



Raising the Status of Teaching

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment

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1.1 Introduction

The low status of teaching is a pressing issue for policy makers in Australia. Teachers feel their work is under-valued; tertiary scores to enter teaching are falling; and the best and brightest are increasingly rejecting the opportunity to teach.

The low status of teaching is a symptom of deeper issues with the way teaching is organised today. Teachers who do well are not recognised for their efforts. There are limited opportunities for career advancement. And top teachers work isolated in their classrooms and are weighed down by heavy administrative loads.

Teaching needs to move from a model of professionals working in isolation to one that is more collegiate and systematic. Jobs that are complex tend to have high professional standards, intensive on-the-job training, evidence-informed practice, and the right incentives and accountability measures to produce the best results.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet or further assist the Committee as it conducts its important inquiry in 2019.

1.2 Raising teacher status will improve teaching

Raising the status of teachers is more than an image problem because of the complex relationship between perceived status, who goes into (and stays in) teaching, and the ways in which teachers do their daily work.

There are two distinct benefits to raising teacher status. First, it would make teaching more attractive. More talented young students would enter teaching, thereby boosting the quality of the teaching workforce. This is a key issue given that more than 40 per cent of student teachers in Australia today have an entry score of less than 70.¹ The best education systems in the world attract most of their teachers from top graduates.²

Second, to lift teacher status requires making fundamental changes to the job itself – the pay, career, appraisal and development structures. Such changes would empower existing teachers to be more effective.

But policy makers should not expect raising teacher status to have big benefits for retention – because retention rates are not unusually low in teaching. While some have made anecdotal claims that up to 40 per cent of new teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years³, ABS census data shows that this number is far smaller. Of those working full time in both census years, only 13 per cent of school teachers aged 20 – 24 years in 2011 had

¹ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, (2018).

² Barber & Mourshed, (2007).

³ Gallant & Riley, (2014).

left by 2016.⁴ Older teachers are also unlikely to leave the profession, with a recent Melbourne institute study finding that about 14 per cent of all teachers go on long term leave, retire or quit the profession each year, compared to 17 per cent of nurses.⁵ Policy attention is better directed to issues other than teacher retention.

1.3 Find out what works in attracting top graduates

As a first step, the Inquiry team should examine the existing research on what factors raise teacher status and influence high performers to take up a job in teaching and then stay in it. Deeply understanding the reasons why high flyers do or don't enter teaching is necessary to identify what government solutions are likely to work best.

For example, a small sample of two studies show that more top graduates would be likely to select teaching if there were better opportunities to:

- Advance in a teaching career
- Receive better pay
- Work in a more professional environment, and
- Work in a job perceived by others as being a sign of success.⁶

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2016).

⁵ This includes teachers who take a break but later return to the profession. Jha & Ryan, (2017, p.9).

But more research is needed on the views of high-performing graduates at school and university, on what factors influence their future career choices.

In addition, policy makers should also explore the factors that matter to current high-performing teachers, with a focus on the changes that would make teaching more rewarding and satisfying.

1.4 Reform areas

Many of the policy levers that could improve the status of the teaching profession are in areas of state government responsibility. This section first discusses state government recommendations, and then a discrete number of policy opportunities for the Commonwealth.

1.4.1 State Government actions

The Inquiry should recommend that state governments work in the following areas to raise teacher status:

1. **Increase the selectivity of teaching** by strengthening requirements to (i) enter initial teacher education, and then (ii) gain employment in a school. State governments should support a minimum Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) for Year 12 students to enter undergraduate teaching programs, as well as require new teachers to pass graduate proficiency tests at teacher registration.

⁶ Two relevant studies McKinsey, (2010), a survey of 900 top university graduates in the USA in 2011; and Department of Education Science and Training, (2006), a focus group with top students.

2. **Create better career pathways for high performing teachers**, giving them more responsibilities for developing the teaching workforce. Often the best teachers need to move into more managerial principal roles if they want to keep progressing in responsibility and pay, rather than roles that enable them to stay working as teachers. Our past work has recommended two new teacher positions: an elite cohort of ‘master teachers’ who are experts in their subject fields and who lead pedagogy across schools; and ‘instructional leaders’ who lead professional learning in schools.⁷
3. **Strengthen teacher appraisal and performance culture** so that effective teacher practices are developed, recognised and rewarded. To improve, teachers need better feedback on their practice.⁸
4. **Fix teacher pay** by offering a higher salary to top teachers that is competitive with high-flying jobs elsewhere. Australia’s teacher pay scale is flat relative to other countries. Australia’s top teacher salary is 40 per cent higher than the starting salary, well below the OECD average of 80 per cent.⁹ And Australia’s secondary teachers typically reach the top pay bracket within seven years, well below the OECD average of 27 years.¹⁰

5. **Improve the professional work environment of teachers** so that it is a desirable career path. There should be better opportunities for on-the-job learning about instruction, interpreting data, and integrating evidence into new ways of working. Australia should learn from teacher development structures and processes used in high-performing systems.¹¹
6. **Better value teacher time** so that the job is more desirable to existing and future workers. A key issue is to better standardise teacher materials, with more use of high-quality, tried-and-tested support materials would enhance student learning and reduce ‘reinvention of the wheel’. Steps should also be taken where possible to reduce the burden of teachers’ administrative workloads so that time is better allocated to high impact tasks.¹²

For further detail on the above reforms, see Grattan Institute’s *State Orange Book 2018* and past reports.

1.4.2 Commonwealth Government actions

Most reforms to raise teacher status fall within state government responsibilities. The federal government should not get heavily involved in the operation of schools, as discussed in our 2018 report *The Commonwealth’s role in schooling*.

⁷ For discussion see Grattan Institute report Goss & Sonnemann, (2016).

⁸ See Grattan Institute report Jensen, (2011).

⁹ Ratio of annual statutory teachers’ salaries at top of scale (maximum qualifications) to starting salary (minimum qualifications) in public institutions. OECD, (2018).

¹⁰ OECD, (2018, p. 363).

¹¹ See Grattan Institute report Jensen, (2012).

¹² See Grattan Institute reports Goss & Hunter, (2015); Jensen, (2014).

Instead, we recommend the federal government take a number of discrete actions (only) to support raising teacher status. Such actions are in areas of existing federal responsibility, or where there are clear advantages of national scale.

Specifically, we suggest the federal government do the following to help raise teacher status:

- **Take an active role in increasing the selectivity of teaching** by encouraging higher entry standards to initial teacher education and delivering tough standards in new graduate proficiency testing.
- **Continue to develop new national assessment tools** for teachers to use in the classroom (in collaboration with state governments) to help improve teachers daily working environment and the attractiveness of the job.
- **Continue to build and disseminate the national evidence base** on what works to make teaching a more evidence-informed profession.

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