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The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) is a federation of state and territory joint councils of teacher professional associations representing over 120 000 teachers, from government and non-government schools, universities and other educational institutions within Australia. Each state and territory has a joint council, which is a member of the APTA. Each council represents its professional education member associations. All of the associations are managed and maintained by professional educators. APTA is incorporated under the Corporations Act 2001 as a public company limited by guarantee. Each state and territory joint council has representation on the APTA board.

APTA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Australian Education Bill 2012. The APTA submission has been developed on the basis of the views, experience and work of teachers in professional teaching associations.

This inquiry comes at a time when significant agendas have been introduced in the education landscape. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) provide teachers with a guide that represents teaching practice, knowledge and engagement. There is a need to use the NPST so that professional development is focused and pitched at the appropriate career level of the NPST. The career levels of Graduate Teacher, Proficient

Teacher, Highly Accomplished Teacher and Lead Teacher support a targeted approach to professional development.

APTA's submission is structured with general comments and commentary concerning the sections of the Australian Education Bill 2012.

General comments

Overall, APTA is generally supportive of the Australian Education Act 2012. Our nation now has a national curriculum outlining what the citizens of Australia expect their children to learn. This curriculum captures who we want to be.

APTA believes that the amount of education reform in the last five years has been unprecedented in Australian history. These reforms include an Australian curriculum and National Professional Teaching Standards providing an objective description of teacher quality. In addition to these reforms, the increased focus on accountability measures has contributed to the broader education landscape. The Australian Education Bill 2012 seeks to provide a way forward to ensure that all our students receive a high quality education. These agendas are at the forefront of our nation's policy change in education.

Specific commentary on Bill parts

Preamble

APTA believes for the most part that the *Preamble* effectively articulates the importance of education and that all students are entitled to a high quality education in all schools.

APTA acknowledges that it is important to build on reforms to date. However, APTA would endorse a broad understanding of reform that includes research, lived experience and praxis. These arrangements will build on successful reforms to date and take account of the views of a broad range of stakeholders, including professional education bodies.

In addition to increasing productivity and prosperity, APTA believes it is important to include aims relating to "quality of life" and well-being provided by a high standard of Australian schooling. The development of the whole child is needed for targets to be achieved. This will provide a key 'point of difference' for Australia as it competes with other countries.

APTA would like to ensure that the two distinct areas of digital education and new evidence-based methods of teaching and learning and needs to be addressed as such.

The Preamble suggests the need for partnerships however there is a need to include reference to educational bodies to the list.

Further, professional teaching associations provide valuable support for teachers and schools that will help fulfill the aims of the Bill.

Part 1 – Preliminary

1. Short Title

No comment

2. Commencement

No comment

3. Objects of this Act

APTA is supportive of the objects of the Act that support an excellent quality education and highly equitable schooling.

Objective (b)(iii) restricts the measurement of the effectiveness of the Act. The Act is structured around broad areas. While APTA is supportive of the setting of targets, it is the setting of aspirational and inspirational targets that will reform the educational agenda across the full range of areas (creativity, innovation, thinking, problem-solving, working collaboratively and collectively) and would better measure the influence of the Act on the nation. Such targets should be set through a national plan and should be subject to review and change. The setting of targets regarding a narrow view of Mathematics, Science and Reading will limit the view of high quality education and will subvert the intention and influence of the Act.

APTA recommends that object (b) include a further goal focused on the development of inclusive, co-ordinated actions that involve the high quality professional learning of teachers and leaders in schools.

4. Definitions

No comment

Part 5 – Improving the performance of schools and school students

5. Improving the performance of schools and school students

No comment

6. Developing a national plan

APTA is supportive of the intention that a national plan be developed for the purpose of continuous school improvement, improving school performance and improving student educational outcomes. There is a need to ensure that that there is an alignment between all areas of the Bill and the plan.

The prospect of planning for school students to develop capabilities to engage with Asia is commendable and will support the implementation of the Australian curriculum. Specifically, the cross curriculum priority area, *Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia* needs to be supported for the benefit of our nation. Teachers have expressed the need for professional development support and resources in this area.

APTA as a national body needs to be supported so professional development, connections and joint projects with professional teaching associations and other groups across Asia can be fostered to allow Australian professional teaching associations such as APTA to support teachers.

The professionalism of teachers needs to be respected in the development of the national plan, as teachers must be given opportunities to make the best possible decisions. Teachers need to be included in the development of the national plan.

APTA believes that consultation with stakeholders (including educational bodies such as APTA) is needed to develop the national plan. An educational network involving APTA should be established to develop the national plan.

APTA believes that the development of a fourth purpose (d) for the national plan to provide high quality professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders must be included.

7. Reform directions for the national plan

Quality teaching

APTA believes it is important that **all** teachers are properly supported in order to provide all students with high quality teaching to their students.

The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) should be used as the basis to determine and guide pre-service teacher education courses, entry requirements to teaching, teacher professional development and the development and implementation of research. The NPST define quality teaching. The NPST will need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are up to date and reflect what our teachers should know and do. We need to ensure that teachers participate in high quality teacher education programs that have been accredited against national standards and that teachers are supported to maintain the high level of performance.

The career level standards and descriptors of the NPST provide a guide for teachers and professional development providers to provide more focused support at the relevant career level of the teacher (Graduate teacher, Proficient teacher, Highly Accomplished teacher and Lead teacher). In this manner, a whole of career approach to support teachers can be developed through the national plan. Teachers need support across their careers and it is critical that our schools have personnel that can provide high quality leadership and teaching. To this end, approaches to continuous improvement need to be part of teachers' continuing professional development.

APTA believes that this section of the Bill will be improved with the inclusion that all teachers will have the skills, and support they require, to improve their performance over time and to deliver teaching of a high quality to all of their school students.

The work of teachers will:

- (a) reflect rigorous professional standards and best practice; and
- (b) be based on evidence of successful teaching methods.

The role of professional educational bodies such as APTA in providing support for teaching and leadership needs to be considered as part of the national plan. Quality

teaching, capacity building and curriculum development and support are core work for APTA.

Teacher development is vital at this point. Change in the workforce, change as a result of the introduction of new curriculum, the development of new knowledge and the global financial crisis have heightened the consideration of what is good and effective professional development. What constitutes “good” effective professional development is an important consideration of APTA. APTA is committed to high quality professional learning and has invested in research that considers the elements of powerful professional development.

Continuing professional learning is needed to keep abreast of new developments in curriculum and pedagogy arising from the changing and evolving educational, social and cultural contexts in which teachers work and students learn. Effective professional development activities can take many forms - from coaching and mentoring, to annual conferences, to series of seminars and workshops, teacher learning investigations, action research to publications. It can be offered as face-to-face, online or blended learning. Professional development can be collaborative or an individual exercise. It does need to be relevant to teachers, planned, and focused on their specific contexts. The National Professional Standards for Teachers are valuable in designing professional development as they help to guide support for teachers that is contextually relevant and focused on quality teaching.

Early career (beginning) teachers need support that is co-ordinated, structured and funded. The National Professional Standards for Teachers provided as a series of touchstones that would assist in the design of the support programs.

Support for teachers returning to the workforce requires specific consideration in the national plan. Such teachers have significant skills to bring to teaching but may need support in developing their knowledge and skills in new or unfamiliar areas (e.g. curriculum, digital technologies). Development needs to be funded and targeted to the needs of the returning teachers. A structured program, guided by the National Professional Standards for Teachers, is needed to support the re-entry of teachers. Such a program should involve the teacher negotiating their learning plan to determine what further learning they require.

Casual/relief teachers also require consideration to ensure co-ordinated support to avoid the fragmented support of variable quality that this group of teachers receive. Again, the National Professional Standards for Teachers provide a useful guide for such support programs. Such support needs to be funded.

As experienced teachers increasingly retire, the teaching profession is losing a wealth of knowledge. It is vital that professional development provides opportunities for new and existing teachers to offer what they know and challenge and influence existing knowledge and practices. The national plan needs to address succession planning and teacher professional development.

In preparing for the Australian curriculum, teachers have been clear that development of resources is not enough in itself to provide a quality education for all students. Professional development is also required. The diversity of our students requires that teachers use a range of strategies to teach students. Resources without professional development do not support teachers. Teachers need to be able adapt and develop materials to meet the range of student needs within their schools.

In order for schools to embrace the affordances of digital technologies, it is important they are resourced to provide up to date learning in this area. This requires access to technology and associated infrastructure, the development of teacher practice to provide high quality contemporary teaching in this area and support to maintain technology.

In some states where teachers are teaching out of their “subject field” the role of the school leader is critical. It also raises quality assurance issues in relation to teacher performance and development. Structured development programs in subject fields are needed. Teachers have raised serious concerns about the erosion of curriculum area leadership. Association data regarding teacher workforce numbers in subject fields indicates that many teachers are teaching outside their area of university training. Curriculum leadership in a period of change (Australian curriculum implementation) across the country is needed. This impacts on the opportunity of Australian students to access quality teaching in a period of new curriculum for many teachers.

One area that could help the implementation is to develop learning programs for curriculum faculties or other teams within a school to explore performance and

development models. Professional educational bodies such as APTA could be valuable partners in such a project.

Professional associations have identified that greater support is needed for:

- Collaborative Learning Communities
- Teacher education that is targeted
- Mentoring and coaching
- Continuing professional development focused on contemporary practice
- Peer-evaluation especially through professional teaching associations.

Professional teaching associations are central to teacher improvement and need to be funded appropriately.

- Associations have a vital role to play in the quality cycle. They promote communities of learners, focus on new learning and advance teacher confidence. They respond to change by helping teachers explore and interpret change in collaborative and non-threatening ways and give a sense of belonging in an educational context. They work across sectors, states and even globally to respond to new directions, current research and take these ideas from notions into classroom practice and changed ways of doing things.
- The professional teaching associations are passionate teachers meeting regularly in clusters to shape the direction and development of their subject/discipline or other educational areas.

APTA believes that a national plan be developed to provide ongoing research based professional development for all teachers, involving a coalition of key professional educational bodies. Such a plan should cater for school and individual teacher contexts to support the education of all students.

APTA believes that this section of the Bill will be improved with the inclusion that all teachers will have the skills, and support they require, to improve their performance over time and to deliver teaching of a high quality to all of their school students.

The work of teachers will:

- (a) reflect rigorous professional standards and best practice; and
- (b) be based on evidence of successful teaching methods.

Quality learning

APTA believes that schooling should provide a high quality educational experience. An environment and curriculum that supports all school students to reach their full potential is vital. To this end, it is important that the Australian Curriculum is developed with a view to support all students and that it is continually evaluated to ensure it is current and relevant to meet our nations' needs and directions.

Empowered school leadership

APTA believes that leadership skills need to be developed across teachers' careers. Currently most support in this area is leveled at individuals who are school leaders. To properly support our nations' schools it is vital that support is provided to develop leadership skills across a teacher's career and that support be provided for emerging leaders.

In providing greater power to school leaders it is critical that they are supported to lead effectively and ethically. Such support needs to be focused on student learning and student well-being. Tied in with this is the learning and well-being of teachers. Professional development needs to be available to teachers across various leadership levels of school as it takes time to develop the skills and knowledge required for a high quality school leader.

APTA believes that it is critical that support be provided to professional teaching associations so that they can provide support in this area.

School leaders need to be supported through a comprehensive plan to provide them with ongoing research-based professional development for all teachers involving a coalition of key professional education bodies such as APTA.

Transparency and accountability

The collection of data should also have the aim of supporting teachers to improve their practice.

It is important that a range of data sources be used when analysing and applying data relating to the educational outcomes of students. APTA believes that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) should conduct research, in conjunction with educational bodies such as APTA, to extend the range of data sources that can be used effectively to analyse student learning.

APTA does not support the availability of student data to the public. This leads to the increase in the stakes around testing and creates unnecessary pressure on students. Data should be used for the purpose of strategic planning to support student learning in schools.

APTA believes that schools require professional development for teachers and school leaders to support them in using a wide range of assessment practices (including observation, day to day data, and continuous assessment) that can be used by teachers in their classrooms to inform their practice, as well as the potential use of such data in relation to system data.

8. Developing benchmarks and supporting improvement

APTA is supportive of the sharing of evidence to learn about the methods of improving school and student performance.

The success of this approach relies on a shared understanding by leaders and teachers:

- that there is a shared responsibility of all parties (teacher, school leaders and system) to educate the whole child
- of what quality performance and development is underpinned by and what it looks like when done well
- that the framework works only when used in a transparent and non-judgmental way
- to reduce over bureaucratic processes.

APTA believes that professional learning needs to be provided in the understanding of assessment purposes and benefits, especially in relation to improving teaching practice and student outcomes.

APTA believes that further arrangements that need to be implemented in this area are:

- allowance for student differences and school contexts in the development of benchmarking systems
- allowance for at least equal status to data collected by the teacher as a professional in their day-to-day work with students, as opposed to 'system' data collected.

9. School funding

APTA believes that **all** students no matter where they are deserve a quality education, and to this end all schools need to be properly resourced.

Part 3 – Miscellaneous

10. Act does not create legally enforceable obligations etc.

No comment

11. Regulations

No comment