



## Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Australian Teacher Education Association  
Submitting as a: Peak body  
State: Vic.

### Summary

This submission, made on behalf of the Australia Teacher Education Association, addresses two focus areas of the Review: 'Teachers' and 'Identifying, sharing and driving good practice/continuous improvement'.

We submit that these areas can be strengthened to foster improved outcomes for all students by:

1. Investing in the continuous improvement of teaching practices in Australian schools in order to improve outcomes for all students
2. Pursuing opportunities for innovation in relation to out-of-field teaching and teacher supply in rural and remote areas
3. Using school and system funding to support collaborative inquiry into effective, contextually-situated classroom practice and school leadership.

Our submission makes practical, evidence-based recommendations for advancing these strategies.

### Main submission

This submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools is made on behalf of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA).

ATEA is the peak professional association for teacher educators in Australia. The mission of the Association is to promote:

- The preservice and continuing education of teachers in all forms and contexts
- Teacher education as central in the educational enterprise of the nation
- Research on teacher education as a core endeavour.

The Association enacts this mission through several key strategies, namely:

- fostering improvement in initial teacher education

- promoting and supporting the teaching profession
- forming strong links with individuals and organisations involved in educational change
- improving the nature, quality and availability of professional development for teacher educators
- promoting and disseminating research, ideas and practices, innovation, and evaluation in teacher education.

The Association's scholarly journal, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, publishes high-quality Australian and international research into pre-service and in-service teacher education and development. The Association's Constitution, Executive, and activities are detailed on its website: <https://atea.edu.au>

This submission addresses two focus areas of the Review: 'Teachers' and 'Identifying, sharing and driving good practice/continuous improvement'. We submit that these areas can be strengthened to foster improved outcomes for all students by:

1. Investing in the continuous improvement of teaching practices in Australian schools in order to improve outcomes for all students
  2. Pursuing opportunities for innovation in relation to out-of-field teaching and teacher supply in rural and remote areas
  3. Using school and system funding to support collaborative inquiry into effective, contextually-situated classroom practice and school leadership.
1. Investing in the continuous improvement of teaching practices in Australian schools in order to improve outcomes for all students

To improve student learning outcomes and to support ongoing improvement over time, it is crucial to support investment in teachers and in professional learning across the teacher professional lifespan. Investment in a Professional Learning approach that is collaborative in nature, embedded in contexts and sustained over time will lead to increased teacher efficacy and improved student learning outcomes. We argue that a systems level professional learning framework that focuses on the elements of teacher efficacy, teacher as expert, and teacher as evaluator will bring about meaningful and substantive change in student outcomes over time.

The need for a professional learning infrastructure was recognized within the 2009 Education and Training Committee report, and elements of this infrastructure are reflected in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and within teacher registration requirements that mandate the number of hours of professional learning to be completed to maintain registration. We contend that, to bring about improvements in student learning outcomes across all cohorts of students, the

nature and focus of teacher professional learning must be underpinned by teachers who take an inquiry stance on the effects of their practice (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2001). While professional 'development' may be episodic and disconnected from both context and from specific teaching needs (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie & Beatty, 2010; Warren Little, 2012), professional 'learning' is distinct, in that it is collaborative in nature, embedded in the school context, sustained over time, and leads to improvement in teacher efficacy and learning outcomes (Bruce et al., 2010). "Teacher efficacy is a reliable precursor to, and predictor of, student achievement" (Bruce et al., 2010, p. 1600) with research evidence highlighting that improvements in teacher efficacy and professional action are reciprocal in nature.

To improve student outcomes across all student cohorts (including disadvantaged, vulnerable and gifted students), a professional learning approach that enables teachers to become experts is essential (Loughran, 2010). Through engaging in professional learning focused on the instructional triangle of the relationship between teachers, students and content (Warren Little, 2012), teachers become experts in supporting how students in their contexts learn.

Teachers must also take an active role in evaluating the evidence of student learning. Rather than focusing on distal measures of achievement from large-scale standardized testing, teachers benefit from becoming evaluators of proximal measures (Fishman, Marx, Best & Tal, 2003) of student achievement linked to the context and curriculum of their classrooms.

A systems level professional learning approach requires a "fundamental shift in the underpinning assumptions and purposes of teacher development" (Loughran, 2012, p.50). Investing in teachers and their learning leads to sustained improvements in teacher efficacy, expert teaching, evaluation of student learning, and improvements in outcomes for all.

## 2. Pursuing opportunities for innovation in relation to out-of-field teaching and teacher supply in rural and remote areas

Staffing rural schools has been a problem for 113 years' (Roberts & Downes, 2017). This entrenched issue reflects the long-standing struggle to address the anomaly in the provision of universal education in Australia. Despite government reviews generating a range of recommendations, research findings identifying the challenges and issues, staffing rural schools with an appropriately qualified teaching workforce remains an ongoing challenge (Ministerial Council on Education et al. 2003; Productivity Commission, 2012; Roberts, 2004; Yarrow et al. 1999; Vinson et al. 2002).

The complexity of Australia's population distribution sets up difficulties in the provision of public services such as health, transport and, in this case, the staffing of schools with appropriately qualified staff. The issues faced in attracting staff to rural

and regional schools have plagued the teaching profession since the beginning of compulsory education. One of the consequences is that a number of schools, many of which are in rural locations, are staffed with teachers not qualified to teach the classes to which they are assigned (Lassig, Doherty & Moore, 2015; McConney & Price, 2009). This is due mainly to a shortage of secondary school teachers in several discipline areas and is compounded by the retention of staff (Azano & Stewart, 2016 Productivity Commission, 2012; NSW Department of Education, 2015; Weldon, 2015). The nature of the teacher shortage varies across Australia, but the most notable areas are in secondary mathematics, English, Technological and Applied Studies (such as Food Technology, Industrial Technology), some discipline areas within science, and Languages Other Than English (LOTE).

However, teacher shortage data understates the magnitude of the situation. The number of 'out-of-field' teaching by staff is not taken into account in teacher shortage data. The reported data into out-of-field teaching suggests that more than half of Information and Communication Technologies and lower secondary mathematics teachers do not have a three-year qualification in the relevant discipline. Further, approximately 20% of those teaching physics, 25% of those teaching history and 40% of teaching geography were out-of-field teachers (McConney & Price, 2009; Department of Education & Training, 2017; NSW Department of Education, 2015; 2009; Weldon, 2015).

A range of employer schemes, teacher 're-training' programs, regional content, and professional experience placements embedded in some University teacher education courses, have been implemented as localised responses and short-term fixes (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Kline and Walker-Gibbs, 2015; McConney & Price, 2009; Thomas, 2000). In light of this on-going situation it is time to re-think, and enact as policy, a range of strategies aimed at improving approaches to staffing rural schools with appropriately qualified staff. While there have been moves to enact greater links between staffing needs and those graduating from initial teacher education programs the opportunity now exists to strengthen this connection through, for example, sponsorship of final-year pre-service teachers to undertake extended, embedded placements in rural and remote schools. Additional support likely to improve retention, such as frequent professional development opportunities both online and face-to-face, could be funded by systems to increase the attractiveness of rural and remote schools as sites for teacher and career development.

3. Using school and system funding to support collaborative research into effective, contextually-situated, classroom practice and school leadership.

During 2016 and 2017 ATEA has collaborated with the Australian Council of Deans of Education and the Australian Association for Research in Education on the project Building a research-rich teaching profession for Australia, which will report in early 2018. The project has involved workshops around Australia with school and system

personnel, education academics, and education policy actors. A national survey has also been conducted to identify opportunities for strengthening school and system practices through engagement with research. The project has taken an inclusive approach to defining research engagement to include, for example, research consumption, the commissioning of research, participatory research, inquiry-based practices in schools, participation in academic research, and collaboration between schools and the academy.

The project replicates, in part, extensive reviews of research literature and a program of consultation conducted by the British Educational Research Association and the Royal Society of Arts in the UK. The BERA/RSA (2014) report argued:

- Every learner is entitled to teaching that is informed by the latest relevant research.
- Teachers share a common responsibility for the continuous development of their research literacy. This informs all aspects of their professional practice and should be written into initial and continuing teacher education programmes, curriculum, standards, and in registration and licensing frameworks.
- During the course of qualifying and throughout their careers, teachers should have multiple opportunities to engage in research and enquiry, collaborating with colleagues in other schools and with members of the wider research community, based in universities and elsewhere.
- Research literacy must have a prominent place in development programmes for educational leaders, for parents' organisations, and for senior and middle leaders, such that the development of research-rich schools is seen as a key leadership responsibility.
- The levers that hold schools – and other educational institutions and agencies – to account, notably regulatory frameworks, must explicitly recognise the importance of research literacy to teachers' professional identity and practice.
- Research literacy is an important prerequisite for school and a research-rich culture as a key feature of any school designated 'outstanding'.
- Policymakers of all persuasions – and those who seek to influence policy – should encourage, and be responsive to, the findings of educational research, both in policy formulation and in implementation strategies.
- System success criteria include sustained and growing systemic capacity to support educational research at the level of the individual school, through local and regional networks, embedded in teachers' terms and conditions,

and across the wider research community, based in universities and elsewhere.

- Commissioners of education should research build teacher engagement into commissioning processes, so that wherever possible teachers are active agents in research, rather than passive participants.
- Producers of new research knowledge, including universities, university-school partnerships, school groupings, and local authorities, as well as individual schools, must endeavour to make their research findings as freely available, accessible and usable as possible.

Early analysis of data from the Building a research-rich teaching profession for Australia project suggest that Australian teachers, schools, and education systems are increasingly seeking to participate in, and benefit from, engagement with research and participation in systematic inquiry. A number of strategies have the potential to boost this engagement as a key component of continuous professional learning to improve diverse student outcomes. These strategies could include:

- An increased emphasis on research engagement in the revision of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to be conducted in 2018
- Collaboration between schools to jointly sponsor and/or commission research from university partners in ways that directly inform and benefit classroom practice in those schools
- Increased opportunities for teacher secondment into research activities and/or institutions
- System-level subscriptions to educational research literature allowing teachers to access latest research insights
- Education systems taking a stronger role in brokering research collaborations and networks between education institutions and systems

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