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Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Submission No. 16

### **Submission to the Parliamentary Standards Enquiry**

As teacher educators, we work within an accountability system based on professionally-agreed standards and linked to a code of ethics. Our programs are re-accredited every 5 years against a comprehensive set of standards, which exist on School, University and at external accreditation levels. We are required to assess our capacity to meet those standards against evidence of our performance.

The establishment of the Victorian Institute of Teaching as a regulatory body in 2002 means that preservice and practising teachers are now responsible to a self governing, elected body of educational professionals. Now, as in other areas such as Law and Medicine, teachers can be confident that they are working with properly qualified peers who comply to consensually-agreed standards of professional behaviour. The VIT also has the power to deregister a teacher who has breached provisions of this code. Moreover, the expectation now exists that educators will continue to seek formal, as well as informal opportunities to learn as part of their professional undertaking. Evidence of professional learning has become a required dimension of continued registration as a teacher, bolstering theoretical as well as practical knowledge of learning and teaching.

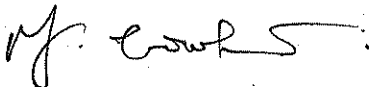
Underpinning such processes sit concerns to improve and maintain concepts of quality teaching, especially in the light of unhelpful media coverage. Increasingly, teachers are asked to take on growing numbers of responsibilities in curricular, co-curricular and significant pastoral areas. Notwithstanding federal proposals to introduce a merit pay system, teachers' salaries remain low in relation to other forms of professional remuneration. To attract and retain quality teachers, we must act to strengthen our profession from within, working collaboratively and with the highest levels of professional expertise to raise both the practice expectations and general perception of educators' labour. We believe in the value and integrity of our work and will strongly assert the ethical principles within which that work is undertaken.

Education, however, does not sit in a social or political vacuum. It exists in Victoria as an important arm of state government, whose policies are contingent to Education's continued directions. In a more general sense, however, professional educators and students look to our decision makers as exemplars of the process we are expected to uphold. It is our submission then, that state political representatives agree to similar standards of professional practice that we do. We argue that elected representatives should develop a code of practice similar to that of other professional bodies, conforming to accountability standards and responsible behaviour. This behaviour should be evidenced in all forms of parliamentary debate, decision making, policy implementation and in relation to their public face when dealing with the media. Breaches of the code of conduct by state political representatives need to be dealt with in accordance with the agreed code. Poor performance in the parliamentary and public arenas creates an impoverished context for raising standards in contingent professional areas, such as Education and Health.

The reformation of the Victorian Legislative Council, in effect from the 2006 election, provides an opening to begin making a difference. We strongly advocate for improvement to current practice, and hope this will not be an opportunity squandered.



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