

1 December 2022

RE: CPTAV response to the draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

To the National Teacher Workforce Working Group,

The Council of Professional Teaching Associations of Victoria (CPTAV) is pleased to provide the attached response to the draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

CPTAV represents the 32 professional teachers' associations in Victoria, which over 72,000 teachers and education professionals have chosen to join and support. Professional teachers' associations are not unions. They play a different role in the education system. They were established by teachers to provide continuing professional learning, resources, networking and mentoring to improve teachers' subject-related knowledge and skills. Around 250 practicing teachers and other educators are on the Boards/Committees that govern Victorian professional teaching associations.

Victorian teachers' associations, like those around the country, vary in size and scale but there is an increasing recognition of the vital and continuous role they play in developing teachers' subject expertise across every area of the curriculum.

CPTAV welcomes the commitment of the Education Ministers and the Working Group to the important goals of reducing teacher workload and raising the esteem in which the teaching profession is held.

Thank you for considering CPTAV's response to the Action Plan.

Regards,



Dr Deb Hull

President, CPTAV
and
Executive Officer, History Teachers' Association of Victoria

DRAFT NATIONAL TEACHER WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN**Priority Area 1: Elevating the Profession**

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

YES/NO

The actions proposed recognise the value teachers bring to students, communities and the economy:

Strongly disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Strongly agree

Action 1: This is an excellent initiative, and very welcome. The campaign to ‘elevate the profession’ and ‘recognise the value teachers bring to students, communities and the economy’ should be focused on changing broader, long-term public opinion. It should commence with research into community views of teachers and teaching, and then the marketing and communications strategy should address the misconceptions and negative stereotypes identified in the research.

Importantly, it should not be confused or merged with a recruitment campaign that is seeking to attract new teachers to the profession. They are two separate and distinct aims. In raising the esteem of the profession, you would not shy away from the vast array of high-level skills that teachers use every day, the pedagogical and technical expertise they apply, the long hours they work and the emotionally demanding work they do. The public will admire it if they understand it is hard and that teachers are doing it well. In recruitment, however, you will be trying to make it sound like an appealing job and this will require emphasising the positive aspects of it. This is unlikely to raise the esteem in which it is held.

Action 2: A national awards process will be expensive, duplicate state-based awards and the existing national Education Awards, require a lot of teachers and school leaders to put precious time into writing nominations, and only a small number of teachers will win. No matter how much media coverage the event generates, the message it will convey to the public is that it has been possible to identify a small number of exceptional teachers in the system. The public already believes that they exist.

Action 3: This is a positive step, and it would be very good to see teachers acknowledged in this way alongside the great contributions of other professionals.

Action 4: If teachers are not currently choosing to pursue HALT accreditation in large numbers, the reasons for that should be separately explored and not as part of this Plan. Expanding HALT numbers will do nothing to raise the status of teaching as a profession – it will simply show that a cohort of teachers has progressed into a specific career stage that the public does not (and does not need to) understand.

If the role of teachers is truly valued, then other proposed actions should be prioritised, including the following.

- Teachers should be directly involved in policy and strategy development. While unions represent an important aspect of teachers' interests, professional associations were established, and are governed, by practicing teachers to improve their practice and thereby improve student engagement and outcomes. Teachers' associations and their peak bodies should be represented on the working group for this Action Plan, and in other state and territory policy-making bodies with the potential to impact teaching practice and the esteem in which the teaching profession is held. That participation should be remunerated to ensure that schools and teachers' associations can release teachers/staff to participate. That would show respect for teachers and for the perspectives they can offer that principals' associations and unions cannot.
- States and territories should undertake, and share the outcomes of, initiatives to improve teacher safety and reduce the verbal and physical abuse of teachers and principals. The underlying causes of this phenomenon should be thoroughly explored and all education sectors in all states and territories should sign up to strategies that promote a zero tolerance policy. It will raise the esteem in which teachers are held if the public sees that their employers (both at the school and system level) hold them in sufficient esteem to take decisive and coordinated action to keep them safe. The fact that a school community member is 'upset' or 'feels strongly' is not a sufficient reason for teachers to be made unsafe in their workplace.

The new Victorian School Community Safety Order Policy is such an initiative; principals should be encouraged to make use of the orders, and teachers and the public should be kept informed of the impact of the policy.

Priority Area 2: Improving teacher supply

Do you have feedback on the actions proposed for 'Improving teacher supply'?

YES

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

Would you like to provide feedback about these actions? (maximum 300 words)

New teachers should also be funded and released to attend professional learning and participate in mentoring and teacher networks that are facilitated by professional teachers' associations. No university education faculty can possibly contain deep subject expertise across all of the subjects/disciplines in the curriculum, and so it is not reasonable to expect teachers to emerge from university ready to teach the full curriculum of Year 9 History, for example, or Year 5 Civics and Citizenship. It is also increasingly common that a school will not have on staff a trained subject specialist for each subject. This leaves many new teachers unprepared and having to fend for themselves as they commence curriculum planning, finding resources and professional reading. The practical and nourishing support from experienced and expert teachers, facilitated by teachers' associations, accelerates the learning of new teachers, saves them time and reduces their feelings of professional isolation.

Priority Area 3: Strengthening Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Do you have feedback on the actions proposed for 'Strengthening Initial Teacher Education'?

YES/**NO**

Priority Area 4: Maximising the time to teach (14-18)

Do you have feedback on the actions proposed for 'Maximising the time to teach

YES/NO

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

Reducing teacher workload is an outstanding goal for the Action Plan to pursue. CPTAV fully endorses the intention behind this goal and the recognition that this issue is a significant – perhaps the most significant - factor in poor teacher retention.

However, the phrasing of the goal – “Maximising the time to teach. Objective: To improve retention and free up teachers to focus on teaching and collaboration” – does not actually acknowledge that the issue is not one of shifting teacher effort from one type of activity to another. Teachers are working far too many hours per week and they are saying in clear terms that this is a contributing factor to their plans to leave the profession. The goal should therefore be reframed as ‘Reduce teacher workload and maximise the time to teach.’

Action 14: Piloting new approaches to teacher workload reduction is a welcome initiative. However, please note that CPTAV does not support the proposal inspired by the Grattan Institute report that a central bank of teaching resources would save teachers’ time.

Firstly, it is taking away from teachers an intrinsic part of their role – to develop unit and lesson plans that meet the needs of their particular student cohorts, and that can be differentiated to meet the full span of abilities within their classroom. This is not the part of their workload from which most teachers are asking to be relieved.

Secondly, it is not possible. To save all teachers time, such a bank would need to have sample lessons and resources to support every content description and elaboration within the curriculum, with complete instructions for differentiation for each of these, and recommendations for customisation to suit different cohorts. This would take many years to build, teachers would inevitably (and publicly) disagree about the quality and suitability of the resources for their context, and the size of the collection would be so unwieldy that it would be hard for teachers to locate the resources they were looking for. As soon as the resources were completed they would need to be revised, culled and replaced to reflect curriculum changes.

If the Australian Department of Education or the state and territory departments chose only some subjects within the curriculum to support in this way, to make the project more manageable, it would not achieve the goal, and it would send a message that the time of some teachers was perceived as more valuable and worth saving than others.

Thirdly, in subjects like History, English and Politics, providing a consolidated set of resources for use in all schools is an idea that Western democracies have shunned as dangerous. Exposing students to a wide range of perspectives, and encouraging teachers to use their initiative and professional judgement in choosing how to implement the curriculum, is fundamental to developing an informed, diverse and open-minded citizenry.

Finally, the recommendation ignores the complex, diverse, distributed and effective work already undertaken in this space by many professional teachers' associations – not as a one-off initiative but as part of their core purpose. For example, the Victorian Commerce Teachers' Association produces a highly regarded journal, each issue of which contains sample teaching resources for teachers to customise and use. It does not prescribe a single set of resources for each topic, but rather it continues to produce diverse and updated resources each year that reflect diverse thinking and approaches. Similarly, members of the History Teachers' Association of Victoria participate in an online network of teachers of VCE History: Revolutions in which teachers continually share resources. This network and its archive provide induction, support and time-saving to new teachers but also challenge expert teachers to keep thinking about ways to improve and innovate. The resources are plentiful and diverse which enables teachers to choose those that best suit their teaching style and student cohort. These are only two examples of the many existing ways in which resources can be shared *when schools and systems support teachers to engage* in these networks.

This could not be achieved by a centralised and slow-to-update bank of resources. As one of the initiatives to be piloted, states and territories could invite professional teachers' associations to apply for funding to scale up or introduce more initiatives of this kind, which would result in a greater pool of authors and ideas, and a curated and constantly-updated collection of resources for teachers to consider and customise. The benefit would continue long after the injection of government funding ends.

Action 15: This is a welcome initiative. Progress reports that include valid evidence of the effectiveness or otherwise of state and territory initiatives should be shared with teachers across Australia.

Initiatives should focus on long-term, sustained improvements that enable teachers to focus on teaching. These are most likely to be achieved by:

- increased staffing in schools in administration, counselling, social work and compliance
- whole-of-Department-of-Education commitments to remove unnecessary reporting or administration requirements, and to limit the introduction of new requirements each year
- providing all schools with access to expertise and advice that can optimise the interoperability of their school IT systems (such as learning management systems, reporting

software, attendance software, etc.) to ensure that the use of digital technologies reduces rather than increases the time teachers spend on administration.

Action 16: This is a welcome initiative. Progress reports that include valid evidence of the effectiveness of these initiatives (including the number of annual downloads of the teaching resources being produced by curriculum authorities and other agencies) should be shared with teachers across Australia.

Action 17: “Each initiative in the next National School Reform Agreement will be subject to a Teacher Workload Impact Assessment”. If this is implemented in good faith, this could be the most significant strategy in the Plan. Teachers will rejoice to see this being proposed. However, teachers will not celebrate the next sentence, which says that “States and territories, non-government school authorities and teachers’ unions will be consulted on the development of the workload impact assessment.” No practicing teachers. No professional teachers’ associations. What does this suggest about the respect being given to the teacher perspective?

The ‘Development of a Sample Learner Profile’ is one example of an Education Ministers’ initiative that would have benefitted from having an assessment of the potential impact on teacher time built into the design stage and process. The teacher time that would be required to develop a comprehensive Profile on every student did not appear to be a consideration, and there were no prompts about this impact included in the consultation process. It was practicing teachers who first raised this as a potential issue during consultations.

This Action would be even more powerful if the states and territories committed to subjecting all new initiatives to a similar assessment, as part of a national collaboration to rapidly reduce teacher workloads.

Priority Area 5: Better understanding future teacher workforce needs

Do you have feedback on the actions proposed for 'Better understanding workforce needs'?

YES/NO

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

Extremely effective

Very effective

Moderately effective

Slightly effective

Not effective at all

...

Action 23: The potential solutions to be explored in this strategy should include “teacher access to funding and time-release to participate in professional learning and networks of their choosing”. Evaluations conducted by teachers’ associations show that this is a sustaining, motivating force in teachers’ professional lives. Many schools and school sectors are severely limiting this access and prescribing ‘whole-school’ professional learning that does not have the same effect on teacher confidence, subject expertise or morale.

Priority Area 6: Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession (24-28)

Do you have feedback on the actions proposed for 'Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession'?

YES/NO

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

Strongly disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Strongly agree

Would you like to provide feedback about these actions? (maximum 300 words)

Action 25: Before developing the framework, AITSL should consult with professional teaching associations to understand the mentoring and induction support they currently provide, and what the evaluation feedback on those offerings shows.

A number of teachers' associations offer free membership for pre-service teachers and reduced membership fees for graduate teachers. Some offer mentoring programs, and professional learning and networks that specifically target new and out-of-field teachers. This provision could be expanded and more consistently offered across all subjects with support from states and territories, and from sectors.

As mentioned above, many schools now do not have a trained specialist in all subject areas on their staff. This is particularly true in small and rural schools, but will be true in at least one subject area in almost every school. In addition, the sole Design and Technologies teacher, or the sole Politics teacher (for example), usually cannot be provided with subject-specific mentoring within the school. The impact of this on the efficacy, confidence and growth of new teachers is significant. The guidelines should reflect this and require the school to facilitate access to subject-specific specialist expertise – internal or external - in all subjects in which the new teacher has been appointed to teach.

(The 2018 AITSL Review of Teacher Registration, in an attempt to improve teacher subject expertise and support out-of-field teachers, included the recommendation that teachers should be required and supported to undertake professional learning in the subjects they had been allocated to teach in that year, but this recommendation has not yet been implemented.)

Action 28: Official documents from national and state education authorities often imply that teacher career progression is solely or profoundly influenced by their completion of university qualifications or something like a HALT program. This assumption does not stand up to scrutiny.

These offerings form an important part of a complex and extended ecosystem of teacher professional learning. However, many more teachers each year take part in the short-form professional learning offered by teachers' associations and other providers. This is more accessible to most teachers (and schools) in terms of cost and time, and can be undertaken year after year to build skills and knowledge progressively, in areas selected by the teacher to fill perceived expertise gaps or pursue professional interests. It can also be accessed easily by out-of-field teachers.

Last year, Victorian teachers' associations offered around 450 professional learning activities ranging from one-hour webinars to three-day conferences, attracting more than 22,000 attendees. (Please note, the same teacher may appear multiple times in this figure if they registered for multiple events.) These events and programs also provided many teachers with the opportunity to provide peer-led, subject-specific professional learning to others, adding another string to their professional bow. Over the course of a teachers' career, the expertise gained from this continuing professional development contributes to their status as a subject expert within their school and to their appointment to roles such as Head of Department/Learning Area Leader, Head of Curriculum, and Head of Teaching and Learning. These promotions may certainly be assisted by, but they are not reliant on, the achievement of a university qualification or external accreditation like HALT.

It should also be noted that state curriculum authorities provide important teacher professional learning by employing teachers as assessors, exam development panelists, curriculum reviewers or resource developers. Participation in these activities is also likely to boost teachers' perceived expertise and career progression.

The introduction of more micro-credentials will be a positive addition to the professional learning offerings available to teachers, but there will still be many teachers and schools who cannot afford the cost or the time. Support for the diverse, valued and widely-utilised professional learning provided by teachers' associations, and a more sophisticated understanding of what contributes to teacher career progression, should therefore be included in the Action Plan.