

Response from the Australian Primary Principals Association, National Advisory Council (NAC), to the

Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) represents 7,600 principals and school leaders, 200,000 teachers and 2.2 million students across Australia. The National Advisory Council (NAC) of the Australian Primary Principals Association met on 16 November, 2022 to discuss the *Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan*.

The problem being addressed is the shortage of teachers. The solution is to attract more people to the profession and retain teachers in the profession for longer. Minister Clare asked the Association to comment on:

- The parts of the plan we agree with;
- What needs to be added to the plan; and
- What should be removed.

Overview

APPA NAC members felt that the proposed actions need to be placed in a broader framework which acknowledges the **superordinate factors** that make a workplace desirable and which reflects the work realities of teachers and principals. While the plan contains a number of important actions it was felt these were mostly **subordinate** to these larger questions. APPA recognises the need to establish a long-term strategic plan and recognises that a number of the proposed actions will take some years to implement. Nonetheless, APPA also calls for the implementation of some actions which are able to have immediate effect. For example: employing student teachers (in a limited capacity) as they near the completion of their degrees or; simplifying national teacher registration processes to enable people to quickly start teaching in a new jurisdiction or; forgiving HECS fees for graduates to commence in harder to staff schools.

Beyond this, APPA wants some of the fundamental reasons teaching is becoming harder, to be addressed. We want to see fun and joy return to classrooms and we feel this is being compromised by an increasingly measurement focussed bureaucracy. The question of what makes people engage with their work must be addressed as part of the plan. According to psychologists working in this area, the factors which make people deeply engage with work include: when they feel they are contributing to something bigger than them - a shared sense of purpose, something meaningful; when they feel their skills are being utilised to a high degree and; when they engage positively with other people. When people see how their efforts have a genuine impact on the lives of others, even mundane work becomes more rewarding. All of these things can be part of teaching in droves, but there are a number of factors which **reduce the purposefulness of teaching** and increase the **purposelessness**. And it is these deeper, underlying factors which must be addressed as part of establishing teaching as an attractive profession and a profession which retains its teaching workforce members.

Compounding the issue of workforce shortages is demographics. Baby boomers leaving the workforce is resulting in workforce shortages in all areas. The education workforce is competing for workers across the board. It is now an employee's market and **attractive conditions and remuneration** need to be part of the discussion - and are noticeably absent.

This response from APPA **firstly** addresses the superordinate factors which can and should be addressed as part of a recruitment strategy and **secondly** looks at the specific proposals from the working party.

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Section 1: What should be added to the plan? The superordinate issues facing the profession which must be addressed as part of an action plan.

APPA has for some time been calling for a recognition of the issues facing teachers and school leaders in the workplace. A recruitment and retention strategy which fails to recognise these fundamental issues is an insufficient strategy.

APPA contends that there are a number of factors contributing to the intensification of teachers' and principals' work and we have been consistently highlighting these in a number of submissions. APPA contends that this intensification of work demands is one of the key reasons we are attracting less teachers to the profession and why many are leaving the profession early.

APPA contends that these are the issues which must be recognised as overarching issues in any design of a national teacher workforce action plan.

The seven key overarching issues which we consider must be addressed in this action plan include:

1. Insufficient Involvement of school practitioners in policy development

A key component of teacher retention is making the workload manageable. This means structuring a school/bureaucracy interface which has input from school-based practitioners. Schools need input into policy decisions that impact them. While it is recognised that Governments set policy agendas, those policy agendas must be enriched by a school perspective. Working with schools to assess the practicality of policy propositions is more likely to lessen the intensification of work demands on principals and school staff and make schools happier workplaces.

Policy makers must consider any policy proposition from the perspective of schools - and that perspective is of the school as a whole, not the multiple competing demands of numerous silos. When the bureaucracy is organised in silos, each of which transmits their edicts to schools without the crucial test of practicality, this adds to intensification of work for school practitioners. And too many edicts, from too many silos, results in an intensification of the work of principals and teachers to the point of ridiculousness. Sadly, this is the position in which we increasingly find ourselves.

2. Resourcing

Primary School matters. In particular, teaching the foundational knowledge and skills of literacy and numeracy together with personal capabilities. These skills matter because they predict future performance in successive school years. Prior performance in primary school, predicts future outcomes more so than student background or parental education or occupation. Primary school outcomes matter because they predict future income and wages and participation in the labour force. They also predict whether a young person will be incarcerated or



not. Poor primary school outcomes have a lifelong impact on the health and well-being of Australians. The costs of poor educational outcomes to the Australian economy and society are extreme. They are also preventable.¹

Primary School matters! And funding must reflect the primacy of primary education. Many of the issues facing schools can be overcome with sufficient funding. Primary schools are funded significantly less per student than their secondary equivalents. Yet primary outcomes substantially set the course of a student's life. APPA calls for funding to ensure an education of the highest quality for every student, in every locale and for funding to be targeted to those students who need it most.

The Productivity Commission noted, in their review of the next *National Schools Resource Agreement*, that student engagement has declined. We want to engage all children, whatever their passion. If we can increase participation, we feel we can better engage children in education and improve literacy and numeracy outcomes in the process. All children matter. And we want them all attending school regularly. Having a curriculum which allows the space for literacy and numeracy together with specialist areas such as art, drama, music, school productions, sport teams, those things which build a community and human relationships, are the heart of schooling. To do this, we need appropriate specialist teachers and resourcing must also allow for the employment of appropriate specialist teachers to supplement the expertise of classroom teachers.

If teachers realise they are able to work flexibly and in their domain of passion, this may also attract teachers back to the profession.

Too often universal solutions are proposed to what are often subtly different local problems. We want resource provision to allow for good decisions to be made locally wherever possible and appropriate.

3. Coordinated support for children

Teachers become frustrated when children in need of help can't access help in a timely manner. A lack of access to appropriate services often expresses itself in severe and inappropriate behavioural enactments - which in turn sees a number of teachers leaving the workforce. It shouldn't be like this. There are many, many agencies and NGOs providing duplicate services, soaking up much needed resources, which are not effectively used. There are too many uncoordinated service providers, none of which individually have the capacity to provide the level of service needed by some children and their families.

Insufficiently coordinated services to children and their families leads to rectifiable problems not being addressed and teacher burnout. We can do better. We must have coherent, joined up services that work with children and families in need. The many resources available across agencies and NGOs, must change from the current ethos of scarcity and 'passing the funding buck' to one of providing service. And in supporting children and families, we are supporting teachers to stay connected with teaching.

Allied health care support in communities is also in short supply and particularly hard to access in rural/remote areas of the country. Schools and families need ready access to psychologists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, paediatricians and like services.

¹ Denny, L (2022). Primary school matters. Positioning paper: The case for change. www.primaryfocus.org.au



4. A content dominated curriculum

We must make teacher workload manageable and we can do this by developing a primary curriculum which reflects teaching realities. The current primary and early childhood curriculum is too crowded, impossible to teach if taken literally, and is based on outdated models of curriculum, steeped in coverage. The curriculum documents should have begun with school and classroom practice realities, especially in primary school and particularly in the early years.²

APPA advocates for a primary curriculum which allows the space for literacy and numeracy together with activities which connect kids and makes them a part of their community and their community part of their schools.

5. Too much micro-management and testing

The weight of NAPLAN and micro-management is taking its toll on teachers. APPA supports governments focussing on results-based accountability, but feel we are losing our way when stipulating far too many accountability metrics. Instead of creating flourishing organisations, this results in mediocrity, a measurement induced mire, as schools struggle to respond to all of the 'bits'. Schools need to be accountable but teachers are being overwhelmed by checklists and testing, with detrimental outcomes for leaders, teachers and students. APPA advocates shifting national testing to measures of the performance of educational jurisdictions, not the performance of every child. This can be achieved by comprehensive sample testing, not national testing of all children through mechanisms such as NAPLAN. APPA contends national testing creates a cycle of competition for better NAPLAN results and in that process, redirects teaching towards a greater focus on test outcomes. APPA contends this is well intentioned but wrong. This has the unintended consequence of redirecting teaching to a narrower focus on the 'basics' with conversely, **less engagement of children with schooling**. This leads to less job satisfaction and more frustrated teachers.

6. Remuneration and conditions

If the status of the teaching profession needs to be elevated, pay scales need to be reviewed and increased. In jurisdictions where teachers are well paid, the workforce is more stable, has more capacity and the outcomes are higher.³

In the coming years, education is competing with numerous other areas of the workforce in attracting personnel. We must have competitive salaries and this needs to be part of the discussion. There needs to be a significant increase in teacher salary - especially for experienced career teachers. While early career teachers are relatively well placed in financial terms, more experienced teachers reach a level at which their classification and remuneration remains fixed and doesn't match other professions of similar qualification and expertise.

Improved remuneration is not the whole story. If we want to connect teachers to their work-place and for them to stay connected with the profession, we also need to substantially improve their conditions. Teachers must have time for planning, assessment and reporting, and these need to become scheduled as part of the working

² Donnelly, K. & Wiltshire, K. 2014. Review of the Australian Curriculum. Australian Government Department of Education

³ Dr. Cherie Taylor-Patel, President, New Zealand Principals' Federation



week. But more than this, teachers need to feel valued, to feel they are contributing to something bigger than them, to have the flexibility to respond to their particular group of students. And teachers feel they can do this when children with obvious needs, are able to access assistance and appropriate allied professionals; when the curriculum is sensibly structured; when good curriculum support materials are produced; when national testing focuses on the performance of the jurisdiction and not the child; when specialist teachers are readily available to supplement the teacher's own strengths thereby enriching student programs.

7. Retaining teachers in the profession and support for early career teachers

The development of quality teachers cannot be constructed as a simple set of processes. While graduate teachers are ready to start their teaching careers, they must be supported in their early years and expected to be continuing learners throughout the entirety of their careers. Quality teaching must be understood as a continuous process.

Beginning teachers often cite a lack of adequate support in their early years as a key reason for leaving the profession. They report inadequate mentoring and supervision, lack of support in behaviour management, excessive responsibilities and failure to recognise and reward professional growth. By the second year out of university, as many as 29 per cent of new teachers may already be considering leaving the profession.⁴ This data is concerning and better support in the early years of a teacher's career might address some of this.

APPA NAC members stress the importance of long-term support for early career teachers. Retaining high quality candidates in teaching is a high priority. Early career support is crucial to overall workforce retention.

Section 2: Comments on the priority areas and actions.

1. Elevating the profession (4 proposed actions)

This priority area is strongly supported. APPA NAC members support a plan to recognise the value of the role of teachers. As discussed in section one, this campaign must be accompanied by actions to improve teachers' work conditions. It is not enough to run campaigns without commensurate actions to make the actual profession 'attractive'.

There were mixed views about some of the suggested actions.

While APPA NAC members support the acknowledgement of teachers, some expressed the view that holding one teacher up over others is not part of our culture - we 'praise quietly' - and as a result, some groups were opposed to including teacher awards in the plan. Recognition through mechanisms such as appointing excellent teachers to Associate Professor positions attracted much more acclaim from APPA NAC members.

Action 4: APPA NAC members partially support the recognition of HALTs. The process of qualifying for a HALT position needs considerable refinement. A more holistic assessment of highly accomplished teaching is recommended together with a process to build the impact and abilities of ALL teachers. If HALT positions are to be retained, we need to ensure the fidelity of the appointment process and ensure the process is much less time consuming for all involved.

⁴ Action Now – Classroom Ready Teachers p. 41. <http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/teacher-education-ministerial-advisory-group>



Additional suggestions for raising the profile of teaching as a profession included:

- Career nights in senior schools should have a teacher representative speaking powerfully about the joy and purpose of teaching - in early childhood and primary. The fact is, teaching can be fun, learning environments exciting and it is not all gloom and doom - this should be promoted.
- We need to promote teaching as a career and encourage opportunities for aspiring teachers to work with young people as part of finding their vocation.
- Teachers/leadership/graduates talking and connecting with Year 11 and 12 students about their chosen career/vocation.
- Raising the profile of a teaching career to secondary students.
- Promoting teaching as a career to people in other occupations to gain experienced graduates from those industries/vocations.
- Offering traineeships to secondary students to work in neighbouring primary schools for say a 12-month period.
- Employment-based pathways into teaching - allowing trainee teachers to earn while they learn should be investigated.

Promotion of teaching as a career is one factor. Ensuring teaching is attractive as a career also requires a focus on generous remuneration and working conditions. Incentives to attract staff to work in hard to staff schools and remote areas, needs attention. Experiencing practicums in remote settings can be expensive for student-teachers who may forgo part time work in their usual places of residence. Subsidies to undertake practicums in hard to staff areas, may encourage graduate teachers to consider remote positions.

2. Improving teacher supply (5 proposed actions)

The thrust of this priority was strongly supported by APPA NAC members. Every initiative that is targeted to bringing people into the profession is welcomed.

A comment was made that incentives need to be positive, not framed as deficits. For example, if you do your time as a young graduate in a hard to staff (and by nature difficult context), you then get a school of your choice. This creates a negative incentive and is not one that enhances the view of the profession or a deep understanding of the mission of teaching in Australia.

Action 5: This should be reworded as **target** subjects and specialisations.

Action 6: In addition to bursaries and studentships, a reduction in HECS fees should be considered.

Action 9: Agreement that the red tape of visa processes should be eased. Some questions were asked about the cost effectiveness of recruitment from overseas.

It was felt we should not poach teachers from other states or countries.

An important addition to the plan would be to nationalise *Teacher Registration* and remove bureaucratic red tape to enable free movement of teachers around Australia and between sectors - removing barriers to movement within Australia would also help promote teaching as an adventure, a way to see our country.

Perhaps a national 'locum teacher' program that is financially enticing, could be of assistance in filling short term vacancies in harder to staff areas.



3. Strengthening initial teacher education (4 proposed actions)

APPA NAC members strongly endorse the development of School/University partnerships in teacher education. Partnerships in teacher education build on the strengths of universities and schools and provide the basis for an ongoing partnership in teacher education, teacher induction and the ongoing professional learning of teachers. Most comments from APPA NAC discussion groups, centred on the appropriateness and desirability of schools being **partners** in teacher training. We don't feel this is properly recognised in these recommendations, nor was it properly captured in the *Initial Teacher Education Review* published in 2021.

To support these comments APPA makes the following observations:

The Practicum must be more systematic and embedded in schools: In 2015, Professor Greg Craven, Chair of the *Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG)* charged with making recommendations on how initial teacher education in Australia could be improved to better prepare new teachers with the practical skills needed for the classroom, told an Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) Forum: *"Every single person or group that came before TEMAG emphasised the centrality and criticality of the professional experience. Every single submission talked about its importance...every single person proposed the greater integration of practicum and professional experience with university, teaching and theory"*.⁵

This too is the view of APPA NAC members. As students near the end of their teaching degree, more and more time should be spent in a school setting. There is a perceived reluctance from some universities to partner in teacher education and it is hoped this will be addressed as part of the review into ITE.

We must quality assure supervising teachers and investigate accrediting specialist teacher training schools: APPA NAC members are concerned with the current *ad hoc* practicum experience of some students. Accrediting teaching schools and mentors within those schools to work with students during their practicums, can be a model which addresses this. Properly trained and accredited Mentor Teachers are suggested as key to supporting student teachers in their practicum placements.

Structured Mentor Teacher support should also be provided for early career teachers.

Funding: Partnerships between higher education providers and schools need to be recognised and funded according to the contribution of each partner. If models such as teaching schools and mentor teachers are being considered, these need to be appropriately funded. Commonwealth allocations and redirection of funding from other programs are all viable funding sources which should be considered as part of the review.

Action 10: We want to see a change of direction in school university partnerships in teacher training. This should be part of Professor Scott's brief in leading the *Teacher Education Expert Panel*.

Action 11: Supported. Reducing barriers to transitioning between careers by recognising relevance in past qualifications and experience is sensible.

⁵ Accessed from: <https://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/temag-and-the-way-forward-perspectives-on-professional-experience-induction-and-professional-development-for-teachers/>



Action 12: Strongly supported. We must recognise the imperative of attracting and retaining first nations teachers, including removal of barriers such as HECS and the encouragement of students in regional areas to be as close as possible to home. We also need to ensure cultural sensitivity is incorporated in ITE programs and promoted within school staff cultures.

Action 13: LANTITE - APPA NAC members questioned the necessity of this test. We see this as an unnecessary hurdle - surely literacy and numeracy competency should be assessed as part of a degree? If it must be retained, we support it being done at the start of a student's degree. It should be accessible for as many times as needed to enable a pass to be attained. Targeted support needs to be provided to student-teachers not passing at the first attempt, so that they are able to grow literacy and numeracy skills. The LANTITE testing fee should also be removed. Sample tests can be accessed here: <https://teacheredtest.acer.edu.au/prepare/practice-material> In the test, there is a strong emphasis on comprehension - surely this should be inherent within study for a degree? There is also an emphasis on spelling some difficult words - checking your spelling and modelling this in front of children is not something to be ashamed of - it models effective literacy practice.

4. Maximising the time to teach (5 proposed actions)

APPA NAC members strongly agree with the premise of this priority. But we don't want the workload of principals and teachers to increase in meaningless ways. The key to this priority is to consider the fundamentals listed in Section 1 of this response. We want to put the fun and joy back into teaching. To do this, we need space in the curriculum, we need input into policy development so that workable solutions are developed, we need coordinated service provision for children and families in need so that they are helped as a whole family, not picked at by multiple providers. We need better resourcing to make a difference in the life of children. Given such opportunities, who wouldn't want to be a teacher?

In terms of the specific actions, we agree that there are opportunities to lessen teachers' loads - primary teachers need as much planning-release time as their secondary colleagues; activities that are not core to teaching and learning such as playground duty, bus duty and first aid might be assigned to support staff. Teachers want and need planning time and this should be generously allocated.

Members had various opinions on suggestions such as time in lieu. One group stated 'teachers are professionals - they do their job to the best of their abilities and don't count every hour.' Beware an hour counting environment for teachers - it encourages hour counting behaviours.

Action 16: This is surface picking - the curriculum needs to be rewritten for primary education as discussed in section 1.

Action 17: See the discussion on meaningful input from schools into policy development in Section 1.

Action 18: Why is this proposed as a central initiative? Local people are the best determiners of how to deploy their staff to suit their particular needs. This should really be a question of allocating sufficient resources.

5. Better understanding future teacher workforce needs (5 proposed actions)

Agreed we need good data to assist in workforce planning. However, if we don't use the data, what is the point? Demographic projections have been flagging the current workforce shortages for at least 15 years. Has the



bureaucracy been asleep at the wheel? Perhaps instead of focussing on micro-managing schools, the bureaucracy should do the job they are funded to do.

Action 21: Beyond initial teacher education, we need a national teacher registration process to facilitate easy movement of teachers between states and jurisdictions.

Action 22: This is a useful short-term fix which needs to be accompanied by a strong mentorship program so that initial experiences in teaching are positive. This should include additional release time to observe and work with experienced teachers. Time should be readily given to enable further professional learning both in the school and beyond.

Action 23: Exit interviews could be very helpful. Some members believe Professor Phil Riley may already have this data.

6. Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession (5 proposed actions)

There seems to be a substantial mismatch between the objective statement in this priority, and the suggested actions. The thrust of this priority is strongly supported by NAC members. Tying this objective to teacher standards seems to be unhelpful.

While national standards are considered useful, some argue that they can be far too reductionist and don't capture the sophistication of excellent teaching.

Action 25: Guidelines about the support expectations for beginning teachers should be developed. This should link with a strong mentor program with a strong focus on supporting teachers to remain in the profession.

Action 26: Strongly supported.

Action 27: There were mixed views on this action. Some members felt streamlined standards would be of assistance. Others questioned the idea of HALTS - there is agreement that teacher standards need to be refined. This refinement should be done in consultation with the profession - not done to the profession.

Action 28: The budgeted trial will be watched with interest.

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A final comment: This action plan must be situated within the national workforce context. There is high demand for workers in many areas across the country. We have moved to an employee market and successful initiatives to attract teachers will have to compete with other areas of the economy. As a result, a key strategy should be encouraging teachers who have retired or left teaching early, to consider part-time roles.



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