

Working Group
National Teacher Workforce Action Plan
Department of Education
Australian Government

1 December 2022

Dear Secretary

Re. Grattan Institute response to the Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

This submission provides a brief response to the actions outlined in the Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. Improving the quality of school education should be a national priority and teachers are vital to these efforts. Tackling teacher shortages and attracting and retaining great teachers is key to ensuring the school education system can deliver on its promise to young Australians. We respond to 7 actions in the workforce plan below. Grattan Institute also endorses draft Action 1 (establishment of a targeted national campaign to raise the status and value the role of teachers).

i. Recognising high-achieving and highly accomplished teachers (Action 4); Develop and support career pathways which value teachers and reflect transitions in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Action 24)

The action plan sets out a target for the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to work with states and territories to ‘*increase the number of teachers certified as Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) or equivalent to 10,000 nationally by 2025*’ (p. 1). It also requests jurisdictions and sectors to report on specific measures being put in place to support career pathways (p. 13).

We agree that Australia needs a larger pool of recognised expert teachers. But to make the most of Australia’s highly effective teachers, governments should also reform expert teacher career paths so that expert teachers have greater responsibility for leading the professional development of others.

We highlight Grattan Institute’s previous research on this issue in our 2020 report, [*Top Teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*](#). We propose that two new permanent positions be created – Master Teachers and Instructional Specialists – to enable top teachers to lead professional learning in schools. Critically, these roles would be designed for *subject-specific* expert teachers, who have recognised skills and dedicated responsibilities to work with classroom teachers to build quality practice.

Subject-specific pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is an essential element of great teaching.¹ It is also a necessary foundation for teachers to be able to improve the way they teach. Research

¹ Goss, P. and Sonnemann, J. (2020). *Top teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*. Grattan Institute; Baumert, J. et al (2010) “Teachers’ Mathematical Knowledge, Cognitive Activation in the Classroom, and Student

suggests that when teachers have low PCK, their engagement in professional learning activities is less effective, and they are more likely to think they are 'already doing' the new teaching strategies. For example, Timperley et al (2007) emphasise that 'without content on which to base deeper understandings and extend teaching skills, there is no foundation for [teachers to] change'.²

Grattan Institute notes concerns that teachers in Australia have been emerging from initial teacher education without sufficiently strong PCK. And in recent decades, teacher professional learning has focused heavily on building 'general' teaching skills rather than knowledge and skills tied to specific subject areas. There are also some signs that teachers' PCK is low in Australia. For example, one-in-five secondary school Maths students in Year 8 are taught by 'out-of-field' teachers.³ Fewer Australian teachers, on completing their university training, indicate they feel prepared in PCK (63 per cent) than the OECD average (71 per cent).⁴

Instructional Specialists would work within schools to set the standard for good teaching, build teaching capacity, and spread evidence-informed practices. They would support classroom teachers to build their knowledge and implement best practice in the classroom, helping teachers understand not just 'what to do' but 'how to do it' within their classroom context. They would be paid \$40,000 more than the highest standard pay rate for teachers. The position would be limited to about 8 per cent of teachers.

Master Teachers would be responsible for improving teaching across multiple schools by coordinating professional learning, supporting Instructional Specialists, and connecting schools with research. They would help bring rigour, excellence, coherence, and consistency to professional judgments about best practice, and act as a system-level broker, facilitating learning between system leaders, schools, and teachers. They would be paid \$80,000 more than the highest standard pay rate for teachers. The position should be limited to about 1 per cent of teachers.

Ideally, school-based Instructional Specialists and region-based Master Teachers would be HALT accredited and also meet the requirements set out in agreed subject-specific 'elaborations' of the HALT standards. Appointment to the limited number of Instructional Specialist and Master Teacher roles should involve an open, competitive recruitment process that includes subject-specific experts on selection panels. And for selection of Instructional Specialists, a Master Teacher in the relevant subject should sit on every selection panel.⁵

Progress". *American Educational Research Journal* 47.1, pp. 133-180; Goulding, M., Rowling, T., and Barber, P. (2002) "Does It Matter? Primary Teacher Trainees' Subject Knowledge in Mathematics". *British Educational Research Journal* 28.5, pp. 689-704; Hill, H. C., Rowan, B., and Ball, D. L. (2005) "Effects of Teachers' Mathematical Knowledge for Teaching on Student Achievement". *American Educational Research Journal* 42.2, pp. 371-406; Harris, D. N. and Sass, T. R. (2011). "Teacher training, teacher quality, and student achievement". *Journal of Public Economics* 95.7-8, pp. 798-812.

² Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. and Fung, I. (2007) *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

³ Thomson, S., Wernert, N., O'Grady, E., and Rodrigues, S. *TIMSS 2015: Reporting Australia's results*. Australian Council for Educational Research, p. 181.

⁴ OECD (2019) *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and Schools Leaders as Lifelong Learners*. Table I.4.20.

⁵ A two-stage process, with HALT accreditation as the first stage, followed by a competitive process for a small number of advertised roles as a second stage, would also help to minimise cost blow-outs. Because the number of Instructional Specialist and Master Teacher roles would be limited to a small pool (8% and 1%), this model encourage teachers to achieve HALT status without blowing the budget. This would help to prevent a cost

To ensure the effectiveness and credibility of new expert teacher career pathway roles, it is critical that teachers in these new roles are reliably able to demonstrate strong subject-specific knowledge and skills in the classroom and are also skilled in coaching and mentoring others. Recent Grattan Institute research suggests there is a perception among teachers that instructional leaders often provide inconsistent advice. More than half of teachers surveyed by Grattan Institute in 2019 for the 2020 *Top teachers* report indicated that the pedagogical advice they had received over the past five years in a specific learning area was either ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ inconsistent. Some teachers also questioned the quality and capability of instructional leaders (p.15). This suggests that to protect the integrity of a new expert teacher career pathway, it would be important for governments to establish robust performance management processes to ensure successful applicants maintain high-quality performance standards in schools, and provide ongoing opportunities for further development.

ii. Attracting new teachers to the profession (Action 6)

The action plan recommends providing ‘5,000 bursaries worth up to \$40,000 each to help attract our best and brightest to the teaching profession’ (p. 3). We agree that attracting high achievers into teaching should be a core policy priority in Australia. We highlight our work on this issue in the 2019 Grattan Institute report, *Attracting high achievers to teaching*. This report shows that teachers with strong academic records are likely to be more effective in the classroom.

Our report details an Australia-first survey of nearly 1,000 young high achievers (aged 18-25 and with an ATAR of 80 or higher). Our survey found that more high achieving young Australians would take up teaching if it offered higher top-end pay and greater career challenge. We recommend taking an integrated approach to attracting high achievers to the profession, including the use of bursaries to study teaching, alongside reforms to the teacher career pathway set out above (section i). New ‘Instructional Specialist’ and ‘Master Teacher’ roles would give Australia’s most effective teachers clear responsibility and extra time to improve teaching within and across schools. Grattan Institute’s research suggests these career opportunities would appeal strongly to high achievers, who worry about getting ‘stuck’ in one classroom and want opportunities to progress and get higher pay.

iii. Reducing teachers’ workloads (Actions 14 and 15)

We welcome the action plan’s proposals to ‘pilot new approaches to reduce teacher workload through a Workload Reduction Fund’ and to ‘build on work already underway to maximise teachers’ time to teach, plan, and collaborate, and independently evaluate the effectiveness of these measures on teachers’ time’ (p. 8).

We highlight Grattan Institute’s January 2022 report, *Making Time for Great Teaching*, which found that teachers have heavy workloads and many teachers are now too stretched to do everything we ask of them. Our survey of 5,442 Australian teachers and school leaders, conducted in 2021, found more than 90 per cent of teachers say they don’t have enough time to prepare effectively for

blowout such as occurred with the Advanced Skills Teacher scheme of the 1990s. See Goss, P. and Sonnemann, J. (2020). *Top teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*. Grattan Institute, p. 33.

classroom teaching – the core of their job. Our October 2022 report, [*Ending the lesson lottery: How to improve curriculum planning in schools*](#), confirmed that workload pressures are making it difficult for teachers to find the time to prepare high-quality, well-sequenced lessons for their students.

Teachers' work is complex, and expectations on schools have grown significantly over time. Tackling workload pressures in ways that enhance teacher effectiveness, improve student performance, and meet Australians' broader expectations for schools, will require careful consideration by governments and rigorous experimentation and evaluation of new ways of working.

Governments should avoid ad hoc, piecemeal approaches and instead focus on how work in schools is best organised to meet students' needs, including the core aspects of teachers' roles and the roles of the wider non-teacher schools workforce. Governments should also consider the most cost-effective ways to organise teachers' work, to ensure teachers have the time they need for professional collaboration with colleagues and to develop effective classroom practice. This will require close consideration of key cost-drivers in schools, including class sizes and the proportion of teachers' working week spent teaching in the classroom, on preparation activities, and on non-teaching duties.

Grattan Institute does not recommend governments make expensive, 'one-size-fits-all' reductions to face-to-face teaching hours to give teachers additional 'preparation' time, without first exploring more cost-effective reforms to address workload concerns.

As a first step, Grattan Institute recommends the federal government invest \$60 million in pilot and research studies with the states and territories and non-government school sector leaders to evaluate school operating models and test the best ways to make more time for great teaching. The proposed Workload Reduction Fund, noted in the Draft Action Plan, provides an opportunity to commence this work.

New pilots and trials should examine three reform areas as a priority:

- first, test new ways to let teachers focus on teaching, by better deploying the wider schools' workforce, including school specialists and support staff, to ease workload pressures on teachers;
- second, look for concrete opportunities to help teachers work smarter, by streamlining work associated with core teaching activities, such as reducing the need for teachers to 're-invent the wheel' in curriculum and lesson planning; and
- third, consider options to increase flexibility for school and system leaders to find the best ways to allocate school budgets, including the right balance between teachers' release time and class sizes, and to smooth out teachers' workloads over the school year by scheduling more time for teachers to work together on preparation activities in term breaks (noting that in some jurisdictions these reforms may require changes to industrial agreements).

Grattan Institute's [*Making Time for Great Teaching*](#) survey demonstrated that cost-effective reforms are possible. In our report, we identify reforms that had majority support from teachers. For example, these two reforms together could save teachers five hours a week:

- support staff could cover teachers' extra-curricular activities for two hours a week (almost 70 per cent of teachers in our survey agree)
- improved access to and use of high-quality common lesson resources could free up three hours a week for teachers (almost 90 per cent of teachers agree).

In addition, supporting teachers to work together in a structured and effective way for 2-to-3 days during each term break would create significantly more time over the course of the year for teachers to prepare for effective teaching during term time. A majority of teachers (58 per cent) in our survey indicated this would reduce their term-time workload.

iv. Supporting curriculum implementation (Action 16)

The action plan calls for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) to '*examin[e] ways to develop optional supports to assist the implementation of the national curriculum... includ[ing] working with teachers to ensure any resources are adaptable and help reduce their workload*' (p. 9).

Grattan Institute considers that there is an important opportunity for the federal government and the state and territory governments, along with sector leaders, to invest in reforms that strengthen curriculum planning approaches in schools. This could have significant learning benefits for students and ease workload pressures on teachers.

We highlight Grattan's October 2022 report, [*Ending the lesson lottery: How to improve curriculum planning in schools*](#), which finds that governments have dramatically underestimated how much support teachers and school leaders need to get curriculum planning right (see Attachment 1). A coordinated, whole-school approach to planning – which carefully sequences learning of key knowledge and skills across subjects and year levels – is best for teachers and students. This approach allows teachers to share the curriculum planning load and provides more time for teachers to tailor instruction for their students' needs. This approach also ensures that student knowledge builds from a strong foundation and that all students have equitable access to the curriculum, regardless of which classroom in a school they happen to be in.

A Grattan Institute survey of 2,243 teachers and school leaders, conducted for this report, shows that a whole-school approach to curriculum planning is the exception in Australia, not the rule. Half of teachers are planning on their own. The typical teacher spends six hours a week sourcing and creating materials, and a quarter of teachers spend 10 hours a week or more. Only 15 per cent of teachers report having access to a shared bank of high-quality curriculum materials for all their classes. Even more troubling, teachers in disadvantaged schools are only half as likely to have access to a shared bank as teachers in advantaged schools. Supporting schools without shared curriculum resources to shift to a whole-school approach to high-quality shared curriculum planning could save teachers three hours of time each week, and boost student performance.

Grattan Institute recommends a new partnership between governments, principals, and teachers, in which governments and sector leaders acknowledge the heavy lifting involved in curriculum planning, and provide schools and teachers with clearer guidance and more practical support to help all schools implement a whole-school curriculum approach.

We welcome the proposed direction for this work to be taken forward through a partnership between ACARA, as the leading Australian agency responsible for the national curriculum, and AERO, as Australia's independent education evidence body committed to the effective implementation of evidence in practice and policy.

In taking this work forward, Grattan Institute recommends:

- First, governments work together to audit available high-quality, comprehensive curriculum materials in Australia – focusing on subject-specific materials that are knowledge-rich, fully-sequenced across year levels, and include detailed lesson-level materials along with student assessments, workbooks, and teacher guides – and invest to fill gaps (see Box 3 and Appendix A in our report for the features of high-quality materials and concrete examples of these materials). Governments should ensure these materials are road-tested in real classrooms, and that they are readily available to all schools, whether in government, Catholic, or independent sectors, to use and adapt, if they choose.

To support this effort, governments should establish a **rigorous, independent, quality-assurance mechanism** that can be used to evaluate the quality of curriculum materials, including curriculum materials created by governments. Quality assurance findings should be made public. In devising a national model, Grattan Institute recommends Australian governments look to the US, where an independent not-for-profit organisation, EdReports, has developed a nationally recognised framework for examining the quality of comprehensive curriculum materials. EdReports uses trained and paid teacher experts to conduct thorough quality reviews of comprehensive curriculum materials developed by both commercial and non-profit providers, and publishes the results on its website. Over time, this model can increase the quality of the curriculum materials on offer to teachers and school leaders, providing them with more high-quality options and better information about material quality.

- Second, governments should **strengthen curriculum expertise in schools**. Principals, curriculum leaders, and teachers need much more professional development to implement a high-quality, whole-school curriculum approach, and adapt teaching materials effectively for their schools and their students. Governments should also direct the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to revise the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and Principals to free teachers from the unhelpful assumption that individualised lesson planning is the best way to support student learning in their classrooms.
- Third, governments should commit to **strengthening the focus on curriculum planning in school reviews**, to track implementation on the ground and target more support to the schools that need it. Reforms should also be adopted that ensure all schools – government, Catholic, and independent – are required to participate in a regular, improvement-focused school review process that includes a rigorous examination of whole-school curriculum.

v. Deploying the wider schools workforce (Action 18)

The action plan calls for governments to *‘review the role and function of initial teacher education students, teaching assistants, and school support staff to determine how they can be optimally*

deployed to reduce teacher workload’ (p. 10). We agree that determining how to best deploy the wider schools workforce is critical to achieving the objectives of the education system and reducing the workload pressures on teachers. We again highlight Grattan Institute’s January 2022 report, [*Making Time for Great Teaching*](#), which emphasises the increasing expectations of schools and teachers over time, and the need to improve the deployment of the wider schools’ workforce, including school specialists and support staff, so teachers have time to deliver high-quality classroom instruction.

There are two key opportunities. The first is improving the way schools use specialist staff and teaching assistants to support individual students and small groups in the classroom. Well-trained specialist staff and teaching assistants can provide interventions and supports for students that directly boost learning and engagement, reduce the complexity of the classroom environment, and bolster teacher effectiveness.⁶

The second is considering the scope of work of teaching assistants and other support staff in schools, including task allocation, to reduce the time teachers are required to spend on tasks that do not require teaching expertise, such as routine administration, yard duty, and supervision of extra-curricular activities.

Our August 2022 article, [*Making Better Use of Teaching Assistants*](#), published in *The Conversation* (see Attachment 2), considered this issue further, highlighting the need for Australia to improve the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs). We estimate that Australia spends more than \$5 billion on TAs each year, which accounts for about 8 per cent of recurrent school expenditure. Today there are more than 105,000 TAs working in classrooms across the country, almost a four-fold increase since 1990 – well above the increase in the numbers of students and teachers over that period. Yet Australian governments know very little about what TAs do in practice and how principals and teachers can better support them to maximise benefits for the school community.

Grattan Institute has called on federal and state education ministers to commit to national reforms to examine how the substantial TA workforce is currently deployed in schools and to evaluate options to better deploy this workforce, with the twin goals of improving student performance and easing teacher workloads.

Grattan Institute urges governments to consider the appropriate scope of work and the best options for the efficient and effective deployment of the wider workforce in schools – including teachers, specialist staff, teaching assistants, and other support staff – as part of a thorough review of the adequacy of the schools’ workforce to meet Australia’s educational goals.

In particular, Grattan recommends governments consider ways to strengthen evidence-based schools workforce planning, policy, and evaluation processes. Currently, there is significant fragmentation of schools workforce planning and policy in Australia, which is exacerbated by the complexity of school education delivery and governance models split across multiple state and territory jurisdictions and across government, Catholic, and independent school sectors. Given persistent concerns about shortages of teachers and other specialist staff, and as the schools workforce becomes increasingly diverse, effective workforce planning is more important than ever.

⁶ See, for example, Sharples, J., Webster, R., and Blatchford, P. *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants: Guidance Report*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidancereports/teaching-assistants>.

Grattan Institute notes there are established precedents that can inform how federal, state, and territory governments work together to improve workforce planning in key sectors. In the health sector, Health Workforce Australia (2010-2014) had a remit to provide evidence-based health workforce planning and policy advice to health ministers.⁷ In addition to workforce planning, its responsibilities included consideration of 'innovation and reform of Australia's health workforce to encourage an inter-professional approach to service delivery, flexibility in deployment of scarce health professional resources, and development of new health workforce models to respond to demand for health care'.⁸ This included projects aimed at boosting workforce productivity by analysing the scope of practice of specific health workforce roles, such as healthcare sector assistants and support workers, to help address concerns about the availability of medical practitioners.⁹

Given the importance of ensuring schools have the workforce they need to achieve Australian education ministers' commitment to provide a world-class school system that delivers both excellence and equity, it is imperative that governments commit to a concerted effort to strengthen evidence-based schools workforce planning and policy development.¹⁰

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jordana Hunter
School Education Program Director

[Redacted contact information]

⁷ Health Workforce Australia was abolished in 2014, with its activities subsumed into the Department of Health.

⁸ Health Workforce Australia, Annual Report 2009-10, p. 2, as cited in Jolly, R., *Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014* (2 June 2014), Parliamentary Library Bills Digest, No. 77, 2013-14, p. 4.

https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/billsdgs/3201521/upload_binary/3201521.pdf;fileType=application/pdf

⁹ Jolly, R., *Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014* (2 June 2014), Parliamentary Library Bills Digest, No. 77, 2013-14, p. 14.

¹⁰ Australian Education Ministers, *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, December 2019.