Introduction

This response is made on behalf of the School of Education and Professional Studies (EPS), Griffith University. EPS is a major provider of undergraduate and postgraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes for preservice teachers who live in South-East Queensland and also for those who live in other states of Australia and choose to study online with Griffith University.

Like the *Better and Fairer Education System Review,* EPS is committed to leveraging the transformational impact of education. A sound education system not only aims to foster the skills, knowledge, and inquiry that children, young people, and adults need for their futures, education is foundational to the creation of an informed and critically engaged citizenship. For our School, education in all its forms is fundamental to a socially just democracy – it is (or should be) preparation to live well in a world worth living in (Kemmis, 2012). It is, therefore, a major concern that the Australian education system is increasingly segregated along socio-economic lines. This raises the need for equitable investment into an education system in which the quality of education is not reliant upon, or an outcome of, high socio-economic status. A robust, well-resourced public education system is needed to act as a site for building social cohesion - not only through the mix of population it should attract but through an explicit focus on building respect for diversity.

We preface our discussion by noting that early years, primary, and secondary teaching is a complex endeavour that involves a high degree of professional judgement and expertise. In this response we have chosen to focus on the broad areas of concern outlined by the consultation paper, rather than respond to the many individual questions posed.

We are especially focused on a holistic view of the role of schools that encompasses, but is not limited to, a focus on academic achievement in areas such as literacy and numeracy. To this end, we also refer to the submission made by the AMIE, which includes academic staff from our own School and our sister School, the Griffith Conservatorium, expressing their deep concern about the decline of music education in the school system. The question of what outcomes count is important, as the resourcing of the school system is directed at what is valued as outputs.

In order to prepare students for their future lives, there are some important outcomes that are yet to be visible in the very content oriented and outputs designed systems to date. These areas include:

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- Health and wellbeing
- 21st century capabilities (eg. critical thinking, empathy, resilience, lifelong learning attitudes and skills communication, digital skills, creativity)
- Engagement in learning (behavioural, social and emotional, cognitive engagement as well as student and teacher agency)

Evidence-Based Practice

The complexity of teaching requires teachers to locate and critically engage with a range of evidence, and exercise professional judgement.

Evidence-informed practices are necessary. However, the effective application of evidence to inform practice requires acknowledging that: evidence changes over time; the evidence-base is shaped by what is chosen to be the focus of research; and as a result, measures of effectiveness can be narrow. Additionally, evidenced-based practices are only as effective as the critical thinking and reflective teaching that transpires. The way in which curriculum content is taught should be informed by a range of evidence *and* contextually responsive professional judgement. Any evidence-based teaching practice needs to be responsive to context (place-based) and the specific students (personalised) in that context.

Responsiveness to diverse students' learning needs is critical. Students come from a variety of social, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, and each student brings a unique set of strengths and capabilities, as well as areas in which they are challenged. They may be gifted and talented, twice-exceptional students (have both disability and giftedness), have a disability, or be trauma-impacted. Respect for and responsiveness to diversity and intersections of diversities is essential. An extensive literature base provides evidence for the effectiveness of a range of teaching approaches suitable for addressing the varied learning needs of students, including: differentiated and personalised learning (e.g., Tomlinson, 2000, 2006, 2011; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019) and problem-based learning, which Hung et al. (2008), state is "perhaps the most innovative pedagogical method ever implemented in education" (p. 486).

Importantly, to pave the way for effective learning and school engagement for all students, schools must know their community. Knowing the community, understanding its strengths and challenges, and working with the community, is a key contributor to School success for all children.

Our recent *Creating Futures Summit: Transforming Indigenous Education in Practice* gathered 555 participants, to hear from Indigenous Education experts and explore innovative ideas, to improve our responsiveness to Indigenous communities and improve educational outcomes. Almost every speaker reinforced the need for schools to be proactive in building respectful, listening relationships and working with their communities. A commitment to culturally affirming curriculum emerged as paramount.

Student Health and Wellbeing

The importance of student health and wellbeing is a global issue with students' health and social and emotional wellbeing directly impacting their academic progress. School leaders, in-service and preservice teachers need to have explicit resources (professional learning and training) to develop nurturing school cultures. To date, most school improvement discourses are dominated by a singular focus on academic achievement, which tends to overwhelm other potential priorities, such as wellbeing. The persistence of this singular focus is evident in the pre-eminence of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which focus on academic outcomes, as prime indicators of the success of schooling systems and individual schools (Livingstone & Doherty, 2020; Sahlberg, 2016).

If student health and well-being matter, they need to be measured. Acknowledging the impact of non-school factors on wellbeing will include:
- Building 'nurturing' schools through nurturing style leadership;
- Promoting personal well-being of teaching staff (in-service and preservice);
- Explicitly embedding the teaching of social and emotional capacities within the curriculum (not an added program but highlighting opportunities already within the curriculum)
- Monitoring and measuring teacher and student health and well-being as a key priority.

A key area for attention is the development of more consistent and responsive approach to teaching and learning systems for students in the middle years (aged 11-15). At this time, students are experiencing the second sensitive period of brain development with synaptic pruning with brain construction a feature. In addition, social connection and peer groups, along with insecurity and rapid physical growth, make these young people vulnerable. This is one of the times that students learning typically dips and students can go backwards in their learning, their wellbeing, and their mental health status. A strategic, whole of system approach is needed to incorporate evidence-based practices and to ensure students remain engaged in their learning. Addressing this major gap would change the life course and learning outcomes of a vast number of students (see, for example Pendergast et al, 2017; Allen et al., 2019).

Teachers need professional development in identifying and responding to mental health issues in their students. Be You, is a Beyond Blue initiative, supported by the Government, providing support and resources for educators for early childhood and child wellbeing and builds communities of practice. It is a model that could be upscaled for inclusion in all schools in the nation. The best outcomes are achieved through setting up approaches that enable collective efficacy, which has a multiplier effect (see Hattie, 2012) on effort.

All children, at some point in their schooling lives, may experience 'unwell-ness' and be at risk of disengagement. Schools should have a pyramid of increasing levels of intervention

depending on student needs and this pyramid should be cyclical so that students can work through issues and cycle back through the curriculum.

The complexity of Teachers' Work/ Teacher Retention
The Stronger Beginnings TEEP report and the QITE Review have identified some of the areas of challenge for attracting and retaining teachers. Fundamentally, teachers work has changed dramatically but the systems within which they operate has been less adaptable.

In 2019, EPS set out to better understand the declining status of the teaching profession, which has contributed to teacher attrition and challenges to attracting the next generation of teachers. In that year, Griffith University, in collaboration with key stakeholders, hosted a [Summit on the Teaching Profession](#) with 250 delegates drawn from across the sector. The delegates highlighted the misperceptions held across the community of teachers' work and identified six features that distinguish the work of teachers today. Teachers:
- nurture caring relationships with students, parents and the community;
- generate curiosity from a spectrum of disciplinary subjects to promote learning;
- are capable of transforming individuals, schools and society and the value systems upon which they are based;
- are committed to innovation, justice, the work of teaching and to progressing the profession;
- promote flexibility as both an attitude and a mindset; and
- intellectually engage people in ways that differ from previous generations (Brown et al, 2019).

Delegates left the Summit with agreed actions to contribute positively to enhancing the status of teachers, given this contemporary understanding of what it means to be a teacher:
- building collaborative relationships between students, teachers, schools and communities;
- strengthening advocacy for teaching as a profession;
- promoting active teacher communities of practice;
- nurturing life-long learning and professional development;
- fostering teacher wellbeing; and
- cultivating a culture of partnerships and mentoring.

Unfortunately, there is a disconnect between how teachers see themselves and the perceptions others hold about the profession. Mockler's (2022) study of 65,000 print media articles around the nation over a 25-year period (1996-2020) revealed three findings that position teachers as a problem. First, the persistent focus on 'teacher quality' to blame for wider education failures (system failures are hidden). Second, presenting teachers' work as simple and common sense (it's not). Third, teachers are presented negatively, and 'teacher-bashing' is commonplace (thus it is not a 'safe' profession). Teachers are disillusioned and exhausted by this narrative, especially as their daily experience is one of work intensification, increased complexity, and the lack of acknowledgement.

Since the 2019 Summit, COVID has disrupted the schooling sector, accelerating previously anticipated teacher shortages and escalating the importance of positioning the profession differently in the community. There is no precedent for global learning delays, estimated to average more than 8 months for every learner, at this scale accompanied by the demands of the hidden pandemic, that is the mental health and wellbeing of students, teachers and the wider community.

In response, in 2022 Griffith University hosted a Summit on the topic Rethinking teaching and teacher education in a post-pandemic world. A key purpose was to enhance the status of the profession and attract and retain teachers. This is what Summit delegates told us:

- *What was challenging?* More than one third (35%) of delegates reported supporting teacher and student wellbeing, another quarter indicated the necessary change in teacher mindset and skillset (24%). Challenges related to catering for inequity within society being increasingly obvious (17%), and teacher care and concern for disadvantaged/disconnected students (12%).
- *How has the pandemic changed what you do*? Almost half of the delegates reported the pandemic has changed what they do by being more agile, flexible and adaptable (47%). Almost a quarter indicated increased technology usage and availability (24%). The remaining categories revealed shifts about future thinking (16%), an appreciation of fundamentals (8%), and different ways of working with families (5%) as being the aspects that have most changed for them most as a response to the pandemic.
- *What innovations would you like to keep*. The majority of respondents (71%) indicated they sought flexibility in the areas of: work structures AND learning design AND space to innovate AND connecting beyond the classroom. This flexibility mirrors changes in many workplaces.
- *Delegates were invited to share their ideas about the legacy that could be created for teachers and teacher education.* Almost half highlighted the opportunity to enhance the value of the profession, and the expertise of teachers (44%). They recognise that yes, teachers are rockstars, a phrase that became synonymous with the Summit (Pendergast & O'Brien, 2023).

This is a profession that is undergoing change. These Summit events reveal two persistent themes to transform the work of teachers and how they are perceived – the *desire for flexibility, and the yearning for the recognition of expertise.* These themes are in keeping with the findings of a recent study on the work of early childhood educators: *Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work*. This study focused on educators in very high-quality early childhood centres (preschool and long day care). In the 10 case study sites of the research, staff retention was high. Staff reported feeling valued, and that they were able to exercise their professional judgement.

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