accreditation panel to ensure an Aboriginal perspective is applied to the accreditation process.

NESA will nominate the Chair of the Accreditation Panel.

Each Accreditation Panel will be supported by an NESA officer who has undertaken national panel training and who will act as the NESA Executive Officer for the Accreditation Panel.

In cases where significant changes are made to an accredited program a modified panel may be established. NESA staff will ascertain in consultation with the provider, whether the proposed changes warrant being assessed by the modified panel. This modified panel will consist of a subset of the membership of the normal accreditation panel and having regard for a balance of interest, would normally comprise one teacher educator and one teacher or principal.

9.3 Program Accreditation Review Panel

The Program Accreditation Review Panel, a sub-committee established by the ITEC, is responsible for assessing accredited programs where NESA forms a view that it is not meeting accreditation requirements and/or conditions that have been placed within the specified timeframe.

The Program Accreditation Review Panel should comprise of at least three members of the ITEC that ensures a breadth of representation; for example higher education representative, teacher employer and teacher.

10 Related documents

This policy must be read in conjunction with:

- *Education Standards Authority Act 2013*
- *Teacher Accreditation Act 2004*
- Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures AITSL, December 2015
- Guidelines for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs, June 2016, AITSL, June 2016

- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, AITSL, February 2011
- NSW Supplementary Documentation: Elaborations in Priority Areas, NESA, November 2017
- NSW Supplementary Documentation: Subject Content Knowledge Requirements, NESA, [Revised version being considered by the NESA Board March 2018]
- NSW Supplementary Documentation: Professional Experience in Initial Teacher Education, NESA, April 2015
- A Framework for High-Quality Professional Experience in NSW Schools, NESA, 2014

Notes

Date	March 2018
Revision summary	Policy revised to incorporate BOSTES Review recommendations, legislative changes, national policy reforms, and developed in consultation with key internal and external stakeholders, before Minister approval.
Contact	John Healey, Director, Initial Teacher Education Tel: 9367 8470

Internal reference only

Policy group/owner	Initial Teacher Education
Version	V9
Classification	Sensitive: NSW government
Approved by	
Date of commencement	1 June 2018
Date for review	To be updated every five years or earlier if required
Documents superseded by this Policy	<i>Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in NSW: Policy and Procedures, October 2014</i> (Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW)
TRIM reference	D2018/97156

Distribution history – internal use only

Version	Recipient/s	Issue date
V8	Initial Teacher Education Committee endorsement	6 December 2017
V9	NESA Board endorsement	1 March 2018
V9	Approved by Minister	28 May 2018