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Making the Most of Highly Effective Classroom Teachers

Submission to NSW Department of Education

Rewarding Excellence in Teaching Consultation Process

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Summary

This submission provides Grattan Institute's brief response to the options outlined in the NSW Department of Education's *Rewarding Excellence in Teaching – Options Paper*, published on 1 November 2022.

Grattan Institute recommends an overhaul of the teacher career path in Australia to establish new selective and prestigious positions for highly effective classroom teachers, so that Australia's top teachers are better recognised, rewarded, and deployed to improve teaching quality in all schools. Grattan's research suggests that the creation of these positions could help lift teaching quality across the whole workforce and improve student learning (see Grattan Institute: [*Top Teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*](#) (2020) and [*Attracting High Achievers to Teaching*](#) (2019)).

While the NSW Department of Education's Options Paper identifies a range of reforms that could help strengthen the NSW school education system, Grattan also recommends the department:

- Ensure the new school-based instructional roles for highly effective classroom teachers are tightly linked to subject-specific expertise.
- Ensure the design of the new school-based instructional pathway role provides sufficient collaboration time to allow for regular work directly with other teachers.
- Provide ongoing professional learning and guidance for highly effective teachers in these new school-based roles.
- Create 'Master Teacher' roles to support and guide the new school-based instructional roles for highly effective teachers.

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1 The Options Paper identifies several strong reform proposals

The NSW Department of Education's Options Paper identifies a range of reforms that could help strengthen the NSW school education system by creating a new 'instructional' career pathway that includes new school-based roles for highly effective classroom teachers.

Grattan recognises the strengths of the proposals outlined in the Options Paper, which seek to:

- improve the career pathways for highly effective classroom teachers by creating an instructional pathway option in which teachers are able to use their expertise to build system-wide teaching capacity while retaining a direct connection to the classroom.
- increase opportunities for all teachers – not just ITE (initial teacher education), early career, and out-of-field teachers – to participate in effective school-based professional development, including classroom observation, feedback and coaching, and collaborative lesson planning led by highly effective teachers.
- increase remuneration for highly effective classroom teachers in new roles up to \$147,000 per annum.

Grattan Institute research suggests that lifting salaries for top teachers is important to recognise the increased responsibilities assigned to the new roles, signal the prestige attached to the roles, and increase the attractiveness of teaching to high achievers.

- provide up to 0.5 release from face-to-face teaching to support the 'collaboration' work of highly effective classroom teachers in these new roles.
- establish a two-stage process for appointing highly effective classroom teachers to the proposed new roles.

Developing a strong pipeline of applicants with the requisite expertise and skills will be critical to the success of the NSW model. The proposed two-stage recruitment process would help ensure the NSW Department of Education, rather than individual schools, is primarily responsible for developing the pipeline and creating a 'pool' of recognised expert teachers (as per the proposed option on p. 11).

Appointment to defined roles in schools based on an open, competitive, merit-based selection process through the proposed 'Stage 2' would then help ensure that the new roles are well-targeted to schools' needs and more equitably distributed across the NSW school system. Further, the proposal to appoint to fixed-term roles aligned to a school's SIP (Strategic Improvement Plan) would ensure that roles remain targeted to the greatest areas of need in each school as they change over time (as per the proposed option on p. 18).

- align with the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) framework, while recognising the need for the

HALT accreditation process to be streamlined and minimally burdensome, while maintaining rigor.

Grattan Institute recommends that further consideration be given to augmenting the HALT accreditation process to incorporate subject-specific 'elaborations' to recognise the importance of subject-specific pedagogical content knowledge in effective teaching and professional development (discussed further below).

2 Recommendations to further enhance the role of top teachers in NSW

In refining the proposals further, Grattan Institute recommends that the NSW Department of Education give additional consideration to the following issues:

2.1 Ensure the new school-based instructional roles for highly effective classroom teachers are tightly linked to subject-specific expertise

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 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’.

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.² Fewer Australian teachers, on completing their university training, indicate they feel prepared in PCK (63 per cent) than the OECD average (71 per cent).³

Grattan Institute urges the NSW Department of Education to strengthen the requirement that the proposed new instructional pathway roles for highly effective teachers are linked to strong subject-specific expertise. Ideally this would be supported by the development of subject-specific ‘elaborations’ that augment the AITSL Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) standards, as well as the mandatory inclusion of subject-specific experts on the selection panels used to appoint teachers to these new roles.

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

³ OECD (2019) *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and Schools Leaders as Lifelong Learners*. Table I.4.20.

2.2 Ensure the design of the new school-based instructional pathway role provides sufficient collaboration time to allow for regular work directly with other teachers

The Options Paper suggests that the new roles could have variable release time from face-to-face teaching, ranging from no release time to up to 0.5 release from a full-time classroom load.

Given a key objective of the new role is to build high-quality teaching practice within and across schools, it is essential that the new roles are allocated sufficient release time to allow for regular training, mentoring, coaching, and collaboration with other teachers in a school.

Grattan Institute's research suggests that past instructional leader roles in Australia have suffered from the insufficient allocation of time to work effectively with other teachers. This has undermined the potential of these roles to lead to positive change in schools.⁴

In calling for the creation of new 'Instructional Specialist' roles, Grattan Institute recommended teachers in these roles split their time between classroom teaching and instructional leadership activities, including taking on clear responsibility for demonstrating effective practice (in their own and others' classrooms), coaching, mentoring, training, and observing teachers and providing feedback. This should include regular opportunities to work 'shoulder-to-shoulder' with other teachers in their classrooms as well as lead collaborative planning, PLC (professional learning community) meetings, and assessment moderation sessions.

It is difficult to see how the proposed new roles in NSW would allow for such activities in the cases where no additional 'collaboration' time is attached to them.

2.3 Provide ongoing professional learning and guidance for highly effective teachers in these new school-based roles

To ensure the effectiveness and credibility of the new instructional 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. For example, more than half of teachers surveyed by Grattan Institute in 2019 for our Top Teachers report (2020) 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).

The integrity of the new instructional pathway in NSW would be quickly undermined if teachers in the new roles routinely provided inconsistent advice, or were perceived as lacking the requisite knowledge, skills, or capacity to develop others. To mitigate against this risk, the NSW Department of Education should commit to providing significant and ongoing investment in professional learning, as necessary, to ensure all teachers in the

⁴ Goss, P. and Sonnemann, J. (2020). *Top teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*. Grattan Institute, p. 20.

new roles have strong subject-specific pedagogical content knowledge, and coaching and mentoring skills.

The use of the 'two-stage' appointment process noted in the Options Paper (p. 7) would provide an opportunity for the Department to ensure potential applicants have the requisite knowledge and skills prior to applying for a school-based role. It would also enable the Department to upskill potential applicants (as necessary) in areas that align with system-level priorities.

To protect the integrity of the roles, the Department should also establish robust performance management processes to ensure successful applicants maintain high-quality performance standards in schools, along with ongoing opportunities for further development.

2.4 Create 'Master Teacher' roles to support and guide the new school-based instructional roles for highly effective teachers.

In addition to the creation of school-based instructional roles for highly effective teachers, as proposed in the Options Paper, Grattan Institute recommends the creation of a much smaller number of non-school based 'Master Teacher' positions. Under the Grattan Institute model, these positions would occupy the pinnacle of the 'instructional' teacher career path as the pedagogical leader in their specific subject area, be limited to a very small number of teachers (about 1 per cent) and be remunerated at about \$80,000 more than the top rung of the teacher salary scale.⁵ Master Teachers would be based in a region and would work closely with a number of schools and

teachers in the new school-based instructional roles to improve teaching practice. They would have no direct teaching load.

Master Teachers would help bring rigour, excellence, coherence, and consistency to the instructional career pathway. Working together with teachers in the new school-based instructional pathway roles, Master Teachers would help develop critical information flows that encompass the entire NSW system.

For example, Master Teachers would have a key role in developing and guiding teachers in the new school-based instructional pathway roles, would help balance system-level and school-based priorities, and connect research and evidence to schools; while teachers in the new school-based instructional pathway roles would communicate school needs and promising practices to Master Teachers. Master Teachers would also support peer collaboration with other experts in the same field to share information and generate new knowledge.

If new Master Teacher roles are not created, the NSW Department should carefully consider creating alternative communication, professional development, and accountability mechanisms to ensure excellence and alignment of new school-based instructional roles. Without these mechanisms, there is a risk that teachers appointed to the new roles will lack the coherence and guidance necessary to ensure improvements across all schools.

⁵ Goss, P. and Sonnemann, J. (2020). *Top teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching*. Grattan Institute.