

PRESIDENT WRITES

NSW PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM: ONLY THE BEST WILL DO

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Federation has been at the forefront of demanding that governments at federal and state level ensure that rigorous academics standards are applied at the point of entry into initial teacher education.

Unfortunately, too many universities, because of the funding model, are accepting prospective students with very low or no academic scores.

Indeed, recent media reports have alerted the community that universities have actively suppressed the data on entry scores.

No other profession would allow this and neither should the teaching profession.

Teaching is an extraordinarily complex job, testing to a high degree the intellectual, emotional and psychological capacity of teachers each and every day.

Not everyone who wants to be a teacher should or could become one.

As [California's Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education Faculty Director] Linda Darling-Hammond said: "Teaching is rocket science!"

A recent announcement by NSW Education Minister Rob Stokes reflects a frustration that attempts to create a very modest set of criteria for entry into initial teacher education established under the Great Teaching, Inspired Learning policy have been undermined by some universities.

In response, a new proposal is being developed to establish higher standards as prerequisites for employment as a teacher in the NSW public school system.

The NSW Department of Education is the largest employer of teachers in Australia.

While universities might attempt to lower the status of the teaching profession by lowering entry scores, it is time for the Department to respond by making it clear that only those with a

proven and consistent academic record will get a teaching job in NSW public schools.

Federation will work with the Department as the employment standards are developed.

Once the details have been established they should send a clear signal to the community that, at the point of employment, NSW public schools will not employ graduates with a low academic performance.

But these will not replace the need to protect high academic entry standards into initial teacher education.

These are critically important. Indeed, Federation will continue to campaign for these to be strengthened.

An international benchmark established by the OECD is that only the top 30 per cent of a cohort should be accepted into teaching. If we were to apply that standard in Australia, that equates roughly to an ATAR of 80.

As well as applying high academic standards at every point, it is critical that graduates are also screened to assess their suitability to work with children and young people including their emotional stability and capacity to work collegially.

For some time now, Federation members have reported that many universities pressure schools to pass trainee teachers at their end of their practicum experience even when the supervising teacher has recommended a fail.

This is unacceptable and must be regulated.

What is also important is that those seeking to work in NSW Department schools must understand and can demonstrate a commitment to the ethos and values of public education.

The protection of the status of the teaching profession is core business of Federation. To state it in very clear terms, for public schools, only the best will do.