![AHISA logo - Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia]

20 April 2023

Professor Mark Scott AO
Chair
Teacher Education Expert Panel
Australian Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

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Dear Professor Scott,

Response to Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Expert Panel's deliberations on initial teacher education (ITE).

Our response focuses on mentoring of pre-service and graduate teachers, an issue which is directly or indirectly referred to in three of the four reform areas covered by the Panel's discussion paper:

- Strengthen initial teacher education (ITE) programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates

- Improve the quality of practical experience in teaching

- Improve postgraduate ITE programs for mid-career entrants.

It is AHISA's view that the role of school-based teacher-mentors in supporting and contributing to the education of pre-service teachers, and in supporting teachers move from Graduate to Proficient status, is a vital component in achieving not only competent ITE graduates but a vibrant profession capable of ongoing self-renewal. It comes as no surprise that there are 39 instances in the Expert Panel's discussion paper where the terms 'mentor' or 'mentoring' are used, both in the general text and case studies, and on the following pages we present the case for a national policy response to the training of teacher-mentors.

AHISA welcomes any inquiries the Expert Panel may have about this submission. These may be directed to me at telephone (02) 6247 7300, or via email at ceo@ahisa.edu.au.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Chris Duncan

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About AHISA

AHISA Ltd is a professional association for Heads of independent schools.

The primary object of AHISA is to optimise the opportunity for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

AHISA's 460 members lead schools that collectively account for over 450,000 students, representing 70 per cent of Australia's independent sector enrolments and over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments. AHISA members' schools also educate a significant proportion of senior secondary students: 20 per cent of Australia's Year 12 students attend AHISA members' schools.

AHISA's members lead a collective workforce of over 44,000 teaching staff and almost 30,000 support staff.

The socio-economic profile of AHISA members' schools is diverse. Over 20 per cent of members lead schools serving low- to very low-SES communities. The geographic spread of members' schools is also diverse, with schools located in major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas. School size varies from less than 200 students to over 3,000 students, with most members' schools falling within the range 600 to 1400 students.

AHISA believes that a high-quality schooling system in Australia depends on:

- Parents having the freedom to exercise their rights and responsibilities regarding the education of their children

- Students and their families having the freedom to choose among diverse schooling options

- Schools having the autonomy to exercise educational leadership as they respond to the emerging needs of their communities in a rapidly changing society.

Strengthening Australia's teaching profession through a national teacher mentoring scheme

In its discussion of Reform Area 3, Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching, the Expert Panel presents key findings of dandolopartners' literature review and stakeholder consultations, including:

> Skilled teacher mentors are crucial to ensuring high-quality experiences for ITE students. A capable mentor is an experienced teacher, trained in supervision and willing to invest time and thought into the role. Mentor teachers are able to self-critique their professional practice and to assist ITE students to self-reflect. Mentor teachers should understand the Graduate Teacher Standards and effectively judge ITE students' performance against these. (Sub-section 3.2.5, page 52)

A further finding, however, is that 'There is high variation in support and guidance for mentor teachers. Some jurisdictions provide little or no guidance. Other jurisdictional approaches range from high-level policies outlining broad roles and responsibilities to more detailed frameworks to support mentoring activities.' (Sub-section 3.3.2, page 54)

Dandolopartners also found limited teacher mentor capacity and capability (Sub-section 3.3.4):

> Stakeholder consultation suggested that many teachers do not feel they have the time to mentor ITE students beyond their existing teaching demands. Current processes for selecting mentors are typically ad-hoc and unstructured. Poorly planned selection can lead to high variation in a school's mentor cohort in terms of experience, capability and investment in the role. Mentors may also be unaware of – or lack access to – professional development opportunities that would improve their capability. For example, an evaluation of AITSL's Supervising Preservice Teachers program demonstrated that while the program was effective, many teachers were unaware of its benefits. Furthermore, stakeholder consultation suggested that teacher workforce shortages compound the scarcity of teacher mentors. (Page 55)

Worth noting in the light of these findings are mentions of professional development and/or resourcing of teacher mentors who engage with ITE students during their school placements in the discussion paper case studies, including:

- The description of the NT Department of Education and Training and Charles Darwin University Teaching School program (page 50) notes that the program facilitates 'resources for mentors including guides for planning and assessment of placements and templates for observation/reflection' and 'ongoing professional learning and development for mentor teachers and Professional Learning Leaders in schools'.

- The NSW Hub School Program case study notes that the program includes an initiative which provides professional learning in mentoring skills for mentor teachers in schools (page 51).

The dandolopartners findings reflect findings from a series of interviews conducted with AHISA members in 2015, which informed a paper on mentoring prepared for the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) as part of a project involving national principals' associations and related to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) Review. Based on the outcomes of that project, AHISA began advocating the value of a national teacher-

mentor training scheme. Key points we have presented since 2015, in submissions or direct to Ministers of Education, include:

- In interviews conducted in preparation for the TEMAG project paper, AHISA members reported that mentoring and/or observation and feedback are considered successful models for professional development of teachers at all stages in their careers.

- Among AHISA's members' schools there is increasing adoption of peer-to-peer models of teacher professional learning such as learning circles, action research projects and peer observation models, including pedagogical rounds and learning walks. Peer-to-peer models promote collaborative professional learning, which can accelerate the adoption of and help embed new and/or improved practices far more readily than attendance at external professional development courses. Trained teacher-mentors are seen as enriching this process.

- A system of trained teacher-mentors in schools has the potential to support alternative pathways into teaching, for example for career-change professionals, including practitioners in the visual and performing arts or from VET-related industries, and for those in targeted areas of teacher shortage, including native speakers of languages other than English, or with a background in physics and chemistry or higher-level mathematics. (The Expert Panel's discussion paper notes that 'Providing additional coaching and mentoring support is also a key characteristic to attract – and as importantly, to retain – mid-career cohorts into ITE and teaching'. Sub-section 4.3.6, page 62.)

- Mentors need to be outstanding adult educators, not just outstanding child and adolescent educators.

- The introduction of Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) arrangements for ITE students suggests a further benefit of teacher-mentors: to assist ITE students on practicum placements develop and demonstrate the attributes and skills to be assessed.

In short, school-based mentors are seen as the most appropriate model for maximising the effectiveness of school-based practical experience for a range of programs (including clinical teacher education programs and internships) and for particular stages of ITE students' development, as well as to support the ongoing professional learning of graduates and experienced teachers.

Given the potential impact of a teacher-mentor system on Australia's teacher workforce, including retention of teachers in the profession, AHISA advocates that a national approach by governments to formalise and at least partially fund the training and support of mentors is warranted.

First steps toward a national approach to the training of teacher-mentors

As initial steps toward a national approach to the training and certification of teacher-mentors, AHISA suggests:

1. A review of teacher-mentor training and certification already offered in Australia, and their supporting standards or frameworks and tools/resources. For example, the Victorian Department of Education and Training's Effective Mentoring Programs encompasses a two-day mentoring course as well as online modules and is supported by a Mentoring Capability Framework[1]; Queensland University of Technology offers an

online certificate course, *Mentoring Beginning Teachers*, rated for 13 hours of certified professional development.[2]

2. A review of international teacher-mentor training and certification programs and/or related standards, tools or resources and any evidence of their impact, such as Washington State Standards for Mentoring and related resources for mentors[3] and the non-statutory national standards for school-based initial teacher training mentors developed by The Teaching Schools Council in the United Kingdom.[4] (It is worth noting that the Teacher Registration Board of South Australia commissioned such a review in 2016-17.[5])

3. Development of draft standards for Australian teacher-mentors for consultation among ITE providers and the profession. AITSL is well-placed to undertake such a task, having already produced *Graduate to Proficient: Australian guidelines for teacher induction into the profession*[6] to inform jurisdictions' frameworks and guides for the induction of initial teacher education (ITE) graduates in schools. The guidelines also establish the contribution of mentoring to graduate professional development.

4. Identification of resources or tools for teacher-mentors that could be developed nationally and existing resources or tools that could be linked via a dedicated page on AITSL's website, such as AITSL's mentoring guide[7] and its range of tools and resources designed for use between peers and mentors to improve teaching practice.[8]

5. To promote both 'diffusion' and development of teacher-mentor expertise, AISTL could also host an online professional support group for teacher-mentors.

Given the potential importance of teacher-mentors to Australia's teacher workforce, AHISA further suggests consideration be given to the national accreditation of teacher-mentor training courses to:

- Ensure their compatibility with the accreditation of ITE courses

- Give assurance of quality to those undertaking the courses as well as to mentors' future mentees

- Assist in the recognition of teacher-mentor training courses as professional development counting towards teachers' re-registration requirements.

Consistency in mentoring approaches would also support consistency in Teacher Performance Assessments.

Costs and benefits of a national approach to the training of teacher-mentors

The Expert Panel notes in its discussion paper that 'Practical experience can be a relatively expensive component of an ITE program', referring to the costs to higher education providers. The costs to schools are also considerable, often entailing time release for teachers. Teachers themselves must also absorb the additional time spent on supervision and/or mentoring roles. The Expert Panel suggests, however, that the cost of the opportunities it identifies 'could also improve the efficiency of placements' (page 57).

In similar vein, AHISA recommends that introduction of a national teacher-mentor scheme, although entailing additional government expenditure, would enhance the return to the nation from existing federal investment. That investment in educators is already significant. The Australian Government subsidises the cost of initial teacher education courses and supports

teachers' employment through its general recurrent grants to state and territory governments and non-government schools which typically help defray the cost of teacher salaries. The Australian Government also supports the teaching workforce through the National Education Architecture organisations, which all produce a range of resources and professional development tools for teachers.

The value to schools of having trained teacher-mentors on staff to support the ongoing professional development of teachers suggests that schools might be expected to share some of the direct costs required to support a teacher-mentor scheme from their budget resources, either in teacher release time as already occurs, or through a dedicated appointment of time for mentoring. Teachers might also be interested in personally contributing to the cost of a certified mentor training course as part of their required professional learning, or to improve self-reflective practice.

Mentoring may also be attractive to schools and teachers as a means to achieve certification to recognise an active contribution to the profession without the time investment of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) certification. Given that not all jurisdictions make HALT certification available as yet, it is unlikely – at least in the near future – that the number of certified HALTs would be sufficient to address the demand for mentoring among ITE students and graduates, and also contribute to the professional development of experienced teachers. Further, if teacher-mentor certification need not signify advancement to a new pay scale, this would serve as an encouragement to employers to bear the still considerable cost of any time-release for training of the teacher-mentor and then time-release for mentoring of ITE students on practicum placement, of graduates who might be employed by a school or of peers. Teacher-mentor certification could, however, be recognised as a pre-requisite for and therefore an encouragement to undertaking HALT accreditation.

A national teacher-mentor scheme could help quickly increase the number of teacher-mentors and therefore their impact on teaching quality. To initiate a national scheme with the breadth and depth to have immediate and long-term impact on retention of ITE students and graduates and their professional learning, government funding support is required. As noted above, at least some jurisdictions are already investing in the teacher-mentor programs and resources. The Australian Government also has a leadership role to play. It might consider, for example, introduction of matching grant schemes:

- In a recent article canvassing options to break the ongoing cycle of teacher shortages experienced in the United States[9], influential education academic Linda Darling-Hammond, President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute and Emeritus Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, proposes provision of high-quality mentoring for all beginning teachers to 'sharply reduce attrition and increase competence'. According to Darling-Hammond, 'A federal matching grant to states and districts that create high-quality mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers – who most often teach in high-need schools – would reduce churn, heighten teaching quality, and heighten student achievement'. The Australian Government could make available to state and territory governments a grants pool to pay schools in all sectors which make application for a set amount to support time release of certified teacher-mentors. Such grants might be limited to mentoring of pre-service teachers, interns and ITE graduates in their first two years of teaching.

- Given that Australia is also experiencing a critical teacher shortage, with indicators of attrition from the profession of teachers at all stages in their career, Australian governments might consider a limited-life project to offer experienced teachers considering leaving the profession the opportunity to first train and then work as teacher-mentors on a time-limited contract. As well as facilitating the sharing of expertise, such a project might also have the added benefit of persuading experienced teachers to remain within the profession at the end of their mentoring contract.

The Australian Government, in agreement with the states and territories, could also consider making a national teacher-mentor scheme a priority action for the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA). Federal Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare has made it clear that the Australian Government wants to make sure that the significant amount of federal funding linked to the NSRA 'is tied to the things that will really make a difference to children who are falling behind'.[10] A national teacher-mentor scheme has the potential to make a difference to all Australian school students and their teachers. ■

Notes

[1] The Victorian Department of Education and Training's *Mentoring Capability Framework* is posted at https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/profdev/mentoringcapabilityframework.pdf. Its *Principal and school leader guide to induction of graduate teachers* is posted at https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/profdev/Principalandschoolleaderguidetoinductionofgraduateteachers.pdf.

[2] Accessed at https://www.qut.edu.au/study/professional-and-executive-education/courses/mentoring-beginning-teachers.

[3] Accessed at https://www.k12.wa.us/educator-support/beginning-educator-support-team/washington-state-standards-mentoring.

[4] Accessed at http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/collegeofsocialsciencesandinternationalstudies/education/partnership/primary/Mentor_standards.pdf.

[5] The report of the review is available at https://www.trb.sa.edu.au/sites/default/files/PdfDocuments/TRB-Induction-and-Mentoring-Report-June-2018.pdf.

[6] Accessed at https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/graduate-to-proficient-australian-guidelines-for-teacher-induction-into-the-profession.

[7] Accessed at https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/practical-guides/mentoring.

[8] Accessed at https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others.

[9] Posted at https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/breaking-the-legacy-of-teacher-shortages.

[10] See for example the Minister's comments to the media at a press conference on 20 January 2023, posted at https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/press-conference-villawood-east-public-school.