

# Recruiting students with higher grades won't alone improve teaching quality in schools

January 22 2016, by Tony Loughland, Unsw Australia

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The [Victorian government's plan](#) to introduce a (as yet unspecified) minimum ATAR for students looking to study a teaching course is not a silver bullet to improving teaching standards in schools.

Recruiting teachers with higher grades may help improve the profile of the [teaching](#) profession, but it is not a shortcut to establishing the kind of quality teaching in schools that society expects. In 2015, just [one in five](#) undergraduate entrants to a teaching program were school leavers with an ATAR. This means lots of entrants to teaching degrees come as mature-age students or transfer from other courses, rather than straight out of year 12.

The announcement follows a [policy change in New South Wales](#), which means that from this year, teaching students who do not receive more than 80% in at least three subjects at school, including English, won't get jobs when they graduate.

The aim of this policy was to attract more high-achieving students to the profession – teachers will be recruited from the top 30% of school leavers.

The top 30% was arbitrarily chosen; there is no clear consensus in the research that recruiting [teacher education](#) students from the top 30% will guarantee a quality teaching profession.

The actual policy lever chosen by NSW is more rigorous and clever than

a broad top 30% ATAR cutoff, as three Band Fives ([80-89 marks](#)) constitute an actual performance measure in three subjects including English.

Whereas the relative ATAR ranking can be boosted by astute subject selection on the part of students and through bonus schemes offered by providers.

## **Recruiting teacher education students**

The shift away from school leavers with an ATAR has been significant in the last decade.

Australian entrants applying from a secondary education without an ATAR [increased significantly](#) between 2005 to 2013 by 67%.

This change in enrolment patterns demands a more comprehensive approach to selecting candidates for teacher education programs that goes beyond establishing minimum ATAR cutoff points.

## **How to boost quality**

There are a multitude of pathways to a teaching degree, as well as current policy measures in place to ensure that graduates are [classroom ready](#).

Teacher education providers have been working alongside the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, and their equivalent state teacher accreditation authorities, to introduce a broad range of input and outcome measures to assure teacher quality.

These measures include the introduction of a literacy and numeracy test

as a threshold barrier for teacher education graduates who wish to gain employment in Australian schools.

In a 2015 [pilot study](#) sat by 5,000 teacher education students across the country, 92% passed in literacy and 90% in numeracy.

This is a performance outcome measure not loved by teacher educators, but it does allow students who experienced significant disadvantage during the high school years and thus a lower ATAR ranking to demonstrate their literacy and numeracy skills before graduation rather than on entry.

Under a minimum ATAR policy measure this disadvantaged student would miss out on entry altogether.

Some interesting research projects in the area of teacher selection are also underway in both Australia and overseas.

[Researchers](#) are examining non-academic criteria for selection such as personal characteristics that would augment and inform academic criteria such as minimum ATAR rankings.

Another large international study has appropriated the judgement test methodology from medical schools to create a teacher judgement test for prospective entrants into teacher education courses in the UK.

The timing of this test, just as in the case of the literacy and numeracy test, is a point of contention. Is it fair to conduct a teacher judgement test before candidates understand anything about teaching or should this be a condition of graduation?

A range of outcome measures needs to be employed throughout the teacher education process to assure a quality teacher upon graduation.

*This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).*

Source: University of New South Wales

Citation: Recruiting students with higher grades won't alone improve teaching quality in schools (2016, January 22) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-students-higher-grades-wont-quality.html>

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