



OVERVIEW

Across Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has set standards for the skills and knowledge that new, graduate teachers must have. This includes AITSL Standard 2.5:

“Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas”⁶.

AITSL also requires universities and other providers of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to demonstrate that their programs enable preservice teachers to meet this standard, as well as the 36 other professional standards for graduate teachers⁷.

This fact sheet is based on our research in Tasmania¹⁵, informed by a useful framework by Adoniou¹. It points to *four key aspects* of preparing new teachers for teaching literacy. Much of this fact sheet is also relevant to Initial Teacher Education for teaching literacy in other states and territories in Australia.

PERSONAL CONTEXT

The personal context that preservice teachers bring to their ITE course influences their preparation and capacity for teaching literacy. It includes their own personal literacy levels and experiences of learning to become literate, as well as their attitudes about teaching as a profession and motivations for becoming a teacher. To examine this personal context, the University of Tasmania uses three formal tests:

- ➔ *Non-Academic Capability Assessment Tool (NACAT)*¹⁷. This is administered before students can start their teaching degree. It is an online assessment that requires applicants to demonstrate a range of personal traits in addition to an understanding of what it means to be a teacher.
- ➔ *Internal Faculty-based literacy (and numeracy) competency test*¹⁸. Pre-service teachers must pass the test at a mastery level (that is, with a score of at least 80 per cent) before being permitted to do their first Professional Experience placement. Students who struggle are offered:
 - online resources and courses on writing, vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation, which they can access and complete separate from and outside of their ITE course; and
 - support programs and services made available through the University of Tasmania Student Learning facility, to help students develop academic skills—including English language skills.
- ➔ *Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE)*^{5,18}. This is a national test, which is compulsory for all teacher education degrees. At the University of Tasmania students must pass this test before they are permitted to do their final Professional Experience placement.



“A teacher’s literacy, their own literacy, is so important to teaching in classrooms. Unless they feel confident and comfortable and love literacy, then they’re not going to manage to be successful teachers”.

COURSEWORK

To obtain a teaching degree, the University of Tasmania is accredited by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), to offer two main pathways:

- *Bachelor of Education (BEd)*: this is completed in a minimum of four years at undergraduate level.
- *Master of Teaching (MTeach)*: this is completed in a minimum of two years at postgraduate level.

Literacy units: both degree programs contain compulsory units specific for preparing to teach literacy. These units are spread across all years of study and are mapped to the Teacher Professional Standards (Graduate Level) as required by the AITSL accreditation guidelines. They include:

- *Generic units*, focussed on literacy as a general capability in the Australian Curriculum², including for secondary teaching across different subjects.
- *English units for early childhood and primary teaching* that address the three strands of English (Language, Literacy, Literature)³.
- *English units for secondary teachers of English* as a learning area in the Australian Curriculum^{3,4}.



“We have tried to make it sequential, make each unit dependent upon what they have learned before ... So, it’s not just the content but also the pedagogy that is increased in sophistication by the time they get to the third year”.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professional Experience is a core component of all Initial Teacher Education courses. It is an opportunity for preservice teachers to deepen and apply their learning from their coursework studies. As required by AITSL⁷, the University of Tasmania provides:

- 80 days of professional experience in the BEd (Primary) and BEd (Secondary).
- 90 days of professional experience in the BEd (Early Childhood).
- 60 days of professional experience in the MTeach.

Successful Professional Experience—not only for teaching literacy but for teaching generally—is supported when:

- there is a *close connection* between university-based coursework and school-based field experience,
- *all stakeholders contribute*, including preservice teachers themselves, school staff, University staff, and staff in the Department of Education. Of particular importance are:
 - productive communication, clear expectations, mutual regard, professional respect, and recognition of the role of each party, and
 - high calibre of supervising teachers.

Extra time in the classroom, in addition to and separate from the compulsory minimum hours on placement in a school, was considered highly beneficial in our research, boosting the confidence of graduates for teaching literacy. This is most useful when it enables preservice teachers to work alongside accomplished, experienced teachers. In our research, three ways of gaining extra classroom experience prior to graduation were identified:

- *Internship*: in Tasmania, the Teacher Intern Placement Program (TIPP) is a collaboration between the Department of Education and the University of Tasmania¹³.
- *Limited Authority to Teach (LAT)*: schools can apply for a LAT, to employ someone as a teacher who has the right skills but is not (yet) a registered teacher¹⁶.
- *Teacher Assistant (TA)*: working as a Teacher Assistant provides valuable experience with individual student support, curriculum, classroom management, and broader school processes¹².



“I found my internship process with an experienced teacher the BEST learning I have had in preparing me for my own class... [Learning to teach children how to read] isn’t something that happens overnight and fortunately I [had] the opportunity to observe my mentor model these skills and receive feedback and assistance ... When pre-service teachers and mentors are well matched it works really well and prepares us better for the real deal!”

MENTORING AND INDUCTION POST GRADUATION

The first employment in a school marks the start of a whole new chapter of learning and professional development for new, graduate teachers. Learning to teach literacy does not stop when preservice teachers graduate. It is an ongoing process of professional learning throughout a teaching career.

Mentoring and induction in the first few years after graduation is essential, both to enable high quality literacy teaching and to support early career teachers and avoid attrition¹⁹. High-quality induction programs enable new graduates to make the challenging transition from “student of teaching to teacher of students”^{11 (p.1027)}. These factors support a positive transition to first employment:

- *Formal induction*: the Tasmanian Department of Education offers an induction course for early career teachers, delivered by the Professional Learning Institute¹⁴. This is based on AITSL guidelines⁸ and was considered very useful, and even necessary, as one element of support.
- *Constructive formal or informal mentoring*, with mentors supporting both the pedagogical and practical needs of their new colleagues: In Tasmania this is enabled by the Beginning Teacher Time Release (BeTTR) program for eligible new teachers¹⁰ and by initiatives through the Education Workforce Roundtable⁹.
- *Supportive school environments*, that have a culture of collaboration, encouraging leadership, and practice-focused in-service learning (such as professional learning teams) where new teachers also can contribute their ideas and knowledge.
- *In-school literacy expertise* for professional learning, especially in the form of coaching.

To ensure the next generation of teachers is well-placed to support their students’ literacy learning requires a system that holds together the four different contexts of teacher education (personal context; coursework; professional experience; first employment) in a coherent, cohesive, and connected whole.

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This is fact sheet #5 (out of 11), produced as part of the
“Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools”
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<https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Literacy-Plan-for-Action-2019-2022.pdf>

For information about the review, other factsheets and five detailed reports, see:

<https://www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre/research/completed-projects>

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Launched in 2015, the Peter Underwood Centre is a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania.