

SCU Faculty of Education 'DRAFT NATIONAL TEACHER WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN' RESPONSE

PRIORITY AREA 1 ELEVATING THE PROFESSION

This action aims to recognise the value teachers bring to students, communities, and the economy.

Do you have feedback on the actions proposed for 'Elevating the profession'?

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Action 1:

Over the last 25 years, 'teacher-bashing' has become normalised in the Australian media (Mockler, 2022). This has, in turn, significantly impacted the status of teaching as a profession. While teaching-bashing must cease, an advertising campaign will do little to combat relentless negative media about the teaching profession. There have indeed been many 'teacher recruitment campaigns', including the Queensland's *Teach Queensland* campaign. There is no evidence that these campaigns have shifted perceptions of the teaching profession. This is because perceptions of the teaching profession run deep (Sahlberg, 2021; OECD, 2019), and 'profession elevation' is commensurate to the level of agency that the teacher has in their work.

We recommend developing an 'Education Ambassadors Program'; in essence, education champions across all teaching sectors and key stakeholders, including ITE providers, education unions, parents/guardian associations, and children and youth.

Action 2 & 3:

Teacher awards are important but identifying 'one teacher of the year' is grossly inadequate. There are 4,030,717 students across 9,581 Australian schools primary and secondary schools, with 303,539 full-time equivalent teaching staff (ABS, 2021). Rather than identifying only one teacher of the year, we recommend a State/Territory Education Minister Outstanding Teachers' Honour List where many outstanding teachers are recognised and therein be part of Education Ambassador-led strategies for championing education and teaching (supported by media). Similar programs exist in Universities, such as Southern Cross University's Faculty of Education Dean's Honours list, where all outstanding pre-service student teachers are recognised annually.

Action 4:

Increasing the number of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALT) in Australian schools is encouraged, but only if this includes further salary increases and HALTs are supported to remain on the front-line of teaching.

In short, elevating the teaching profession is critical, but the identified actions fall well short of what is required to elevate the profession.

PRIORITY AREA 2 IMPROVING TEACHER SUPPLY

This action aims to increase the number of students entering Initial Teacher Education (ITE), number of students completing the ITE and the number of teachers staying in and/or returning to the profession.

The actions proposed will be effective in increasing the number of students entering ITE, number of students completing ITE and the number of teachers staying in and/or returning to the profession.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Action 5 & 6:

There is no doubt that there is a critical teacher shortage in Australia, with a clear need for lifting teacher supply. However, slogans such as ‘best and brightest’ devalue the profession. What evidence is there that the best and brightest are not already attracted to the profession, or that the profession does not have the very best and brightest teachers? It is supported, however, that the selection of quality applicants is key to the provision of quality education in Australia. Finland as a nation values education, and this attitudinal shift was catalysed by their 1970s reform of making teacher education highly selective (OECD, 2015).

Action 7 & 8:

Teacher education providers play a critical role in improving supply. However, any High Achieving Teachers program or fast-track program, must not reduce teacher preparation quality. Importantly, there is evidence that the latter programs can be costly with poor teacher retention rates (25% more likely to leave the professional early) (Clark et al., 2017). These issues of retention must be addressed. For example, Southern Cross University has introduced the new Southern Cross model, which is a six-week unit structure (term). There are six terms six times per year. The shorter, more focused six-week unit structure gives students a greater sense of momentum and motivation as they achieve milestones quickly. To these ends, SCU’s ITE programs can be completed in shorter timeframes (at the student’s pace) without jeopardising quality. Thus, it is critical that any High Achieving Teachers program uphold the same quality standards expected of any teacher education program.

Action 9:

Action 10 is supported, provided qualifications and English language skills are at the requisite standard as determined by state/territory teacher accreditation and registration agencies. Teacher quality must not be compromised.

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In short, it is agreed that teacher supply must be improved. However, the actions as currently written require revision to ensure that they are research-informed and evidence-based and do not compromise on quality.

PRIORITY AREA 3 STRENGTHENING INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION (ITE)

This action aims to ensure initial teacher education supports teacher supply and quality.

The actions proposed will ensure initial teacher education supports teacher supply and quality.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Action 10:

Teacher education is heavily regulated, with accreditation and annual reporting mandated to ensure that pre-service student teachers are profession-ready. Contemporary research evidence (Mayer et al., 2017, 2020) does not support the claim that teacher education providers are inadequate in the delivery of "... effective classroom-ready teachers, with particular attention to teaching reading, literacy..." Rather, Mayer and Mills (2020, p.1) argue "that current policy fails to draw on the latest research on what constitutes high-quality professional education for teachers."

There may be a perceived conflict of interest in appointing an Australian Vice Chancellor (*with their own teacher education program*) as chair of the proposed teacher education expert panel determining the "the link between performance and funding of ITE."

Action 11:

The work experience and skills framework would be a welcomed framework for teacher education providers.

Action 12:

The attraction of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers is an important initiative. However, this must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educators and communities.

Action 13:

At Southern Cross University, LANTITE already appears in the first 1-2 years of ITE programs and prior to the second professional experience placement. Students are well supported in that time to enhance and advance their literacy and numeracy skills. Including LANTITE as part of the application process (even optional) would significantly disadvantage pre-service student teachers in enhancing their literacy and numeracy skills. Furthermore, now that LANTITE has been in operation for some time, what evidence is there that this high-priced test and exercise ultimately improves teacher quality? Student assessments across Literacy

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and Numeracy units in ITE programs already rigorously assess student competency in these domains.

In short, priority area three is not well defined, including misguided actions such as performance-based teacher education funding.

PRIORITY AREA 4 MAXIMISING THE TIME TO TEACH

This action aims to improve retention and free up teachers to focus on teaching and collaboration.

The actions proposed will improve retention and free up teachers to focus on teaching and collaboration.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Action 14 & 15:

Decreasing teacher workloads is critical in the Australian teaching profession. Teachers are now required to perform many duties that fall well outside their remit (Gavin et al. 2021). An example is teachers retaining relief staff when they are on leave, including sudden leave due to illness. This also includes teachers having to navigate complicated systems to be paid for pre-teacher supervision, where this could be managed by school administration through invoicing universities. These are just two simple examples (of thousands of possible examples) where teachers perform work previously performed by school leadership, administration, or relevant departmental offices (OECD, 2019).

Action 16:

Teachers' core business is curriculum planning. Prescribed curriculum is not best practice. Existing research reveals that such prescribed curriculum tends to diminish teacher creativity and autonomy (OECD, 2018), which is closely aligned with teacher performance and student success.

Action 18:

Action 18 is highly problematic. It is not the role of pre-service teachers to reduce the workload of teachers. Pre-service teachers are learning the art of teaching and are not fully equipped and authorised with the professional teaching responsibility. Instead, teachers will have more time to focus on teaching if administration is reallocated to leadership and administration teams. Thought should also be given to enlisting further para-educational professionals into schools as a recognition of the new demands on schools and the changing needs of children and young people.

In short, maximising time to teach is unequivocally agreed with. However, the actions presented do not address underlying intensification conditions as the primary drivers for troubling teacher workloads. Thus, priority four actions require significant revision to

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ensure that this important priority area is appropriately actioned, drawing on the considerable research-base on teachers' work.

PRIORITY AREA 5 BETTER UNDERSTANDING FUTURE TEACHER WORKFORCE NEEDS

This action aims to better understand future teacher workforce needs, including the number of teachers required.

How effective are the proposed actions in better understanding future teacher workforce needs, including the number of teachers required?

- Not at all effective
- Slightly ineffective
- Moderately effective
- Every effective
- Extremely effective

Action 19:

Developing “nationally consistent teacher workforce projections based on consistent standards, disaggregated at a regional level and by subject specialisation, to enable a national understanding of teacher demand” is welcomed.

Action 20:

Graduate data is already supplied annually across states and territories. Publishing this data and linking it to performance-based teacher education funding (for example) is more likely to work against any efforts to elevate the profession. In addition, it would be highly inappropriate to utilise this data to inform future university places.

Action 21:

Instituting greater consistency across teacher registration platforms is welcomed, though it is essential that ITE providers are part of these discussions and plans.

Action 22:

Conditional or provisional registration to increase the supply of teachers is a workable action. This strategy supports more staff on-site at schools; however, it is critical that conditionally registered pre-service teachers receive greater supervision and mentoring as they are not yet fully qualified teachers, and so require guidance on quality education and codes of conduct.

Action 23:

The research base and comprehensive data on teacher retention is well established (Boyd et al., 2011; Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Chapman et al., 1986; Geiger et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2021). How will this proposed action (23) build upon the existing substantive research evidence?

In short, priority five is an important priority area; however, further revision of the actions is necessitated, particularly ensuring that data across universities is not published.

PRIORITY AREA 6 BETTER CAREER PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT AND RETAIN TEACHERS IN THE PROFESSION

This action aims to improve career pathways, including through streamlining the process for Highly Accomplished and lead Teacher (HALT) accreditation, and providing better professional support for teachers to retain them in the profession.

The proposed actions will improve career pathways, including through streamlining the process for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) accreditation, and providing better professional support for teachers to retain them in the profession.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Action 24 & 25:

Broadly, priority area six and associated actions are well articulated. Supporting teachers' mental health (teacher-related stress) is a significant omission in priority six and must be addressed (Berry et al., 2021; Gray et al., 2017). Contrary, increasing ongoing teaching roles is welcomed.

Action 26:

The curation of high-quality First Nations' cultural competency resources to ensure teachers are better prepared to teach First Nations peoples in culturally safe ways must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and scholars representative across Australia.

Action 27:

Streaming HALT accreditation processes is welcomed. However, as discussed for Action 4, this must necessitate further salary increases and ensure that HALTs are supported to remain on the front-line of teaching. Importantly, such salary increases must be applied to all classroom teachers if the profession of teaching is to be genuinely elevated (OECD, 2021).

Action 28:

Developing micro-credentials is also welcomed where it may, for example, lead to a Graduate Certificate or Master of Education. It is important that such study (and professional learning) is supported and subsidised by employers.

In short, priority area six is well defined and articulated, although supporting teachers' mental health (including stress) is a significant omission.