Discussion Paper Submission to the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

November 2022

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1   Introduction

A teacher affects eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops.
Henry Adams

The Mott MacDonald Education Consultancy (Cambridge Education, MMEC) is committed to making a difference through education. We build capacity. We engage stakeholders. We make global connections and increase impact.

We are a leader in the field of education, training and capability uplift – working with many government clients across high stakes projects, designing and providing quality professional learning, training, mentoring and coaching for those in their early, middle and senior stages of their career.

We deliver programs that drive success and improve learning for all.

Part of the global Mott MacDonald group, we bring extensive experience in working with educators around the world in designing, developing and facilitating targeted programs to build sector capacity. This experience compels us to write this submission in response to the *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* and the key actions contained therein.

Our experience in designing quality and impactful professional learning for teachers at all stages of their careers, has compelled us to draft this submission and propose the following key themes.

We respectfully urge the Hon Jason Clare MP Minister for Education to consider the development, on a national scale, of a suite of capability uplift programs that expand on, complement or are in addition to the Plan's *Key Actions*. We believe doing so will support the federal government to achieve its goal of improving teacher recruitment, retention and redressing the rates of attrition.

We propose further consideration of the place and value of:

- Providing rich and diverse opportunities for **coaching and mentoring** across *all* levels of schools
- Designing programs that support the development of attributes, knowledge, skills and behaviour for **leading and teaching in complex times**
- Including a focus on **Teacher Wellbeing, Mental Health and Emotional Intelligence**
- Supporting teachers in **understanding culture** and **strengths-based approaches**
- Shifting the conversation towards **teacher core qualities and character strengths** through deep dives into **professional identity and stance**.

> A much larger number of new teachers will enter the profession in the next 5-10 years than in the past 20 years. The entry of substantial numbers of new teachers with up-to-date skills and fresh ideas has the potential to substantially renew the schools. However, if teaching is not perceived as an attractive profession, and teaching does not change in fundamental ways, there is a risk that the quality of schools will decline. There are high stakes in teacher policy. (OECD, Teachers Matter, 2005)

The issues of recruitment, retention and attrition are not new to the education sector – but current challenges in staff shortages, teacher morale and recruitment are particularly acute. One in five Australian teachers are working 50+ hours per week. Their work is highly complex, and increasingly difficult. They have increased

responsibilities, accountabilities and exist in an industry marked by significant disparities from public to private, metropolitan to regional, rural and remote contexts. A large number of teachers leave within the first five years of entering the profession, with another significant attrition after 10 years' service. The challenges of the ongoing teacher shortage and retention, and the impact of COVID-19 are pervasive, with a number of researchers (Diliberti et al., 2021; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; Hargreaves & Blais, 2021; Tsotetsi & Mile, 2021; Zamarro et al., 2021) flagging a "perfect storm".

'Australia's teachers suffer from poor professional status. A lack of respect, problems with recruitment, poor pay (relative to other professions), high workload, conflicting demands and now the pandemic, have conspired to create a perfect storm.

A range of data and reports suggest the scale of the emerging teacher shortage will be serious. Low completion rates of teacher degrees (fewer than 60% of those who started the degree) alongside rising child and youth demographic trends mean many schools, particularly those in rural areas, will find things even more difficult over the next few years.' (Wilson & Carabetta, 2022).

Rinke (2007) refers to a U-shaped curve of teacher attrition with those under 30 and those over 50 most likely to leave; and those teachers with higher qualifications more likely to leave the profession.

MMEC's experience in working with thousands of teachers – from those within the first five years of entering the profession to those working as system leaders – indicates that programs that utilise mentoring and coaching, provide customised and relevant professional learning sustained over time, informed by comprehensive scaffolds for wellbeing and networking through establishing a community of practice, make a substantial difference to confidence, capability and retention.

In this Discussion Paper, we are specifically responding to the following *Key Actions* and draw upon our expertise and coalface experience to highlight further considerations.

Key Actions Within the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

This submission specifically targets the following priority areas and actions:

Priority Areas and Key Actions
Improving teacher supply
• Action 5: a focus on providing mentoring, school-based support and pathways for para-professionals into teaching   • Action 8: trialling new ways of attracting and keeping teachers in the schools that need them most, particularly mentoring
Strengthening initial teacher education
• Action 10: strengthening initial teacher education programs to deliver effective classroom ready teachers, with particular attention to teaching reading, literacy and numeracy, classroom management, cultural responsiveness, teaching students with diverse needs and working with families/carers
Better understanding future teacher workforce needs
• Action 23: a focus on the development of initiatives to retain teachers who are considering leaving the profession and attract qualified teachers back to the profession.
Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession
• Action 25: develop national guidelines to support early career teachers and new school leaders including mentoring and induction   • Action 28: Develop micro-credentials and expand the Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) to enhance teachers' access to quality professional development.

2   Matters for Consideration

We seek to leverage the targeted priority areas and highlighted actions above and also expand the discussion to incorporate some additional considerations.

Priority Area/s 2. Improving teacher supply; and 6. Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession

Coaching and mentoring

Addressed to an extent in **Key Actions 5, 8 and 25**, mentoring is known to be highly effective in positively influencing the way teachers feel about their own practice and the profession itself.

However, we propose the recipients of the coaching and mentoring be expanded to include teachers, and school leaders at all stages of their careers.

Instituting comprehensive coaching and mentoring programs for school leaders, middle leaders and early career teachers to support them in their practice, helps them to plan and implement sustainable change and to lead and teach in complex times. Research indicates a strong correlation between the mentoring experiences and wellbeing of teachers (Kutsyuruba, Godden, Bosica, 2019). Mentoring (and coaching) in the education landscape continues to galvanise researchers' interest worldwide.

The impetus for this research from the global perspective of the OECD to the localised view of PhD students seems to be three-fold. Firstly, the need to nurture the wellbeing of graduate teachers in challenging times, including the complexities of beginning a teaching career in a global pandemic. Secondly, the now well-understood correlation between teacher quality and outcomes for children and young people and thirdly, the deeply pragmatic necessity of teacher retention (Wilcoxen et al., 2019).

The importance of mentoring continues to be confirmed (Ingersoll & Strong, 2012) as one of the most effective mechanisms available to both whole systems and individual educational settings to retain and build the confidence of the teaching workforce.   The link between teacher quality (confidence and skills) and mentoring support is noted as a rationale to the efforts to improve mentoring practice.

'Mentors play a vital role in a novice teacher's development, providing valuable assistance with curriculum, instructional materials, assessment, classroom management, lesson planning, policies, and administrative tasks (Boreen et al., 2009; Conway, 2006; Daresh, 2003). They also provide emotional support (Boreen et al., 2009), help novice teachers build confidence (Daresh, 2003; Weimer, 2017), and can help reduce feelings of isolation among music teachers (Krueger, 1999, 2000). Hence, mentoring is a tremendous responsibility, and mentors must be able to manage multiple demands to effectively carry out their role' (Weimer, 2020).

Our experience in designing and implementing mentoring programs for graduate (provisionally registered) teachers, early childhood educators, regional system leaders, literacy and numeracy leaders and middle leaders in schools indicates that when personalised coaching and mentoring takes place, confidence and capacity grow. Retention soon follows.

Priority Area/s 3. Strengthening initial teacher education; and 6. Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession

Leading and teaching in complex times

Relevant to **Key Action 10,** we believe that teacher education and professional learning – both in pre-service teachers, but also as they rise through the ranks within the school - needs to support them in ways of navigating the complex challenges that pervade contemporary education, particularly in post-COVID times and provide them with the tools to plan for and respond to change.

Relevant to **Key Actions 23 and 28,** effective, inspirational, instructional and visionary school leaders are critical to addressing the teacher shortage. They are the custodians of school culture. They lead the educational vision and the strategies for achieving it within their learning organisation. They design, enact and provide the supports for the workers in their organisation. The OECD *Teachers Matter* report stated "Greater emphasis on school leadership would help address the need for teachers to feel valued and supported in their work." Rich, diverse, evidence-based and contemporary programs founded on supporting school leaders to be effective leaders is critical to teacher retention and the overall health of the profession.

Priority Area 5: Better understanding future teacher workforce needs

Teacher Wellbeing, Mental Health and Emotional Intelligence

The *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* would be further strengthened by including a focus on teacher wellbeing.

Teaching – and leading teachers, attracting and retaining them in the profession - is all about relationships. Teaching is a complex mix of cognitive, affective and motivational elements. The discourse of teacher well-being is now a feature of education systems worldwide (Viac & Fraser, 2020). A focus on teacher wellbeing and mental health is pivotal in normalising the sense of being overwhelmed or in addressing dips in morale in turbulent times. Teacher professional learning needs to take into account their "thinking, feeling and wanting…a shift in focus from the curriculum to the learner" (Korthagen, 2017). Designing programs that incorporate and embed wellbeing does not only focus on burn out and stress, they build resilience through positive psychology principles and enable teachers to flourish (Turner & Theilking, 2019).

Research on teacher burnout stresses the importance of job control and autonomy (Reese & Huecker, 2021). In developing our professional learning programs that are strengths- and evidence-based, we stress positive mindset because it privileges self-efficacy and control rather than being the victim of one's surroundings (Reese & Huecker, 2021). Resilience has been demonstrated to maximise commitment, job satisfaction, wellbeing and engagement (Mansfield et al., 2016). It is variously described as a capacity, process and outcome. Resilience strategies can include seeking allies and buffers, advocating for resources and forming teacher peer groups (Castro et al., 2010). The capacity for resilience can be built through:
- building personal resources (e.g. motivation; social and emotional competence)
- understanding ways to mobilise relationships and support networks

- developing a range of adaptive coping strategies e.g., problem solving, time management, maintaining work-life balance (Mansfield et al., 2016).

Resilience can be broadly conceived as a reaction to pressure. The new programs designed by MMEC stem from this focus on the power of a growth mindset and consider twenty-first-century capabilities and innovations in teacher preparation programs (White & McCallum, 2020).

Further to the focus on wellbeing, a study by Shields and Murray (2017) reinforces the importance of effective mentoring practice from the perspective of beginning teachers, and identifies:

'four types of support that are important to beginning teachers … and these were subsequently developed into four themes:
1. *"Belonging" support (this featured events that demonstrated to beginning teachers that they were wanted in the classroom and school and made them feel welcome).*
2. *Emotional support (this featured giving encouragement and boosting confidence levels).*
3. *Pedagogical support (this featured passing on advice and guidance to support beginning teachers' development in their classroom practice).*
4. *"Space" support (this featured giving beginning teachers the freedom and autonomy to try out their own ideas)'. (Shields & Murray, 2017)*

Complementing the emphasis on the individual practices of mentoring, a study of the Career Advancement and Development of Recruits and Experienced (CADRE) Teachers in the United States (Wilcoxen et al., 2019) identified positive outcomes for beginning teachers, including feeling empowered and supported in their wellbeing, as a result of their participation in a structured (12 month) induction model (which including mentoring) boasting a 100 per cent retention over 25 years.

'Vital to empowering beginning teachers and supporting their well-being is the use of both educative mentoring and multiple forms of coaching. The CADRE Project has been cognizant of beginning teachers' developmental needs in using mentoring and coaching to develop their resiliency.

… it is clear the CADRE Project has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on teachers' well-being and career trajectories'(Wilcoxen et al., 2019).

Increasingly, an assessment of emotional intelligence (EI) is a precursor to employment as a teacher. High EI is important for teacher wellbeing, engagement, interpersonal relationships, job satisfaction and psychosocial development (Mansfield et al., 2016). Teachers use their EI skills in adapting to new situations, innovating and problem-solving, leading groups and assisting students. Many studies posit that teachers need an awareness and knowledge of emotions including recognising their own emotions and how they impact on self and others to be successful in teaching students (Turner & Stough, 2020). This extends to the capacity to generate positive emotions (Mansfield et al. 2016).

EI is neither genetically determined nor a fixed trait and can be taught (Turner & Stough, 2020). MMEC's experience attests that there is a place for explicit professional learning in seeking help, demonstrating advocacy, problem solving, managing difficult relationships and actively seeking rejuvenation and renewal (Castro et al., 2010). Teacher self-efficacy is one of the powerful influences on teachers' effectiveness with students (Pendergast et al., 2011) and is a key to retention.

Understanding culture and strengths-based practice

Enabling educators to understand the place, influence and impact of culture enabling teachers to flourish in the profession. Developing and sustaining an intentionally supportive workplace culture is a strong predictor for teacher retention (Buchanan, 2010). The game-changer is shifting the dialogue from a deficit-driven, problems-of-practice lens to one of strengths.

Teacher core qualities and character strengths; Professional identity and professional stance

Perceptions of success and feelings of self-worth consistently rate highly as factors which positively impact retention. Fostering enduring school partnerships with pre-service providers can serve to build relationship and celebrate the small, everyday successes that lead to a greater overall feeling of identity as a teacher (Dabrowski, 2021). Teachers' professional identity is complex – it is difficult to measure, contextual, dependent on intrapersonal and interpersonal factors.

Teachers with a strong sense of agency are proactive rather than reactive. They confidently make decisions, take initiative and set goals, individually and collectively (Imants & Van Der Wal, 2020). Building a sense of agency can be practically achieved by building in networks that promote formal and informal feedback that are strengths-based; confidence building; encouraging reflection; inclusive of multiple strategies to meet the needs of learners; understanding of the way schools work; and supportive in terms of guidance, feedback, correction and development (Naidoo & Wagner, 2020). Professionals have specific knowledge which they utilise to make sound judgments, specialised training; characteristics that are unique to their field; and standards to which they are accountable (Creasy, 2015). A professional demonstrates behaviours which portray the knowledge and skills of the profession. Understanding teachers' professional identity is essential as it 'provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of how to be, how to act, and how to understand their work and their place in society' (Shayshon & Popper-Giveon, 2017). Developing pedagogical knowledge and skills and critically understanding how to and where to use these is important in forming teacher identify and feelings of success and professional status (Shanks et al., 2020).

3   Conclusion

A one-size-fits all approach does not serve the profession well. Quality professional learning needs to bridge the gap between theory and practice – programs that leverage the core qualities of the educator, their sense of identity, beliefs, competencies, behaviour and the characteristics of the environment, such as a classroom or school. Professional learning that provides coherence – builds capacity and drives retention.

The Mott MacDonald Education Consultancy is committed to designing, developing and facilitating excellent professional learning programs for all Australian educators.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our expertise and offerings to help make a difference through education with you.

About Us

The Mott MacDonald Education Consultancy currently manages high stakes major projects in education, training and capability uplift for government clients that target:

- 2000+ Graduate Teachers
- 1500+ Mentor Teachers
- Professional Learning Communities across hundreds of schools
- Building capacity of hundreds of school leaders to drive whole school improvement
- Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Coaching for over 500 middle leaders in schools
- Professional learning for over 250 regional system leaders
- Professional learning for 480 teachers of Applied Learning

See the following Appendix for sample case studies.

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5 Appendices - Case Studies of MMEC's experience

Case Study 1: Providing guidance on varied and engaging delivery methods

Project Theme
Building Capacity for Excellence

Client Type
A Department of Education

The program - $1m+

This program aims to equip school leaders and specialist teachers with knowledge and skills needed to motivate and enable their school communities to commit to sustained, long-term organisational change that leads to improvement in teacher practice and student outcomes.

As a delivery partner, we developed online modules, which were strategically designed to make use of a variety of delivery methods to maximise engagement from participants. As such, the modules were accessible through a digital learning environment consisting of a Learning Management System (LMS), the Office365 suite (Word, Excel and PowerPoint), and utilised a video-conferencing platform to enable synchronous and asynchronous discussions among participants, differentiated learning pathways, and a variety of learning and assessment activities.

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Case Study 2: Strengthening the development of staff through one-to-one and group coaching

Project Theme
Coaching to build capacity

Client Type
A government department

The program $900k+

This coaching program aims to provide one-to-one and group coaching to strengthen the professional development of participants. Mott MacDonald Education hosts a highly skilled and diverse coaching panel with extensive experience in focused setting, many of whom have led the strategies in their profession.

The coaching sessions include individual, small group sessions and a program targeting coaching-capability-building; tailored and adapted based of the individual's improvement focus and requirements.

Whether the focus is building capability or providing direct teaching support to students, or both; our coaches work closely with participants to identify practical steps and effective strategies that can be readily implemented in their professional environment.

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Case Study 3: Instilling the importance of mentoring

Project Theme
Developing mentoring capacity in experienced teachers
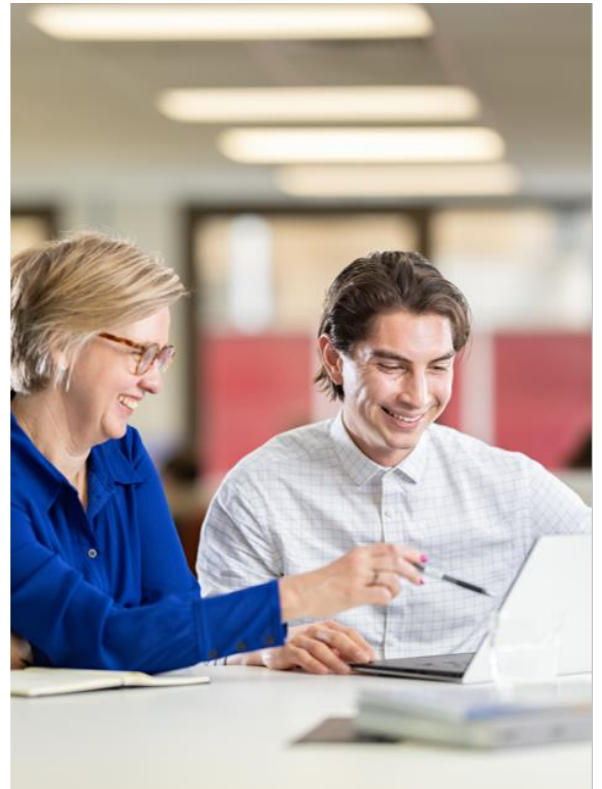
Client Type
A Department of Education

The program $2m+
This program aims to integrate our client's efforts to support early career teachers in their entry into the profession by providing a consistent message to participants from a variety of background about the importance of the mentoring role.

The program consists of state-wide teacher mentor programs that target participants across all education settings.

The programs are conducted as a two-day workshop incorporating an online blended learning approach, with another course as a one-day refresher course for participants who have previously completed the two-day course and require an update to refresh their knowledge and skills. The refresher course also includes online blended learning components.

Case Study 4: Supporting, developing and inspiring early career professionals

Project Theme
Supporting beginning teachers in the first and second years of their teaching career – two state-wide programs

Client Type
A Department of Education

**Two programs $5.5m+**
These state-wide program aim to support and develop beginning participants in the first two years of their teaching career.

The program includes over 3000 participants – graduate teachers and their experienced teacher mentors. The professional learning program provides a cutting edge and unprecedented focus on supporting, developing and inspiring the participants.

Included is the design and delivery of face-to-face and workshops, online learning modules, webinars and content expert videos. Leading teachers play a pivotal role in professional learning design through a collaborative co-design process. The program also provides support and learning for mentor and leading teachers through workshops and resources and includes evaluation and feedback loops, that are used to inform the development of deliverables through a cyclical, iterative process.

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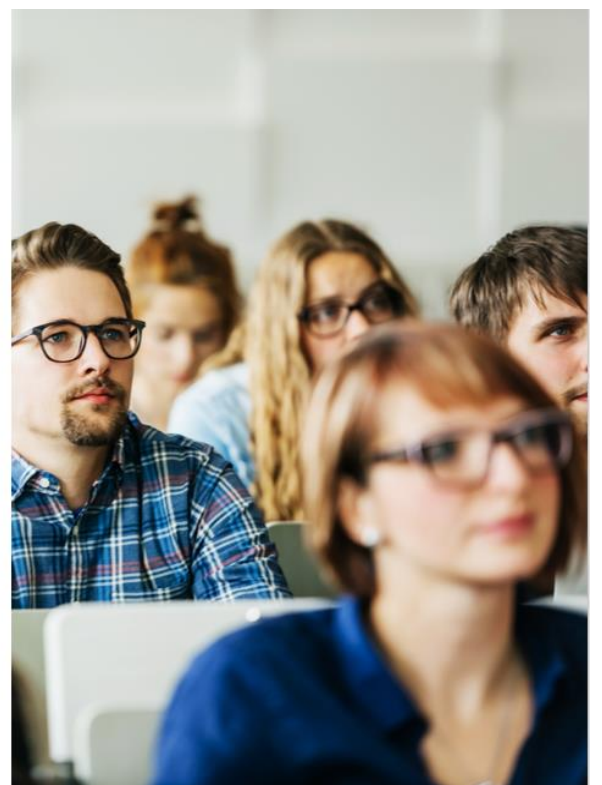
Case Study 5: Building the capability of the workforce

Project Theme
Building capacity of vocational education and applied learning teachers

Client Type
A Department of Education

The program $1.5m+
This program aims to build capability, resources and networking for participants in their professional field. The program consists of online modules, online workshops and webinars with a total of almost 500 participants overall.

Modules are accessible through a learning management system and allow for all participants to connect, engage and support one another throughout the program.

The professional learning program is designed to be relevant for participants today and for those dealing with curriculum changes in future years.

Case Study 6: Shaping organisational leadership for the present and the future

Project Theme
Creating great leaders and resilient schools

Client Type
A Department of Education

The program $500k+
This program is designed for participants to build their knowledge on the processes and requirements of reviewing school processes, including Child Safe standards.

The project includes blended learning and provides additional resources in a learning management system which participants can access at any time.
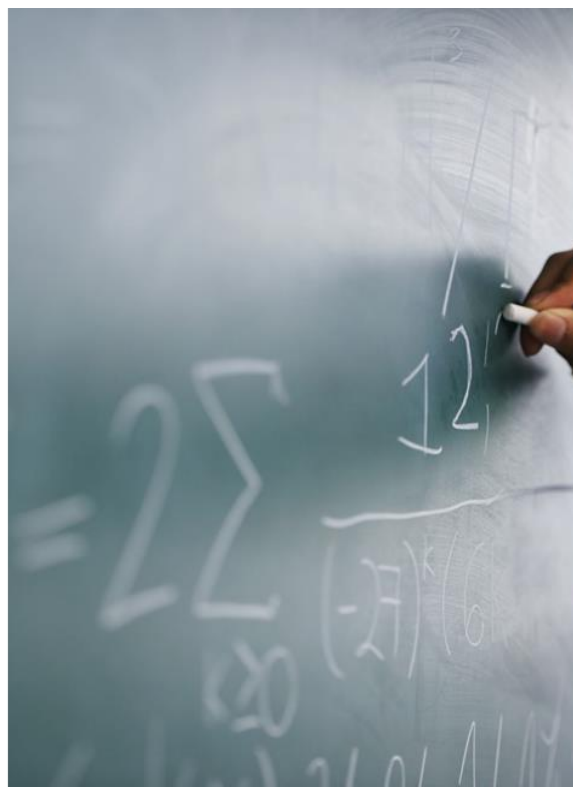
Case Study 7: Implementing an improvement-focused approach

Project Theme
Building capacity for strategic improvement and impact

Client Type
A Department of Education

The program $10m+
This model provides a system-wide school improvement-focused approach to professional learning including mechanisms for embedding this is school culture and practice sustainability, and with measurable impact.

The initiative includes professional learning and resources enabling participants to work collaboratively to share best practice and improve student learning.

Targeted professional learning sessions and in-school coaching support school leadership teams to address problems of practice and plan effective strategies for action.

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