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## National Initiatives to Support Teaching and School Leadership

### Objective

This document aims to guide Education Ministers in commissioning work at a national level to support quality teaching and school leadership, and the teacher workforce.

### Context

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) commits all governments to improving educational outcomes for young Australians. Its shared vision is for Australia to have a world class education system that supports every student. These commitments are at the core of Ministers' collaborative work, including national initiatives to support teaching and school leadership.

Quality teaching and school leadership make the biggest in-school difference in educational outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Governments are committed to continuing to work together to support a skilled workforce.

The Declaration recognises that *“teachers, educators and leaders are vital to achieving these education goals [...and] have the ability to transform the lives of young people and inspire and nurture their personal and academic development. They provide significant encouragement, advice and support for learners outside the home, shaping teaching to nurture the unique abilities of every child.”*

Ministers have undertaken to achieve the vision of the Declaration by *“working with the education community to attract, develop, support and retain high-quality teachers, educators and leaders in Australia’s education system.”*

The National School Reform Agreement outlines national policy initiatives across three reform directions where national collaboration will have the greatest impact on driving improved student outcomes. Under the agreement, governments committed to action to support teaching, school leadership and school improvement through the development of a national teacher workforce strategy and strengthening the initial teacher education accreditation system.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap contains five education-related targets. Increasing the quality of teaching in schools, as well as incorporating greater cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity training will be critical to achieving these targets.

### The case for national collaboration

Australia has, and continues to build, a strong teaching workforce. Teachers feel they are part of ‘one profession’.<sup>2</sup> A majority of initial teacher education students feel well-prepared, teachers are satisfied with their jobs, and the Australian public has a high level of respect for teachers.<sup>3</sup> The response to COVID-19 has highlighted the professionalism, skill and dedicated hard work of teachers and school staff. Teachers and schools have demonstrated flexibility, collaboration and goodwill to meet the needs of learners in unfamiliar and challenging circumstances.

Levers for reform do not exist only within one level of government. Efficiencies can be achieved with collective action and as such some workforce issues benefit from national collaboration. Continuing to work

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<sup>1</sup> School quality in Australia: Exploring the drivers of student outcomes and the links to practice and schooling quality, Deloitte (2019); Teachers Make a Difference, What is the research evidence? John Hattie (2003); Estimating teacher effectiveness from two-year changes in students' test scores, Andrew Leigh (2009).

<sup>2</sup> One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia (2018)

<sup>3</sup> Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, Graduate Outcomes Survey; OECD 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey; Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching in Australia, Monash University (2019)

collaboratively where there is benefit from national approaches will help the education system to respond to students' learning needs, cater for an increasingly diverse population, embrace new approaches and technologies, and build on the existing strengths of the workforce.

Supporting the development of a skilled, flexible and sustainable teacher workforce requires the efforts of all education partners, including all Australian governments, state and territory regulatory authorities, schools and school systems, initial teacher education providers and professional associations. Given the span of the teacher lifecycle, which includes teacher preparation and can extend through to leadership positions, this support requires sustained effort with a long-term focus. The effect and impact of initiatives implemented today may not be fully felt for several years.

Education Ministers have a strong record of cooperation on issues to support the teaching profession. This has included the introduction of professional standards for teachers, a national standard for school principals, accreditation standards for initial teacher education, a consistent framework for teacher registration, the recognition of Highly Accomplished and Lead (HALT) teachers, development of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) collection and establishment of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). These achievements demonstrate the value of national cooperation.

School leaders are an important part of the national teacher workforce landscape. Jurisdictions have acted to provide specific supports to school leaders. This is an area where there may be scope for more national collaboration in the future.

### **Principles for national collaboration**

It is recognised that different jurisdictions, schools, school systems and sectors have different priorities, and that for national initiatives to succeed requires a consensus approach. National collaboration must complement, not duplicate or contradict, local approaches. The following principles for national collaboration will guide future decisions on supporting quality teaching and the teacher workforce. National collaboration will be prioritised where one or more of the following applies:

- responsibility and levers are **shared** between jurisdictions and the Australian Government
- **efficiency** is gained from a national approach through reduced duplication of effort
- **consistency** in approaches enhances quality and/or equity of outcomes
- **sharing** of information will assist responses to key opportunities and challenges.

Decisions on pursuing national collaboration that meets these principles should also be based on meaningful, authentic engagement with teachers and the broader schooling sector, having a robust and evidence-based rationale and whether a proposed action is a sustainable use of resources, and with consideration to the impact on teacher workload.

In progressing workforce initiatives in the schooling sector there is also a need to consider impacts on the early childhood workforce and vocational education and training (especially VET in schools) workforce.

A national approach based on these principles does not necessarily mean a homogenous approach and jurisdictions continue to have the opportunity to drive innovation. National collaboration can be undertaken through:

- **Setting national standards:** Setting minimum expectations will ensure national quality and consistency, while allowing for local application.
- **Information-sharing:** Sharing information, evidence and resources to pool expertise so shared opportunities and challenges can be addressed meaningfully and without duplication of effort.
- **Coordination:** Working together to align or enhance agreed initiatives. This may include multilateral or bilateral action, and partnerships with key stakeholders to achieve mutual gains.
- **Collective action:** A collective approach through Education Ministers may be warranted to implement system-level changes that promote national consistency, enhance efficiency and reduce duplication of work.

Where Education Ministers do not agree there is sufficient case for collective national action on any particular issue, collaborative action may still proceed with interested parties outside the collective arrangements, through bilateral or multilateral initiatives.

## **A framework for national collaboration**

The framework for national collaboration consists of seven pillars which Education Ministers agree are the areas which warrant national focus and where there will be the most benefit in acting nationally. National collaboration should be focused on the areas covered by the seven pillars if ministers are confident the national principles are met.

### **1. Understand**

Understanding the teaching workforce, at national, jurisdictional and local levels, requires robust and accessible data as well as useful data outputs. Variations in geography, population and school context mean that local workforce issues are not always experienced in the same way. Data on the teacher workforce is collected by states and territories and employers through their own administrative systems and through teacher regulatory authorities. The Australian Government collects data on initial teacher education students due to its role in providing higher education funding.

There has been longstanding national collaborative action in building teacher workforce data and evidence. This has historically focused on providing a national snapshot of the workforce, through surveys such as the Staff in Australia's Schools survey, the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey and the Program for International Student Assessment teacher questionnaire.

Recent national efforts to establish the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) collection represent a major development in the collection of national teacher workforce data. The ATWD will build on existing data on initial teacher education and the teaching workforce to create a longitudinal view of the career pathways of all teachers and school leaders across Australia. This will provide a comprehensive picture of the teacher workforce and support a better understanding of supply trends at the local, regional and national level. Access to data on teachers and school leaders can be used to inform workforce planning and identify policy responses to respond to emerging workforce issues.

National action can further improve insights into the teaching workforce through continued investment in the ATWD. This includes using and reporting on the data to develop an improved understanding of the workforce to support quality teaching. This can be further supported through improved clarity, consistency and measures of workforce concepts, such as out-of-field teaching; wellbeing and resilience; and attrition.

### **2. Attract**

Understanding the factors and motivations that attract quality candidates to teaching is critical to promoting the profession at key entry points, including to senior secondary students and school leavers, higher education students and career changers. The status of the teaching profession, including professional recognition and acknowledging specialist skills and expertise, is a key driver of attraction. The promotion of teaching as both a long-term career and as part of a diverse and varied career can appeal to different types of entrants. Identifying high quality candidates and encouraging them to consider teaching as a career is a key to part of building a high quality workforce.

There is a need to attract a diverse teaching workforce with the capacity to adapt to Australia's social and geographic diversity. This includes increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, teachers skilled in dealing with complex and diverse needs, responding to an increasingly diverse population, and investigating ways to address reported teacher shortages in certain geographical areas or in fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). These are also critical elements of attraction into the profession.

Attracting quality entrants into the teaching profession requires action at both the national and jurisdiction levels as the levers to support quality initial teacher education are shared between both levels of government. The Australian Government provides higher education funding for initial teacher education students through Commonwealth Supported Places and has oversight of skilled migration, two key sources of supply for

teacher employers. States and territories, school systems and schools, as employers of teachers, can implement direct incentives to attract teachers where they are needed. As well as attracting new entrants to the profession, incentives for the return of qualified teachers who have left the workforce can be a key consideration in ensuring adequate supply.

Attracting quality teachers beyond the traditional initial teacher education pathway have been explored through alternative pathways into teaching. The Australian Government has funded programs to meet specific areas of need. Some jurisdictions have also introduced alternative pathways.

National action could support understanding and sharing of information about motivations for choosing teaching as a career, and pursuing leadership roles. Insights from the ATWD will enhance understanding of the initial teacher education pipeline into the teacher workforce and support further consideration of the profile of candidates attracted to the profession and the factors influencing their career choice. Ongoing conversations between employers and initial teacher education providers are a mechanism that can be used to attract teachers in specific areas of need.

There is also scope for increased national collaboration to evaluate and establish a clearer, evidence-based role for alternative pathways into teaching, as part of national efforts to recruit and train a quality teaching workforce.

### **3. Prepare**

Preparing future teachers for success in the classroom is a critical part of supporting the teacher workforce. Quality initial teacher education ensures graduates enter the workforce with the skills and capabilities to become effective teachers.

States and territories influence quality through their regulatory responsibility for course accreditation, as direct employers of graduate teachers, introducing jurisdiction-level reforms and through developing effective provider-employer partnerships to influence the supply of graduates to meet local needs. National collaboration has facilitated consistency and improvements to the quality of initial teacher education but relies on support and delivery at jurisdictional, school and school system levels.

Collaborative national action to lift the quality and consistency of initial teacher education has been a priority since 2011 when the first national accreditation standards were agreed. The 2014 Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) reforms included the introduction of non-academic selection criteria for prospective initial teacher education students, a final year Teaching Performance Assessment to ensure classroom readiness and the introduction of a literacy and numeracy test for initial teacher education students to ensure that graduating teachers have the literacy and numeracy skills we expect of our teaching workforce.

National action can further support the quality of initial teacher education by finalising implementation of the agreed TEMAG reforms and National Policy Initiative B(ii) under the National School Reform Agreement, acknowledging that levers for action are shared between jurisdictions and the Australian Government. Improving the quality of initial teacher education can also be pursued through enhanced partnerships with initial teacher education providers and schools to support employer needs and build the evidence base to better understand quality.

Strengthening the profession's capacity to meaningfully participate in teacher preparation can ensure all new teachers are developed and supported to be effective beginning teachers, through quality professional experience as pre-service teachers and once they enter the classroom. A key focus of teacher preparation should be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency.

### **4. Develop**

Further developing a skilled, capable and sustainable teacher workforce includes the specific actions each teacher takes to refine their practice and hone their skills to meet the diverse needs of all students. This begins with promoting a culture of continuous learning, with teachers able to prioritise their growth and development. In practice this means supporting professional experience for pre-service teachers, teachers having access to high quality professional learning and ongoing opportunities for mentoring and collaboration.

Responsibility for setting priorities for teacher professional learning sits with state and territory education authorities, schools and school systems and their teaching staff. Higher education providers have an important role in developing professional learning. School leaders play a key role in building a professional learning community within their school that is focused on the continuous improvement of teaching practice. School leaders also require professional development to deepen skills and support their aspirations to higher leadership positions. To be effective in bringing about a learning culture in schools, professional learning needs to be aligned and firmly embedded in school strategic planning. Teachers should be supported to prioritise their own growth and development. All governments have collaborated to facilitate national consistency through the development of national standards.

Career growth and development is supported by the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards) and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (Principal Standard), endorsed by all Education Ministers in 2011. The Teacher Standards are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality and define what teachers should know and be able to do at different stages across their careers. The Teacher Standards enhance consistency in how teachers progress throughout their career. Some states have moved to align the Teacher Standards to career progression.

High quality professional learning linked to the Standards is a critical element of supporting teacher practice. The *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*, endorsed by jurisdictions in 2012, affirms the importance of professional learning in improving the professional knowledge, practice and engagement of teachers. National certification at the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) levels of the Teacher Standards, implemented by states and territories, presents additional development opportunities for highly skilled teachers to collaborate and reflect and improve their practice in the classroom. Opportunities for teachers to develop their subject or specialty expertise should also be prioritised.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has developed high quality tools and resources to guide professional learning and provide targeted support while reducing the need for duplication of effort. These resources include *Illustrations of Practice* and the *Teacher Self-Assessment Tool*.

National action can further support the development of teachers and school leaders by ensuring the Standards continue to be robust, relevant and evidence based.

## **5. Support**

Support includes the school system or school level assistance that helps teachers to teach effectively. School leaders play a key role in nurturing a skilled teacher workforce. Through enabling a continuous culture of development and support in their schools, school leaders create an environment that prioritises support for teachers to continue learning and enhancing their teaching practice.

Supporting teachers to continue to learn and hone their practice facilitates positive student outcomes, enabling teachers and school leaders to focus their time and expertise on activities that have the greatest impact on student wellbeing, engagement, growth and achievement. This should include enhancing opportunities for teachers to use their professional judgement to identify their own professional learning needs and choose their professional learning focus.

Jurisdictions, schools, school systems and sectors are primarily responsible for providing support to teachers and school leaders. The Australian Government can facilitate national collaboration and support the development of shared resources.

The Online Formative Assessment Initiative aims to enhance teachers' practice by giving them the tools, flexibility and professional learning they need to plan teaching that will work best for the students in their classroom. In addition, the establishment of the Australian Education Research Organisation, will position educators at the forefront of research to improve learning outcomes, presenting an opportunity to harness expertise and best practice and make this readily available to all teachers.

In addition, Australia needs a teacher workforce with the mindset, skills and resources to create culturally safe environments that support improved learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and

promote reconciliation. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* underlined the importance of taking action to ensure students are taught by skilled and educators who are culturally competent in the local context. AITSL continues to develop resources, through consultation with the sector and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, available to all jurisdictions to build or enhance the cultural competency of teachers and increase cultural safety. This complements jurisdictional initiatives already in place.

National action can continue to support current initiatives being implemented to support teachers and school leaders to refine and improve their practice and focus their time and expertise on quality teaching and leadership. National resources should be designed to support and complement the needs and resources of jurisdictions and employers.

## **6. Retain**

Understanding and addressing the issues that drive temporary and permanent teacher attrition is essential to retain both teachers in a range of distinct, and often challenging, local contexts. These can include regional, rural and remote areas, specific subject specialisations and career stages. Retention is also connected to attracting teachers with diverse backgrounds and experiences to the profession in the first instance.

States and territories, along with schools and school systems, are responsible for their own workforces in line with their broader responsibilities for the delivery of school education. This includes determining pay and conditions, facilitating career progression and professional development, supporting teacher wellbeing, and directly incentivising retention through a variety of means. All jurisdictions, including the Australian Government, have worked together to facilitate large-scale data collection and information sharing that will assist jurisdictions to develop and implement policies informed by robust and comprehensive data and evidence.

Collaboration to date has focused on the development and implementation of the ATWD as a foundation for better understanding teacher attrition, to understand the extent to which teachers permanently or temporarily leave the profession.

National collaboration has also focused on improving mobility to ensure teachers who wish to move across jurisdictions can do so and stay in the profession. The 2011 National Framework for Teacher Registration included elements to promote mutual recognition of registration to minimise administrative burden and reduce barriers to the movement of teachers between jurisdictions, while ensuring teachers meet local registration requirements. The 2018 National Review of Teacher Registration recommended that these processes continue to be improved to achieve timely, accurate and rigorous outcomes when teachers move between jurisdictions.

National action can further support targeted retention by sharing information on effective workforce initiatives to retain quality teachers, including specific cohorts such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, teachers in regional, rural and remote areas, subject specialists, diverse learner specialists and early career teachers. This could also include sharing information and best practice to address issues affecting retention, such as teacher and school leader wellbeing and ensuring cultural wellbeing. Understanding who is attracted to teaching, as a long-term career or as part of a diverse and varied career, will also help to understand how to best accommodate diverse needs and different career pathways to support retention. A continued focus on improving mutual recognition processes to improve mobility across jurisdictions, is also a key consideration in future efforts to address retention.

## **7. Recognise**

Recognition of teachers must be authentic, meaningful, and acknowledge teachers' central role in developing the next generation of Australians. Teaching is an essential and highly skilled profession. Teachers, and the contributions they make to the lives of students, communities, the sector and society, are respected and valued, which has been reinforced by the impact of COVID-19. However, while the broader community

considers teachers are respected and trusted, this does not resonate with teachers who are significantly less likely to agree that the Australian public appreciates teachers.<sup>4</sup>

All those with an interest in the teaching profession, including all levels of government, have a role in promoting the value of the profession. There should be a culture of recognising and celebrating teachers and school leaders for the important work they do. Strong policies to attract, prepare, develop, support and retain quality teachers can increase recognition. Equally, valuing teaching can have a positive impact on attracting new entrants and retaining those already in the workforce.

The Teacher Standards and Principal Standard recognise the professionalism of teachers including the specialist skills and competencies held by teachers. This is reinforced by the role of teacher registration, and initiatives such as HALT certification which recognises the value of teachers' professional capabilities, expertise and experience.

National action can further support the recognition of teaching through working together to frame the profession in a positive way that highlights teachers' skills and their impact on students. Data and evidence can be used to 'bust' many of the myths surrounding teaching, including showcasing the skills and commitment teachers possess. Sharing what is working and celebrating successes will also contribute to increased recognition of the complexity of the role and the professionalism of the workforce. Continued implementation of the *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia* recommendations will also give the community confidence the learning of children and young people is guided by high quality professionals.

### **Need for appropriate governance arrangements to support national collaboration**

The Declaration commits governments to working with the education community to attract, develop, support and retain quality teachers and school leaders. This encompasses a broad range of stakeholders from teachers, employers and higher education providers to organisations supporting the workforce such as professional associations and teacher unions.

National governance arrangements should facilitate this collaboration, and support meaningful engagement with the profession, including through the national architecture. Consideration should be given to whether arrangements established to support national collaboration are streamlined, effective and inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, ensuring engagement and consultation with the education community informs Ministers' decisions about future action.

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<sup>4</sup> Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching in Australia, Monash University (2019)