



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

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### Summary

The most important means of achieving educational excellence in Australian schools is building a strong and attractive teaching profession.

The lack of recruitment policies designed to make teaching a profession of choice for talented people is arguably the greatest threat to the future quality of teaching in Australia.

Current arrangements for assuring the quality of future teachers are weak in comparison with high achieving countries. Australia lacks coherent and broad-based policies designed to ensure that sufficient numbers of academically successful students are recruited to meet the demand.

Current arrangements for the certification of highly accomplished and lead teachers are expensive and fragmented across states and territories and sectors, lacking consistency and validity – and consequently, credibility as a basis for substantial salary increases for rewarding excellence. Consequently, the capacity of school leaders to promote widespread use of evidence-based practices is limited.

The major challenge in improving teaching lies not so much in identifying effective teaching practices, as in creating a rigorous certification system that provides strong incentives for all teachers to learn how to use effective teaching practices.

Closing the gap in student outcomes between schools remains one of Australia's greatest educational challenges. Policies are needed that ensure that differences between high and low SES schools cannot be attributed to differences in resources, the quality, experience and expertise of the teaching staff or the numbers of support staff. All schools should have staff profiles with similar proportions of nationally certified Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers.

More funding for schools is important, but it will not suffice unless school leaders can rely on policies that ensure a supply of well-qualified and effective teachers, motivated by career pathways that reward professional certification.

Policies are needed that recognise the mutual responsibility of governments and the profession in achieving educational excellence.

## Main submission

### Five Policy Challenges in Achieving Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Dr Lawrence Ingvarson

The most important means of achieving educational excellence in Australian schools is investment in building a strong and attractive teaching profession.

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals identifies the complex values, knowledge and leadership practices required of effective school leaders. This submission identifies five policy challenges that need to be addressed to enable widespread adoption of that Standard..

1. Australia has relatively weak policies for ensuring that school leaders are supplied with competent and well-qualified teachers

Current arrangements for assuring the quality of future teachers are weak in comparison with high achieving countries. Australia lacks coherent and broad-based policies designed to ensure that sufficient numbers of academically successful students are recruited to meet the demand.

2. The capacity of school leaders to promote widespread use of evidence-based practices needs to be strengthened

Current arrangements for the certification of highly accomplished and lead teachers are expensive and fragmented across states and territories and sectors, lacking consistency and validity – and consequently, credibility as a basis for substantial salary increases for rewarding excellence. Consequently, the capacity of school leaders to promote widespread use of evidence-based practices is limited.

The major challenge in improving teaching lies not so much in identifying effective teaching practices, as in creating a rigorous certification system that provides strong incentives for all teachers to learn how to use what we already know about effective teaching.

3. Principals in disadvantaged schools lack the resources and staffing they need to close achievement gaps

All principals are expected to promote quality teaching and learning, but they do not have an equivalent capacity to so. Out of field teaching is more likely in less socially advantaged schools. Principals in low SES secondary schools are much more likely to have difficulty attracting and retaining effective teachers. The ratio of non-teaching staff to teaching staff in independent schools is double the ratio in government schools.

Closing the gap in student outcomes between schools remains one of Australia's greatest educational challenges. Policies are needed that ensure that differences between high and low SES schools cannot be attributed to differences in resources, the quality, experience and expertise of the teaching staff or the numbers of support staff. All schools should have staff profiles with similar proportions of nationally certified Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers.

4. Australia has weak processes for identifying and preparing future school leaders

Compared with high-achieving countries such as Canada and Singapore, Australia lacks a professional learning and certification system that is designed to ensure that future school leaders have the requirements to implement the leadership practices embodied in the Professional Standards for Principals.

5. Current workloads and compliance expectations prevent many principals from being effective instructional leaders

While leadership standards describe what effective school leaders need to be able to know and do, recent ACER research indicates that workloads and conditions in government schools force many principals into focus mainly on other more pressing and immediate administrative matters and compliance requirements. Conditions that constrain school leaders from concentrating their expertise on what matters for students need to be identified and minimised.

This submission elaborates only on the first two challenges.

1. Australia needs recruitment policies that ensure school leaders are supplied with competent and well-qualified teachers

The most important condition that enables school leaders to meet their educational objectives resides in the professional knowledge, skills and expectations of their teachers. They depend fundamentally on government policies that ensure salaries and career prospects attract high academic quality students to a career in teaching, prepare them well and reward evidence of their growing expertise.

However, Australia has allowed the status and attractiveness of teaching as a career to decline significantly over recent years.

In 2005, 79 per cent of students entering undergraduate programs through Tertiary Admission Centres had ATAR scores above 70. In 2016, the proportion had fallen to 45 per cent, compared with 70 per cent for all university courses. The decline in recruitment is most marked for students with ATAR scores in the top 20 per cent.

The number of entrants with ATAR scores less than 50 has more than doubled over the past four years.

No matter how imperfect ATAR scores might be as a predictor of success and retention in a university course, there can be no denying that this situation is a serious threat to the quality of Australia's schools, now and for many years to come.

Australia appears to have lost control over the academic quality of students entering teacher education programs. The demand-driven system is having deleterious effects on the teaching profession and its status.

The importance of quality assurance systems

The key stages in a nation's quality assurance system include policies and practices related to:

- attraction and recruitment
- matching supply to demand
- entry (selection) standards
- accreditation of teacher education programs, and
- registration and professional certification of highly accomplished teaching

Australia's quality assurance system is weaker at each stage than high achieving countries.

The importance of recruitment

Of all the stages in the quality assurance pipeline, recruitment is the most important as its effects flow through to influence the quality of teacher education programs and the quality of graduates and new teachers. No matter how rigorous selection, accreditation and registration policies might be, they are unlikely to compensate for the lack of recruitment policies that attract sufficient numbers of high quality students to meet the demand.

Recent policy statements have focused mainly on tightening selection methods, whereas, as the above trends indicate, Australia lacks strategies to ensure that sufficient numbers of abler students apply for teacher education programs in the first place.

Countries such as Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea are only able to set high entry standards because they have made the status, salaries and working conditions for teachers very attractive and comparable to those of other professions.

Recruitment policies in high achieving countries ensure that the supply of qualified and well prepared teachers matches the demand. They do not leave enrolment decisions solely in the hands of providers, with little involvement of the public or the profession.

## The importance of competitive salaries to recruitment and quality teaching

Research indicates that ensuring the attractiveness of teaching as a career, in terms of salaries and status relative to other professions, is one of the most productive investments that a country can make to improve its education system and promote learning gains for children living in poverty.

Relative salaries matter. Research shows there is a relationship between the academic quality of students attracted to teaching and the salaries of teachers relative to competing professions. Other studies have found a highly significant and positive effect of teacher wages (relative to GDP per capita) on PISA test scores and on TIMSS mathematics test scores.

International research shows that it is not the salaries for beginning teachers that distinguishes countries with higher levels of student achievement. Rather, it is the ratio of salaries of experienced teachers relative to GDP per capita - and on this measure, teacher salaries in Australia have been declining for many years.

Australian teacher salaries are at about the 50th percentile in their country's wage distribution, whereas Korean teachers, for example, are paid at the 78th percentile. Across OECD countries, salaries at the top of the scale for teachers with typical qualifications are, on average 64-66 per cent higher than starting salaries, whereas they are only 44 per cent higher and plateau earlier in Australia.

## Recommendations

The attractiveness of teaching as a career must be strengthened. The lack of broad based recruitment policies designed to make teaching a profession of choice for talented people is arguably the greatest threat to the future quality of teaching in Australia's schools.

If Australia is to guarantee a supply of quality teachers to school leaders, the recent decline in the status of teaching and levels of student performance must be reversed. Australian governments must enable teaching to compete successfully with other professions for students able to cope with a demanding professional preparation program.

New and vigorous recruitment policies are needed, which ensure that, over the next five years, the proportion of entrants to initial teacher education with ATAR scores above 70, or equivalent, steadily rises to 100 per cent. Governments should be accountable for gathering evidence annually showing that their recruitment policies are lifting the academic quality of students being attracted into teaching.

## Match supply to demand

The nation's present approach to teacher education is wasteful, compared with high achieving countries in which supply and demand are broadly in balance, the number

of entrants to teacher education is much the same as that graduating and most teachers remain in the profession long term.

Australia needs an agency with the authority that state governments once had, to be able to match the supply of new teachers to the demand; in the interests of the tax-paying public and the profession. Ensuring that the supply of new teachers matches the demand is too important to be left to the vagaries of university admission policies.

If the present trends in recruitment continue, funding for teacher education should be diverted from universities to a national teacher education authority, the primary responsibilities of which would be to ensure that:

- the supply of new teachers matches demand in all curriculum areas;
- teacher education services are purchased from accredited providers;
- funded courses attract sufficient students from the top 70 per cent of the age cohort; and
- teacher education program accreditation is conditional upon evidence that graduates meet specified high standards for professional knowledge and performance.

The rigour of the teacher education accreditation system needs to be increased. Current indications are that accreditation authorities are having difficulty applying the National Program Standards rigorously. Programs that enrol few students with ATAR scores above 70 are gaining accreditation, contrary to the intention of the Program Standards.

Increasing numbers of teacher education programs are being offered on-line without evidence of strong partnerships with practice schools, which is also required under the Standards. There are instances where students are being expected to find schools for professional experience themselves, which should disqualify a program from accreditation.

Serious consideration should be given once more to the TEMAG recommendation that the accreditation system for initial teacher education should be administered by a national initial teacher education regulator, as is the case with most professions, to increase the capacity for independent assessments and cross-fertilisation of ideas. With large numbers students enrolled in on-line programs provided to several states and territories, state- and territory-based accreditation jurisdictions no longer match the scope of provision.

2. The capacity of school leaders to promote widespread use of successful practices needs to be strengthened

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals emphasises the key role that school leaders play in creating strong professional communities and thereby ensuring successful teaching. Research shows that the strength of professional community in a school has a significant impact on student outcomes, and teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction and retention.

Schools with a strong professional community are characterized by shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, collaborative approaches to work, reflective dialogue and deprivatisation of practice.

Conditions that support the development of schools as professional communities School leaders need teachers who are guided by strong professional norms and values if they are to promote widespread use of evidence-based practices. They need teachers who expect to be active contributors to their professional community and accountable to their colleagues.

We should not expect school leaders to work miracles in transforming schools, with serious consequences for their wellbeing, without the support of well-prepared teachers committed to and rewarded for attaining high professional standards.

Effective leadership ultimately depends, therefore, on teachers who regard themselves as members of a profession. However, if teachers are to regard themselves as members of a profession, their profession needs to be entrusted with the responsibilities of a profession.

Teaching needs a more effective professional learning system

School leaders rely on teachers with strong incentives for on-going professional learning; to keep up with successful teaching practices and attain advanced professional standards.

Evidence from TALIS 2013 indicates Australian teachers are less likely to report that professional learning has led to changes in practice. Incentives to improve the quality of their teaching are weak. In the 2009 TALIS survey, ninety-two per cent of Australian teachers reported that if they improved the quality of their teaching they would not receive any recognition in their school, a level higher than in most countries

A clear message from the TALIS studies is that Australia lacks an effective professional learning system for teachers; the kind of system that would ensure that most teachers have the opportunity and incentives to engage in the kind of professional learning that leads to widespread use of successful teaching practices. As a result, the capacity of school leaders to promote effective professional learning among their teachers is limited.

The core professional learning system needs to be an instrument for promoting widespread adoption of evidence-base practices, as captured in well-written

teaching standards. The kinds of change that matter in education are those that lead to the widespread implementation of successful teaching practices – practices consistent with research and high standards of teaching.

The problem is not a lack of knowledge about these practices. The problem is the lack of a profession-wide strategy or system for ensuring all teachers have the opportunities and the incentives to attain those standards.

Similarly, there is no lack of knowledge about the characteristics of effective professional learning activities; activities that link professional learning to improved student-learning outcomes. Numerous research reviews reveal a consensus on the matter. The problem, once more, is the lack of any coherent system for ensuring that all teachers have the opportunities and the incentives to engage in such activities.

Teaching needs its own professional learning and certification system

Effective school leadership depends fundamentally on policies that ensure a strong profession. Rhetoric about the importance of the teaching profession should be matched by policies that treat teaching as a profession and trust it with the responsibilities of a profession.

Teaching needs what most professions provide; a system for defining what teachers should get better at (evidence-based standards), promoting development towards those standards and providing recognition to those who reach them. Many reports over the past twenty years have advocated such a system as a basis for lifting the status of teaching as a profession, but their recommendations have been set aside.

A rigorous and well-rewarded certification system is the means by which professions shape professional learning in the pursuit of high standards. A strong profession provides a certification system that employers trust as a valid indicator of highly accomplished teaching.

The current situation where assessment for certification at the highly accomplished and lead teacher levels has been delegated to state and territory governments and other employing authorities lacks rigour, does not does not strengthen teaching as a profession.

Recommendation

It is time for teaching to establish its own professional learning and certification authority: An Australian College of Teaching. That body needs to be independent of unions and not engage in industrial matters such as pay and conditions.

It needs to do what only an independent professional body can do. It needs to develop a rigorous system for providing recognition and certification to teachers and principals who attain high standards of practice. This is the means by which



professions give direction to professional learning and ensure widespread adoption of successful teaching and leadership practices.

England recently established a Chartered College of Teaching with such a responsibility. It is time for the Australian teaching profession to seek a similar charter to establish its own national body for certifying excellence in teaching. As the Secretary of State for Education in the UK recognised, independence is essential for stability.

The first essential will be for the profession to build a coalition across the profession around the concept of an independent professional learning and certification system and to present that concept in a form that Governments and the public welcome and find irresistible.

To promote certification and thereby best practice, employing authorities must create a strong market for nationally certified highly accomplished teachers and teacher leaders. Significant salary increases (20-30%) above the top of current incremental for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher certification respectively will be needed.

Disadvantaged schools must be funded to levels that enable school leaders to compete effectively with more advantaged schools for nationally certified Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers. The aim should be to ensure that all schools have a similar proportion of nationally certified teachers in their staffing profile.

To promote excellent educational practice, the certification system should be 'mainstreamed'. Given research indicating that principals with a track record of successful teaching are more likely to be successful school leaders, certification at the Highly Accomplished and the Lead Teacher levels should become a necessary condition for promotion to school leader and principal career stages.

By gradually making certification at each level a condition for eligibility for the next including school leadership, the benefits of certification as an incentive for professional learning and collaboration, and thereby widespread adoption of successful (evidence-based) teaching practice would be maximised.

## Conclusion

More funding for schools is important, but it will not suffice unless school leaders can rely on policies that ensure a supply of well-qualified and effective teachers, motivated by career pathways that reward professional certification.

Policies are needed that recognise the mutual responsibility of governments and the profession in achieving educational excellence. There are conditions for which governments are mainly responsible, such as recruitment and ensuring teacher salaries are comparable to those for similarly educated professionals.

However, there are also essential enabling conditions that only a strong profession can provide, such as the capacity to describe high standards of practice and certify those who attain them.