



Building capacity to support teacher quality



Office of the Clerk Assistant (Committees)
House of Representatives Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

20 December 2018

The Professional Teachers' Council NSW (PTCNSW) is the peak body for Professional Teacher Associations across all sectors of education in NSW. After surveying our members, we have collated a joint submission for the House of Representatives Committee to consider. Our responses are framed within the context of education and teaching in New South Wales. Should the committee require further input or seek clarification from PTCNSW please do not hesitate to make contact.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr Denis Mootz".

Dr Denis Mootz
President
PTCNSW

Association Responses

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

A. When considering the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, consideration should include raising the profile of the education community including the role of teaching as an essential component of community wellbeing.

1. A remuneration package that recognises and reflects the professional standing of teachers also needs to be given serious consideration. The profession has begun an accreditation process which not only supports teacher professional learning but enhances their professional standing and elevates the professions standards, which in turn requires appropriate levels of remuneration. There is a very recognisable tendency for successive governments to demand a high 'quality' education system but be willing only to invest a minimal budget.

Recommendation – Conduct a review of teacher salaries and conditions with the view to compare with private industry standards for time at work, working conditions, additional unpaid duties and responsibilities, differences across schools, sectors and states and territories and the relationship between salaries, morale and community perception.

2. More often than not when the Australian press publish stories around comparisons with the program for international student assessment (PISA), or poor NAPLAN results, the teachers are inevitably cited as the issue. There is a perception among teachers that they are 'blamed' for all of society's problems. This must change. It is unlikely to engender the spirit to strive for better outcomes in the education sector. Like all professions there are areas where improvement and progress could be made, but criticism from the uninformed will not bring about that result.

Recommendation: - In terms of improving practice, teachers will likely respond to research that highlights what is being done successfully in classrooms, rather than some "expert's" pronouncements on what should be happening! Commission quality classroom-based research and publish positive reports about the achievements of students in NSW, about teachers in the systems and sectors, about the impact of professional learning on the profession and case studies that highlight the work and reality of teachers in the classroom or in leadership positions.

In an era where teachers are increasingly held responsible for the 'wellness' of their students it is pertinent to ask: "Who is responsible for the 'wellness' of teachers?"

3. Clearer and more equitable career progression would also be beneficial for all teachers. For example, In the private sector there are bonuses for staff recognising their specific skills or passion in an area of the school, which help retain quality staff. What incentives are there to keep the best teachers in the State system?

Recommendation: - Explore possibilities for teacher retention and incentives to succeed and stay in the education sector.

4. Unfortunately, some elements of society do not appear to 'value' teachers, and the media is quick to label and blame ALL teachers for society's ills! Public awareness of some of the recommendations from the TEMAG report, including the implementation of more rigorous selection for entry into teacher education programs and final year teaching performance assessments, and the NESAs system of teaching accreditation, could help teachers to be acknowledged as highly trained and skilled professionals. The introduction of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher levels within the NESAs accreditation system allows teachers to develop their professional skills to a higher level.

Recommendation: Increased incentives, both time and financial incentives, would encourage more teachers to endeavour to achieve the higher levels of accreditation. Positive media releases about teachers and students would go some way towards raising the morale of teachers and thus encouraging more to aspire to the highest levels of achievement and accreditation.

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

A. I am not entirely sure what "platforms" means or implies. Support for teachers must include quality, affordable professional learning (PL) to ensure disciplinary content and student learning are effectively supported especially in an era of rapid change in the curriculum at state and national level. Online PL (e.g. Teacher Learning Networks) also has

its place, although this type of PL can be less effective than face to face. However, time and budget considerations may limit the available options. There is no evidence that unsupported 'on-line' assistance is of much benefit or value to classroom teachers. Blended approaches to PL are effective and could be better funded to provide quality meaningful professional learning – particularly for regional and remote teachers.

There is very little doubt that teachers prefer and benefit most from the support of people experienced in pedagogy and discipline based subject matter. This support role, once, but no longer, provided by systemic infrastructure, has been taken up by the not-for-profit Professional Teacher Associations (PTAs) that are forced to rely upon volunteerism and the goodwill of already over-committed teachers. While millions of tax-payer dollars are available for consultants and 'think tanks' the PTAs struggle from year to year to maintain their viability with the absolute minimal, if any, support from government or statutory bodies. Ironically these institutions are often effusive in their praise of the quality professional learning that PTAs provide at the most reasonable rates in the growing market of educational professional learning.

One specific area of support needed by all teachers, especially early-career teachers, in a time of curriculum change, is training and assistance in programming learning sequences. Whether this is done through PL using resources such as a program 'builder' platform, PTAs or some sort of mentoring system – it is essential as it is a challenge for all teachers. Often Ministerial reviews, in their endeavour to bring change, forget to address the basics.

High quality PL should always be part of the equation. In an ideal world there would be an appropriate amount of funding and release time for all teachers to be able to attend PL events.

Recommendation 1: - Consider a review of current PL funding. Explore funding models to provide the necessary and ongoing PL required to progress teaching quality.

Recommendation 2: - Utilise online teacher forums, especially with a mentoring component. Well designed and resourced Mentoring programs on the whole can be very successful (e.g. the Richard Gill music teachers mentoring program and the Tuned-up program which allows general teachers to upskill in the area of music and therefore could lead to a specialist position).

Recommendation 3: - Involve PTAs in consideration and development of quality PL.

Recommendation 4: involve the real "experts", classroom teachers, from the first instance in any major education reviews. Classroom teachers are the only one who can implement change and make recommendations happen in the classroom.

Recommendation 5: - Funding 'inspectors' and 'experts' to monitor and enhance the classroom teaching experience needs to be reviewed. Many of these 'experts' have never been in a classroom or left teaching a very, very long time ago.

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

This is an important area of a teacher's professional life. School and community expectations are that teachers are on 24-hour call.

Perhaps flexible working conditions are important to some teachers and they prefer to work at home rather than at school. This works in Finland.

Schools are increasingly becoming busier and busier places in which to work. Teachers regularly focus on many bureaucratic aspects of schools, “ticking boxes”, that take them away from their core business - from planning quality lessons, from developing their craft and from supporting the students in their classrooms.

Syllabus requirements can also be too proscriptive and content-laden, not allowing for flexibility, individualism and creativity which may be among of the most important variables in any classroom.

There will always be out-of-hours and at-home work for teachers, but efforts must be made to reduce the ‘administrivia’ and to ensure that there is time and energy for teachers to address their core business, quality classroom teaching!

Recommendation: - Explore what in a teacher’s day is their core responsibilities to ensure they are providing the best quality educational experience for their students. Identify and isolate all of the other so-called responsibilities. What can be better managed elsewhere, by others, to free up valuable teaching time?

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

A. Early career teachers are important, to the profession and to all schools across all sectors and particularly in the regional and remote space. Quality targeted programs need to be identified and made available to provide additional support in the early years of a teachers experience. However, equally there is a need to invest in all teachers to ensure expertise is supported and retained.

Anyone who is a teacher knows it is not easy - but they still do it. Teachers generally need a lift. They need to know that what they do is understood and appreciated by the community, policy makers and Education Ministers in each state. It would not require much, nor would it take much effort, but it does have to be genuine and heart felt. As mentioned earlier – the power of positive press cannot be underestimated. Has NESAs or their equivalent in each state and territory ever published a positive 'report' about teachers?

An important key to retaining teachers and avoiding burnout is communication. The development of more systems of mentor and peer support to encourage professional conversations and professional development is essential. These professional connections serve to remind early-career teachers, in fact all teachers, that they are not alone in facing the challenges of teaching. They may also help to renew a teacher’s enthusiasm and excitement through the sharing of new ideas, experiences and advice. The introduction of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher levels may contribute to the retention of teachers. Teaching has traditionally offered few ‘promotion’ positions such as head of department or school executive. These new teaching accreditations may help to structure a career path to many who wish to excel while keeping the classroom as their focus. Perhaps in time, more accreditation levels should be explored, and more support provided for aspirational teachers and their mentors to make this transition possible.

Recommendation: - Research and investigate the issues and pressures around the early career teachers across all sectors and regional and remote. What are the 'real' issues? Use the research develop suitable support programs. Don't archive the research because it is 'inconvenient' or dismiss it to the "too hard basket"! If we want change and progress, we have to act! However, if real change is to be achieved, time must be provided for teachers to not only attend these programs but to implement them. Reduced timetables, effective mentor programs that do not further burden the already over committed experienced teacher. Explore creative experiences and programs that build teacher morale and 'wellness', that may reduce "burn out" so that younger teachers choose to remain in the profession that they originally chose.