



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession

Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training

8 January 2019

Executive Summary

The University of Melbourne welcomes the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's Inquiry into the 'Status of the Teaching Profession'.

The quality of learning outcomes in our schools is directly linked to the quality of the graduates who enter the teaching workforce, and to the ongoing support that teachers receive when they are working in the nation's classrooms. It is appropriate that the Committee examine the extent to which new teachers possess the skills needed to be effective, the extent to which our schools are able to attract and retain teaching talent, and the extent to which teachers are supported so that they continue to develop throughout their careers. If a career in teaching is not seen a rewarding and high-status option, then the learning outcomes of Australian children will suffer, along with the nation's prosperity.

The University of Melbourne's teacher education programs are all offered at the postgraduate level. The Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) offers three postgraduate professional entry clinical teaching courses of study: the Master of Teaching for those who want to become teachers; the Master of Clinical Teaching for practicing teachers; and the Master of Instructional Leadership for educational leaders. The approach has added diversity to Australia's initial teacher education offerings, and is attracting people from a wider variety of backgrounds into teaching, including many with a successful career in another field wishing to make a career change.

The Melbourne Graduate School of Education recognises that teaching is a complex and challenging profession that requires high calibre individuals. For that reason, we only offer initial teacher education (ITE) as a graduate course and have created the Teacher Capability and Assessment Tool to aid candidate selection. The tool supports a rigorous and multi-dimensional selection process that assesses a candidate based on their likelihood of academic success and on their possessing the professional competencies required for effective teaching. The tool includes consideration of non-cognitive attributes, such as communication and resilience, and has broadened selection into teacher education, attracting more mature aged entrants looking to move into teaching from another professional field.

The following submission identifies a number of policy interventions that would contribute to the attractiveness of the teaching profession as well as the quality and effectiveness of teaching in Australia's schools. The University of Melbourne argues that a greater emphasis on teacher empowerment and innovation, as well as restructuring the teaching workforce to introduce more complementary roles for teaching paraprofessionals, would enhance the teacher experience and drive student outcomes.

The following comments provide an outline of two programs initiated by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education that seek to build professional networks among the teaching workforce. The submission also discusses the significant out-of-hours burden imposed on English as an Additional Language (EAL) and other language teachers and suggests that language programs be better integrated into the curricula of schools to address this issue.

Through MGSE, the University of Melbourne enjoys considerable research expertise on the issues raised in this inquiry. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the potential reforms raised here.

For further information, or to discuss the submission, Dr. Jim Watterston, Dean, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, can be contacted at jim.watterston@unimelb.edu.au or on (03) 8344 8331.

Recommendations

Term of Reference 1

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government:

- support teacher empowerment and professional freedom,
- enhance and incentivise leadership development within schools, kindergartens, preschools and other early education centres,
- provide incentives and recognition for commitment to ongoing professional growth,
- move towards a more differentiated workforce within our schools, including introducing more complementary roles for teaching paraprofessionals, and tiers of qualification,
- enact changes to early childhood education, including lifting salaries so that they are competitive with other professional fields and introducing systematic mentoring for early childhood educators.

Term of Reference 2

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government consider ways of helping to build stronger professional school improvement networks within Australia's teaching workforce.

Term of Reference 3

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government encourage more fully developed integration of EAL and foreign languages into school curricula.

Term of Reference 4

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government consider staffing policies that will assist schools to attract and retain quality teachers, including formalising support for postgraduate study and professional development through study leave and course fee subsidies, while considering linking the content of study to the needs of the school.

Response to Terms of Reference

1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.

The attractiveness of teaching as a profession is critical to the learning outcomes of school students. Teaching now competes with a range of professional fields that are highly regarded, have good working conditions and are in many cases better remunerated than a career in teaching. If the teaching profession lags behind these fields in pay, conditions and status, then our schools will continue to miss out on the best and brightest teaching talent.

There are a number of possible interventions relating to the structure of our teaching workforce and to professional development that may enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession. These include:

- Supporting teacher empowerment and professional recognition
- Enhancing leadership development within schools
- Providing incentives and recognition for commitment to professional growth
- Moving towards a more differentiated workforce within our schools
- Significant enhancements to early childhood education

Supporting teacher empowerment and professional freedom

As with any professional field, a sense of career purpose and fulfillment depend upon teachers enjoying a degree of autonomy as well as opportunities to innovate within the role. A recent study by researchers in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education examined the factors that attract teachers or retain them in a school. It found that the career decisions of effective teachers were strongly influenced by “professional autonomy, opportunities for advancement and the perceived commitment of the school to innovation”.¹ In other words, good teachers are more likely to want to remain in a role if they perceive their environment to be conducive to career progress and to innovation in teaching delivery.

These findings encourage a focus on providing teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities, and on giving teachers greater autonomy relating to curriculum design and delivery. This would help to retain quality teaching staff, by fostering a sense of purpose and ownership of the work they do.

Enhancing leadership within schools

Creating more opportunities for leadership development and succession planning within schools would contribute to making a career in teaching a more attractive option for prospective entrants. The benefit of enhancing leadership opportunities within schools is two-fold. Firstly, those occupying leadership roles are a source of support and guidance for less experienced teachers. Secondly, leadership development opportunities themselves represent pathways for professional development. Consideration should be given to the following interventions to help enable leadership opportunities within schools:

- Including ‘Leadership development’ content in pre-service courses
- Developing and resourcing processes to identify readiness for leadership roles associated with teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and principals

¹ Rice, S. (2014), “Working to maximise the effectiveness of a staffing mix: what holds more and less effective teachers in a school, and what drives them away?”, *Educational Review* Vol.66, No.3, pp.311-329, p.313

- Developing explicit pastoral, curriculum and leadership career tracks
- Developing complementary leadership standards for middle leaders

Providing incentives and recognition for commitment to professional growth

Teachers should be encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities, and those who demonstrate an active commitment to professional growth should be recognised for this. Higher degrees in education and major research projects help to develop and maintain a professional community. Teachers should be supported to participate in postgraduate qualifications and research projects.

A more differentiated workforce within schools

There is an opportunity to restructure Australia's teaching workforce so as to introduce greater differentiation within it. Consideration should be given to increasing the number of paraprofessionals who undertake some of the work that fully-trained teachers currently do. This would free up teachers to spend more time with their students and so contribute to stronger educational outcomes. Paraprofessional educators supplement (rather than replace) the role of teachers. The responsibilities of paraprofessionals can vary significantly, but may include aiding teachers in the classroom, performing administrative work, supervising students outside of class, grading student work, and working with students with special needs.

Training courses would need to be developed to prepare paraprofessionals, with pathways through further study available for those who might later seek to become teachers. The credentialing framework would ideally be responsive to the potential diversity of paraprofessional workforce, allowing for upskilling and for 'stacked' credentials that add up to a higher qualification. Australia's nursing workforce has undergone this type of restructuring in recent decades, which may serve as a model for reforms to Australia's teaching workforce.²

The potential benefits of this shift include:

- raising requirements for entry to teaching education programs and (therefore) making those programs more attractive to prospective students
- encouraging a more dynamic teaching workforce that is more responsive to the needs of individual students
- improving the work conditions and the quality of professional experience for teachers
- clearer pathways for career progression
- a reduced workload for teaching staff
- more diverse workforce opportunities for those wanting to work in schools

Notwithstanding these potential benefits, this type of restructuring of the teaching workforce would need to be carefully considered so as to avoid unintended outcomes. The United Kingdom enacted similar changes under the Blair Government with mixed results. One of the problems encountered was that teachers were not adequately trained on how to properly utilise the assistance of paraprofessionals. For example, some paraprofessionals were tasked with providing instruction to students in most need of support, without having any formal training in this area.

An evaluation of the UK reforms identified these problems, which led to guidance material on how to make better use of paraprofessional staff. The lessons learnt from the experience in the UK would be valuable were Australia to embark on a similar restructuring of its workforce.

² <https://theconversation.com/to-raise-status-of-teaching-australia-needs-to-lift-pay-and-cut-teacher-numbers-63518>

Changes to early childhood education

Attracting and retaining teaching talent is particularly difficult at the early childhood level. One major impediment is the low level of remuneration for early childhood educators and preschool teachers. Consideration should be given to lifting salaries so that they are competitive with other professional fields. There is also a role for more systematic mentoring of Early Childhood education graduates to assist them to achieve full registration while also providing support post-registration.

Recommendation

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government:

- support teacher empowerment and professional freedom,
- enhance and incentivise leadership development within schools, kindergartens, preschools and other early education centres,
- provide incentives and recognition for commitment to ongoing professional growth,
- move towards a more differentiated workforce within our schools, including introducing more complementary roles for teaching paraprofessionals, and tiers of qualification,
- enact changes to early childhood education, including lifting salaries so that they are competitive with other professional fields and introducing systematic mentoring for early childhood educators.

2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.

The Melbourne School of Graduate Education has supported two initiatives that aim to build professional networks among the teaching workforce. The experience and success of these initiatives may help to inform broader network building interventions across Australia's schools sector.

The University of Melbourne Network of Schools

The University of Melbourne Network of Schools (UMNOS) is a network of over 100 schools who partner to address key educational challenges, coordinated by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. UMNOS was established in 2014, and enables collaboration between teachers and the research community to tackle the challenges facing schools in Victoria. It draws upon the expertise of University of Melbourne researchers as well as leaders and teachers in partner schools to help identify and implement approaches to teaching and learning that are tailored to the needs of a school community. Each participating school appoints an 'instructional coach' who works with colleagues and with others in the network to develop instructional strategies and evaluate interventions. Activities include:

- developing dashboards and other resources that focus on the use of school data
- developing regular monitoring of all students
- generating and sharing school-based solutions based on internal and external research
- evaluating all school-based implementations and outcomes
- linking school activities into the wider activities and resourcing of the University of Melbourne.

The key criteria for membership of UMNOS is a commitment to leading student learning and instruction.

Teacher as Artmaker Project (TAP)

The Teacher as Artmaker Project (TAP) is a significant research initiative conducted at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. TAP provides opportunities for Art educators to maintain an active art

practice during their teaching careers. Researchers involved in the Project have found that professional learning communities and schools can retain effective and engaged teachers for longer through continued professional learning intervention and targeted support approaches in both physical and virtual spaces. Significantly, even small amounts of practitioner activity, supported by physical and virtual networks, can increase the quality of teaching in our classrooms. While TAP is a network specifically for Art educators, there is an opportunity to apply this approach more broadly to support of networks of teachers working in other fields, such as music and physical education.

Recommendation

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government consider ways of helping to build stronger professional improvement networks within Australia's teaching workforce.

3. Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced.

As suggested above, a re-structuring of the teaching workforce offers the promise of reducing the administrative workload for teachers. While any teaching role will involve some administrative work, paraprofessional educators could take on much of this work. The out-of-hours burden associated with grading assessment pieces could also be reduced by allowing for this to be delegated to paraprofessionals where appropriate.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) and foreign languages

Language teaching is one area where the burden of non-teaching activity is often greater than it is for many other teachers, and where much of this activity is unnecessary. In many cases, language study is marginalised within individual schools. While language study and specialist English programs for immigrant, Indigenous and refugee students are well established in State and national curriculum documents, these programs remain vulnerable at the school level. Language teachers often feel compelled to advocate for the retention of these programs, and in some cases to seek evidence from academics that EAL and language programs do not detract from English literacy.

School leaders should seek to incorporate these language areas into school curriculum, as has happened for other learning areas. This would reduce the effort currently expended by teachers in continually justifying the maintenance of these programs.

Recommendation

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government encourage comprehensive integration of EAL and foreign languages into school curricula.

4. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

As suggested earlier, consideration should be given to workforce re-structuring that would help reduce the time spent on administrative tasks that do not specifically require the professional skills possessed by teachers. This would contribute towards addressing the problem of 'burn out' for early-career teachers.

There is significant public commentary concerning the factors that influence teacher preferences and retention levels within the profession. It is often noted that teachers typically display a preference for middle-class schools that are perceived to have fewer problems with student behaviour. However, the research in this area encourages a more nuanced picture of teacher preferences. For example, one study found that teachers who added most to their students' achievement levels were more likely

to remain in a school than teachers who added the least. This pattern was particularly evident in disadvantaged schools.³

Along these lines, researchers within the Melbourne Graduate School of Education have carried out a series of studies examining factors that impact on the decisions of effective teachers to remain in a given school or transfer to a different one, and how these differ from the factors that influence ineffective teachers. The findings are revealing. One study found that, relative to ineffective teachers, effective teachers were likely to emphasise professional factors (e.g. possibility for promotion, level of innovation within a school) as reasons for transferring to a new school. For example, at a secondary level, effective teachers were found to be “almost four times more likely [than ineffective teachers] to say that they wanted to teach somewhere with a really innovative approach to education”.⁴

A similar pattern is evident in reasons effective teachers give for wanting to remain in a given school, with emphasis placed on the capacity for professional development and innovation.

With regard to what may hold them in a school, the most effective teachers, both primary and secondary, appear to focus on improving professional and educational factors – the quality of the curriculum or the professional development offered – while the least effective were more likely to see the students as the problem, seeking a “better” student cohort, or more time away from them. This is in keeping with other findings from the study for secondary teachers: those with higher effectiveness scores were less likely to attribute scholastic failure to students’ attitudes or abilities than less effective teachers.⁵

The key point here is that good teachers tend to place importance on opportunities for career progression and professional development, and on the extent to which they afforded the sort of empowerment that allows for teaching innovation.

Given that effective teachers place high value on professional development, support for postgraduate study and for formal professional development opportunities would assist in retaining these teachers. This support may come in the form of study leave or of subsidising course fees. Consideration should be given to linking the content of supported study to the needs of the school, particularly in the case of disadvantaged schools.⁶

Recommendation

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Government consider staffing policies that will assist schools to attract and retain quality teachers, including formalising support for postgraduate study and professional development through study leave and course fee subsidies, while considering linking the content of study to the needs of the school.

³ Goldhaber *et. al.*, cited in Rice, S (2010) “Getting the best teachers into disadvantaged schools: differences in the professional and personal factors attracting more effective and less effective teachers to a school”, *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, Vol.9, No.3, pp.177-192, see p.178.

⁴ Rice (2010), “Getting the best teachers into disadvantaged schools”, p.185.

⁵ Rice (2014), “Working to maximise the effectiveness of a staffing mix”, p.319.

⁶ *Ibid.*