Review to **Achieve Educational Excellence** in Australian Schools

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

Submitter: Queensland College of Teachers
Submitting as a: Government agency
State: Qld

Summary

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) is the regulatory authority for the teaching profession in Queensland. Key functions include the development, maintenance and application of professional standards, codes of practice and policies to underpin initial entry to, and continuing membership of, the profession.

The QCT submission highlights the need to focus on the continuous improvement and effectiveness of the current teacher workforce, as well as ensuring newly graduated teachers have the appropriate support they need for their career stage and teaching contexts. The QCT sees this focus being achieved by:

- reviewing and reducing federal government intervention in school education policy and teacher education

- allowing education policy to be driven by educators, not economists or commercial interests

- encouraging a bipartisan approach to support for education policy, to ensure it is not linked to political timeframes and personalities

- discouraging and countering the use of negative and deficit language about the quality of teachers and teaching in the public domain

- ensuring adequate funding is made available to schools to improve the skills and effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, with comprehensive professional development initiatives and other mechanisms, supported by evidence that these are genuinely effective in their impact on educational outcomes

- ensuring adequate funding is made available to initial teacher education providers to embed required accreditation changes and to measure the impact of their programs

- recognising the critical importance of principals and other highly experienced teaching staff for establishing and leading school cultures of research and evidence-informed practice
- recognising the important role school leadership plays in the kind of professional learning teachers undertake, affecting both professional and student outcomes.

Whatever the outcomes of the review, efforts will be needed to engage, enroll and empower teachers to make the plan work. Teacher ownership is necessary if any recommendations are to succeed.

Main submission

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) is the regulatory authority for the teaching profession in Queensland. Key functions include registration and renewal of registration, accreditation of initial teacher education programs and promotion of the profession. The QCT works in the best interests of the public and the profession to ensure approved teachers are qualified, competent and suitable to teach.

Teacher registration helps the public to have confidence that only appropriately qualified and suitable people are employed to teach in Queensland schools. This contributes to protecting educational standards and student safety, and upholds the reputation of the profession. All initial teacher education (ITE) programs delivered in Queensland are accredited by the QCT in accordance with the nationally agreed Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (2015), enabling graduates from these programs to be eligible for teacher registration.

Registration ensures that a high standard of preparation, conduct and practice is upheld in the profession, and highlights the unique professional qualifications, knowledge and skills required to teach. Teachers must apply to renew their registration every five years; their eligibility for renewal depends on factors including their engagement in continuing professional development and their professional conduct.

The QCT values quality teaching and child safety and works with the teaching profession and other key stakeholders to help ensure teachers in Queensland schools meet Australian professional standards.

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

Educational success means young Australians can confidently lead a meaningful life and face the personal and work-based challenges of the 21st century equipped with the necessary understandings, skills and values. The capabilities, skills and knowledge students should learn at school to prepare them for the future include creative problem solving, collaboration and character skills (such as resilience, agility,

compassion and respect) (Fadel, Bialik and Trilling, 2015). Other areas such as entrepreneurship, robotics and wellness are becoming increasingly important.

The Australian Productivity Commission's 2017 report Shifting the Dial: 5 Year Productivity Review identified that the school system needs to ensure all young Australians

…have the key foundational skills — numeracy, literacy, analytical skills — and the capacity to learn so that they can easily acquire knowledge throughout their lives. And 'soft' skills, such as teamwork, collaboration, leadership and creativity are equally essential to adaptability and retention of employment. (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2017, p. 88)

This important mix of skills features in the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills Project (McGaw, 2013). Skills cited as necessary to prepare students for future success include creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, metacognition, ICT literacy and citizenship. This requires an increased focus on the General Capabilities within the Australian Curriculum to ensure Australian students develop 21st century skills throughout their education.

Despite widespread agreement about the types of skills and knowledge needed to ensure educational success for Australian youth into the future, current processes and policies for measuring school quality and educational success are problematic.

Data provided by international tests such as TIMSS and PISA is extremely complex and multi-layered, and should not be used in simplistic ways to criticize and punish teachers, schools, students and parents. This type of assessment data can be useful in informing and evaluating school policy and practices, but it needs to be carefully 'unpacked' and interpreted in an informed way which takes numerous contextual factors into account. Such tests focus on only a fraction of what is essential for educational success, and 'quick fixes' by governments and those with commercial or research interests should not dominate school and student assessment discussions looking for short-term gain. The sentiments in the statement below should inform a rethink about educational measurement:

No one has yet mapped Australia's decline in student achievement against the increase in federal government intervention in what schools teach and how they operate. Yet, since Australia's PISA achievement peak in 2001, we have seen school education strapped to the federal operating table and worked on by the blunt instruments of standardized testing and reporting. (Spiller, 2017)

Professor Margaret Wu from Melbourne University also warns against the misuse of Australian students' NAPLAN test results and advocates for better public understanding and debate about the value of using national assessments, such as NAPLAN, to judge schools (Wu, 2012). She contends that data across 10 years or

more is needed to make an accurate judgement of a teacher's performance and that teacher and school performance, and the effectiveness of government funding, cannot be measured using student achievement results alone.

There needs to be a broadening of what is measured (and valued) to determine educational success and school quality to include 21st century skills or general capabilities. This requires a change in government behaviour to ensure a bipartisan approach is taken in such a critical area as education, and appropriate funding and support made available over timeframes that are not linked to election cycles and political personalities. We also need to build greater data literacy amongst school leaders, teachers and policy makers to help ensure that data collected is valid, reliable and meaningful and is correctly interpreted.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

As stated in the report Shifting the Dial: 5 Year Productivity Review, what is needed to improve educational outcomes includes a government focus on improving the skills and effectiveness of the existing teacher workforce, with comprehensive professional development initiatives and other mechanisms, supported by evidence that these are genuinely effective (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2017, Recommendation 3.1). This can be achieved by better recognising and developing highly effective teachers and school leaders and reducing the constant intervention by the federal government in education policy that creates change-fatigue among those who must implement the changes. Increased funding and longer timeframes for implementation are also critical aspects for genuinely measuring the success of education initiatives.

In recent years significant reforms have been undertaken to strengthen the quality of teaching in Australian schools. The introduction of nationally agreed professional standards for teachers in 2011 provided an important framework upon which initial teacher education programs are accredited and the registration and continuous professional learning of teachers are based. The seven Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) articulate the professional knowledge, practice and engagement required of teachers across four career stages, and reflect the continuum of a teacher's developing professional expertise (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011a). The existence of agreed national standards and an agreed national approach to teacher registration benefits Australian teachers by improving their ability to work across states, as well as ensuring that teacher registration and certification are part of the wider framework for career progression and professional learning underpinned by the APST (AITSL, 2011b).

At the foundational level, ITE is acknowledged as making a critical contribution to the teaching profession in the preparation of effective classroom teachers (European Commission, 2014-15). However, there have been over 100 reviews of ITE over the past four decades in Australia (Mayer, 2014). Most recently, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) (Craven et al, 2015) released the Action now: Classroom ready teachers report, followed by a federal government response. This report focused on the effectiveness of ITE programs to produce 'classroom ready' graduates. Thirty-eight recommendations were made for strengthening the ways higher education institutions, in partnership with schools and employing systems, approach the development of effective and well-prepared graduate teachers.

While of course we need to ensure teacher preparation is as effective as possible, this ongoing scrutiny is not the way to achieve this. The frequent changes made to the requirements imposed on the ITE sector create change-fatigue and excessive workload burden for providers, schools, teachers and regulators. Moreover, the constant reviews also do not allow for a mature outcomes-based reporting framework to be developed to accurately assess the quality of programs. Adequate funding to successfully implement and evaluate the TEMAG recommendations is lacking and the notion that a new teaching graduate can be fully 'classroom ready' must be questioned. Rather than expecting neophytes to take on full professional responsibility from day one, we should recognize that practitioners need a graduated entry to practice as happens in other professions (e.g. medicine, law, nursing).

The QCT engages with teachers across their whole career continuum, which enables us to have a unique perspective on the interconnectedness of the career phases of a teacher, to see the profession holistically, and to understand that the initial teacher education phase should not be viewed in isolation in the teacher quality and preparedness debate.

It is timely to expand the political focus for achieving educational excellence in Australian schools into the inservice areas of the profession where teachers progress through career stages into mentoring and school leadership positions. This is echoed in the recently released Productivity Commission report, where a comprehensive approach to workforce development is viewed as what matters in increasing the outcomes of all Australian students (2017, p. 82).

The recently released report Empowered Educators, an extensive study of teaching quality in the world's high-performing education systems, states that there is no mystery about what needs to be done when this

global body of evidence shows that to deliver the quality of education our children will need in tomorrow's world, we must forge a new commitment to the teaching profession focused on building effective systems to support educators and their work. (online blog - Darling-Hammond & Tucker, 2017).

Other recent international research into high-performing systems shows they share a common characteristic when it comes to recruiting, training, and deploying school leaders: they take a systematic approach. A 2017 study by the (USA) National Center on Education and the Economy analysed principal recruitment, training and development in Ontario, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. They found these school systems had similar approaches including:

- designing leadership development to reflect the system's vision for its schools, such as professional norms for teachers and how schools are held accountable for improvement

- training leaders to manage professional learning organizations, including identifying and mentoring teachers for leadership roles and shared responsibility

- creating programs that build school leaders' skills for a dynamic work environment, including resilience and strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills

- ensuring that professional development continues throughout a school leader's career.

(Jensen, Downing, & Clark 2017).

A national or system-wide focus and investment in identifying, managing and developing future leaders is clearly an effective approach. Principals and other highly experienced teaching staff are vital to the establishment and development of school cultures of research and evidence-informed practice. Ensuring access and funding for appropriate professional preparation for these leadership roles is critical in understanding what has most impact on improving student outcomes across all school contexts.

Similarly, a report from the New Teacher Center and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania identifies key leadership variables directly related to increased student outcomes. Although the importance and impact of school leadership is widely acknowledged by policy makers and practitioners, the profession lacks a comprehensive, research-based analysis to identify the specific elements of school and teacher leadership that can increase student achievement. This large-scale study analysed survey responses from nearly one million teachers and principals in over 25,000 public schools across 16 states in the USA between 2011 and 2015 and found students perform better in schools with the highest levels of instructional and school leadership (Ingersoll, Dougherty & Sirinides, 2017). Schools and teachers require skills to measure their impact on student outcomes.

If investing in better professional learning for school leaders and teachers is important to improving educational outcomes of students, then we must also focus on how effective current professional development choices are for developing highly effective teachers and school leaders.

The QCT undertakes quality assurance processes across career stages of teachers including monitoring the school-based process of moving to full registration for provisionally registered teachers, and conducting an annual audit of fully registered teachers to monitor the hours of continuing professional development and types of activities undertaken.

Data from the 2016 audit of CPD activities indicates most of the professional learning undertaken by Queensland teachers is directed by employers and schools. This indicates the importance of school leadership in determining the kind of professional learning undertaken and thus the outcomes for both teachers and students. It also suggests teachers' professional development is responsive to the challenges and needs of their unique school communities, and the larger contexts of systemic demands around curricular, technological and pedagogical change (Stevenson, Hedberg, O'Sullivan, & Howe, 2016).

Achieving positive outcomes for students and school communities depends on how well matched professional development is to the needs of teachers within their specific school context and their career stage. The changing educational landscape and demands for 21st century learning skills will shape current and future curricula and challenge educators, governments and policy makers to re-think the kinds of professional development required to meet the current and future needs of school leaders and their staff, and inform the content of ITE programs in the preparation of future teachers. It is timely to critically reflect on how best to support and facilitate appropriate and effective continuing professional development choices, as well as the ways professional learning is measured, evaluated and accounted for, and impacts on educational outcomes.

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

The Issues Paper reiterates the well accepted concept that teachers and school leaders have a significant impact on student learning, yet an area of concern that profoundly affects Australia's ability to achieve genuine educational excellence for all students is the way teachers and the teaching profession are represented in the media and other public domains. Education is increasingly positioned in policy debates as a problem in need of fixing. 'Faced with demands for accountability and transparency in public policymaking, governments are constantly looking for solutions that are informed by ''evidence'', are expedient and cost-effective, and likely to get favourable media coverage' (Lewis & Hogan, 2016).

Negative and deficit language used about the quality of teachers and teaching does not assist in developing a talented, engaged and committed workforce that will bring stability to workforce planning and staffing of Australian schools and better educational outcomes for Australian students.

Instead there needs to be a bipartisan focus on the continuous improvement and effectiveness of the current workforce, as well as ensuring newly graduated teachers have the appropriate support they need for their career stage and teaching contexts. Elevating the status of the teaching profession has never been more critical. Governments and policy makers need to choose carefully how they represent the profession in the public domain and to reduce the number and types of interventions imposed by those without educational expertise and experience.

The 2017 Productivity Commission Report sums this up well: 'The extent to which governments can develop and implement policies in line with the public interest depends on the effectiveness of how they participate in public debate. Governments can lead change, but the timing of change, the prioritising amongst the many opportunities, the effective handling of the transition and the distribution of benefits, are all important considerations not to be rushed' (Productivity Commission, p.35).

No country has built a strong teaching profession overnight. As the 'system designer and primary funder and supplier of formal education, governments have to change what they do' (Productivity Commission, 2017, p. 88). To improve the outcomes of school students, education reforms need to be evidence-based, allow appropriate time for implementation (rather than being linked to political cycles), and be supported by teachers and school leaders who are continually learning and reflecting on their practice and its impact on students.

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