

Inquiry into Status of the Teaching Profession

Summary of issues arising from public hearings

Introduction

The inquiry to date has received 90 submissions and public hearings were held in six locations. The Committee was particularly interested in hearing from witnesses with teaching experience, and thanks those who took the time to contribute to the inquiry. Key issues arising from the public hearings are briefly canvassed below, and may assist in any future or further investigation.

1. Promotion of teaching and education, particularly in the media, by community leaders and politicians. Evidence of a deficit model.
2. Status of occupation remains high within communities however the social status of teaching has suffered greatly.
3. Need for higher levels of recognition of and respect for the profession.

Teacher Selection

4. Concern with the model for tertiary entry scores to teaching degrees:
 - international research which suggests entry benchmarks
 - individualised selection.
5. ATAR/OP reliability as an indication of who will be a good teacher.
6. Measures of graduate quality and need for confidence in measures.
7. The necessity for prerequisites such as Mathematics and English for initial teacher training. Some considered this to be essential while others argued that it makes little difference to teacher quality.
8. In the main, education courses in a university teaching degree are all mandatory. There are no electives. Many felt that this was risk averse and compliance driven.
9. The duration of the graduate degree programs of two years with a suggestion of a reduction to one year. It was suggested that the second year should integrate placement, study and a salary.

Induction and Mentoring

10. Teacher preparedness at the end of their degree for the nature of their work. What does it mean to be *ready* to be a teacher? Suggestion that first year teachers may benefit from a reduced load and more time with an experienced mentor.
11. The concept of providing a notional salary to all internships.

12. In accepting barriers exist there is an opportunity to develop incentives for schools to increase willingness and capacity to accept preservice teachers on placements, to increase options and diversity in training experiences available.
13. Proper induction and mentoring programs within schools are vital to better support teachers in their environments. Mentoring programs need to be fostered, funded and given time to happen. This may include stronger partnerships between universities and systems where students are starting to be inducted into the profession in their final year, through to their first three years of teaching.

Specialist Support

14. An increase of funding to schools to help manage the social, behavioural and health related issues of students would allow teachers to be freed up to teach. Teachers increasingly picking up roles that used to be parental roles, and are expected to solve problems that are beyond their training.
15. The value of specialist qualifications to provide a better service to students where mainstream teachers are asked to be everything to everyone. It was reported up to 40 per cent of students in some classes will have some kind of special need or learning difficulty. Rapidly there is generalising of special education, and a lack of qualified specialists. Similarly, it was suggested that teacher training include evidence-based reading instruction to screen and help children with learning difficulties.
16. Increased funding would provide for more administration staff within schools. A cut to red tape requirements would result in teachers being released from time spent in compliance, risk assessment and satisfying bureaucracies. There was a further desire to find ways to automate some of the clerical tasks which consume the time of teachers.
17. 'Extreme' issues around Language Other Than English teachers – in particular retention and quality of training. Language education needs to be taken seriously, and teachers need to be integrated in those schools. Also need to recontextualise new pedagogies that don't treat languages as an add-on to the curriculum but bring them into what schools are already doing, using content and language integrated into learning.

Teaching, Education and Student Data

18. There is a lack of data on the types of unpaid work being undertaken at home. As a result there is a need to quantify, report and address the 'invisible' workload that teachers are absorbing outside of school time. It is acknowledged that many teachers spend many hours per week outside of working hours marking, planning, contributing to individual learning plans, responding to parents, or meeting administrative requirements. If principals and school administrations are not aware of what is being done out of hours, then it isn't possible to introduce solutions.
19. *Datafication* of teaching was identified as a major issue. Professional judgement of teachers is being marginalised by data. Compliance reporting is a major impost on teachers' time.

20. Lack of visibility on how the data is being used, and how it informs teaching and education. Teachers would more readily accept the burden of the paperwork if they could see what happens afterwards. There is also a lack of data on the profession generally.
21. School and student data reporting systems have the same data being entered across multiple systems. There was a desire to be more efficient in data reporting, generally.
22. Similarly, ITC programs that assist teachers to automate the administrative workload could be implemented throughout Australia. For example, some teachers need to email parents to alert them that their child has not submitted an assessment item. Some of this is automated across Australia.

Professional Development and Leadership

23. Supporting continuous professional learning and development will ensure teachers are engaged as lifelong professional learners. Research methods to be included in undergraduate teaching degrees.
24. Permanency allows teachers to pursue a career trajectory, and lifts their self-esteem. Social, cultural and economic professional issues (including pay and conditions) around career trajectory were identified. Highly Accomplished Teachers and Lead Teachers Initiatives were cited.
25. Preparation of preservice principals to improve the quality of leadership by training principals prior to their appointment. The gap in Australian education is the identification, preparation and leadership training for people who can then aspire to the job.
26. There was a strong sense that successful schools require teachers' professional autonomy, and building relationships among teachers, the community and students. It is also about the quality of leadership and the culture of a school.

Early Childhood Teaching

27. Greater salary parity between early childhood teachers and school teachers is required.
28. Recognition of the vital importance of early childhood education (0 – 5 years) and the need to address the impact of lower pay rates for early childhood educators (long day care), likely to deter people from entering (or remaining in) this type of teaching.

Rural and Regional Teachers

29. Shortages of skilled specialist teachers may exist in regional areas.

30. Rural and regional universities are pivotal to attracting and retaining teachers in rural and regional areas. Suggestions include:

- Increasing opportunities for collaborating and a framework for clustering so that people within rural schools do not feel isolated;
- Strong relationships and connections with universities around preservice teachers going to rural schools;
- Recruitment, retention and developing some incentives so that people are encouraged to teach in rural areas;
- Raising the profile of educators in rural settings; and
- National recognition and mutual registration so that teachers can work across states.

Collaboration and Professional Learning Communities

31. Funding, structure and fostering of collaborative and professional learning communities (which include subject matter and leadership experts) during work time.

32. Team building around classrooms (involving support teachers, the classroom teacher and administrative support) is beneficial to both teaching and learning outcomes.

33. Models of co-teaching to enable teachers to share the teaching load and provide support to each other. Administrative staff could alleviate some of the current non-teaching burden faced by teachers.

34. The availability of part-time work is an emerging issue in the workforce, but is not currently accommodated in many school systems. Facilitation and support may help improve the culture of the profession.

35. Models of flexibility within schools, in areas such as school hours, school weeks and school terms, and the delivery of curriculum and customising content according to diversity in the classroom.

36. A good practice repository that both supports teaching research and helps schools share best practice.

Teacher Welfare

37. Teacher welfare is vital to ensuring teachers are retained and professionally supported.

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Chair
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