



**AEU Response to Australia's Teachers:
Australia's Future:
Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology
and Mathematics:**

Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education

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AGENDA FOR ACTION

[Department of Education, Science and Training]

General Comments

The AEU welcomes the report “Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future”. Despite AEU reservations about the composition of the Committee which guided it, the AEU acknowledges that there has been wide-spread consultation with the teaching profession, and that it and many other stakeholders were able to participate in productive meetings of the Reference Group. The Report does reflect the breadth of input and creates confidence that it adequately reflects views held by the majority of the profession and stakeholders.

In particular the AEU notes that the Report succeeds in achieving a balance between suggesting the need for changes to future directions, outlining desirable developments and painting a reasonably healthy picture of the current situation. It is to be congratulated for avoiding alarmist negative portrayals of what is currently occurring. It acknowledges the high achievement of Australian students in PISA and TIMMS, whilst arguing there is no room for complacency. It highlights current good practice in a number of schools and uses these as exemplars of what should be happening. It lauds the current high quality and qualifications of teachers whilst suggesting changes to teacher education and induction.

The Report also does well to take a reasonably generic view of “innovation” as “deliberate action to steer change and use it for beneficial result ... Educational innovation is purposive directed change aimed at improving learning, teaching and the conditions that affect them (MR pp.3-4)¹,” and does not tie it to specific subjects or activities such as exclusively commercial ones.

There is much in the Report that the AEU supports, including:

- The recognition of the serious situation in regard to teacher shortages.
- Necessary steps to attract and retain teachers, including comments that “teaching remains less financially attractive the longer a teacher remains in the profession”. (MR. p. 76)
- The need for greater equity and some concentration on disadvantage, including real concern with the outcomes for Aboriginal students and Torres Straits Island students.
- The need for greater cultural diversity in the teaching profession, including more teachers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.
- Enabling an improvement in the teaching of science, mathematics and technology in the primary school.
- Incentives to teach in ‘difficult to staff’ schools.
- Measures to increase teacher mobility.
- The need for high quality early childhood education and care.

¹ MR is used to designate the Main Report

At the same time, there is a feeling that, whilst the Report does reflect the current situation in a positive and constructive way, it does not contain a great deal that is new and agenda setting.

Although the “Actions” are reasonably clear cut, they also lack prescription in terms of who should carry them out. Most noticeable is the lack of mention in regard to resourcing. This underlines one of the basic problems of a report prepared for the Commonwealth government when the impact is primarily aimed at schools run by states and territories and private authorities, and on teacher education establishments in Universities. Nevertheless the Report is a national report and could have appropriately addressed how the proposed initiatives might be funded. It could also have indicated that it is appropriate for the Commonwealth government to provide funding for programs which are so clearly in the national interest. There appears to be a growing trend for the Commonwealth government to enable reports which are more about telling the state or territory governments what they should do than guiding its own actions. Commonwealth expenditure on schools is substantial, and it is appropriate to consider whether this money would not be better spent in pursuing innovations in the national interest than providing substantial grants to private schools.

The Report also does not paint the clear directions to the future that were expected. Perhaps this reflects the difficulty of the task, but to a degree, it avoids being controversial by being a little bland. To this extent, it is a wasted opportunity.

The Report also fails to address a number of issues when it could and should have done so.

For example, the Report does not call on governments at all levels to meet their responsibility to provide well resourced, freely accessible, high quality public education. It would also have been appropriate to have considered the onerous workloads on teachers in relation to the attraction and retention of teachers, and the importance of class size to both the quality of teaching and learning and workloads is also overlooked. The deleterious impact of large scale contract employment in teaching is also not adequately highlighted.

Much of the discussion about curriculum encompasses desirable goals that progressive teachers have strived after for many years – learning how to learn, self-sufficiency, critical thinking, engagement and joy in learning, and so on. At the same time, the AEU agrees with the Report that implications for the curriculum are fundamental to the future, and that there need to be large changes. However, although there is much talk of “knowledge era” schools, engaging students, nurturing creative thinkers, innovative cultures of schooling and so on; it is difficult to grasp exactly what is intended. It is therefore disappointing that there is no clear recommendation to further understanding of this through a process of research and professional development.

The AEU is also concerned that many of the Action proposals and statements within the Report are open to a number of interpretations and that different perspectives will be put on them by particular interests. Therefore where the AEU is indicating support for particular actions, it is necessary to make clear the nature of this support and to discuss applications of the proposals which would and would not be acceptable.

This is done in the responses to specific suggested Actions below.

Three issues, however, require more detailed response.

First is the issue of developing a relationship between performance and pay, which is referred to in both **Action 29 and 30** as well as the body of the Report. The exact nature of what is being recommended is fairly vague, though there is a reference that “this could mean systematically aligning recognition and performance structures with remuneration” and “a stronger connection to professional standards” (both MR p. 79).

Over the past few years some states and territories, through industrial agreements, have linked increases over the existing incremental scale to processes of assessment against some standards. In W.A., for example, these arrangements include accelerated progression for those not at the top of the incremental scale. These arrangements have been negotiated through normal Enterprise Bargaining processes. Where this has occurred it is seen as a means of creating career paths which keep highly experienced and competent teachers in the classroom. The extent to which other states and territories may adopt similar arrangements is a matter for negotiation between the relevant AEU Branch/Associated Body and employer.

However, the AEU does not believe that arrangements should be created where salary progression is based solely on performance. This would, if anything, make teaching a less desirable career. Teachers gain experience as they stay longer in the profession, and it is appropriate that this continue to be recognised through an incremental scale. This contributes to a transparent career progression.

A system which relied too heavily on assessing performance is fraught with problems, in practice is most unlikely to be objective and consistently applied, could conflict with professional judgement, and would introduce career uncertainty. There is also concern that it would work against the very collegiality which is fundamental to improving quality.

Other methods of dealing with perceived under performance and recognising high performance have been developed which are more satisfactory, and which should continue.

The second issue is that of school self management. Advocating greater school self management has become a stock bureaucratic “remedy” to most problems over a period spanning two decades. Despite this, there is very little evidence to support the contention that it is the vital reform that its advocates claim. Even more confusing is that the rationale for it seems to change without the fervour with which it is advocated diminishing. It originally came into vogue in an era of cost cutting and at a time when there was a desire amongst some to see schools in market competition with each other.

More recently, advocacy is based on a rationale based on flexibility and innovation.

Despite the length of time for which it has been in vogue, it is presented in a very simplistic way. There is a tendency to adopt the philosophy of “any devolution good, any centralisation bad”, rather than any genuine analysis of what are the advantages and disadvantages of moving particular functions either towards or away from centralisation.

Within this context, the AEU does note that the report seeks to set its calls for greater self management within the caveat of being “within a supportive framework of broad systemic policies.” (Action proposal 49). It also notes that the nature of inter-school relationships is seen as collaborative rather than competitive (See pp.235-240), and that the section on school leadership, which is highly commended, is supportive of dispersed leadership, democratic styles, and the involvement of all teachers (and the wider school community) in

decision making. (See pp.220- 235). These are welcome advances in the argument, and go some way towards ameliorating the bald statement:

...it would be highly beneficial to confer greater authority and responsibility for decision making on the school principal and to strengthen and make more effective many existing school governance arrangements". (MR p.226)

Nevertheless, the nature of the self management that is being advocated is still not sufficiently discussed, nor are the complexities of the issues sufficiently canvassed for the AEU to feel there is a clear and acceptable governance structure being proposed.

The third area requiring some detailed response is that of teacher quality in general and the development of standards in particular. Again, it has become almost clichéd to state that the quality of teaching is possibly the most important factor in quality learning outcomes. From an AEU perspective, the fact that good teaching counts is a welcome affirmation of the importance of our member's work, and supports our attempts to raise the status of teachers.

However, some are seeking to use this as a diversion from other important and related matters. For instance, the Minister for Education Brendan Nelson, writing on the Report in The Australian, (October 13th) had as his sub-heading "Forget school funding issues: what really counts is the quality of teaching." The AEU rejects the notion that there is a choice between good teaching and quality resources, and believes rather that the two are inter-related. Part of being a good teacher is ensuring that the best resources are available for the task.

The development of professional standards, especially advanced standards, is another idea which is being perceived by many, particularly one has to observe those less connected with classrooms, as the solution to many of schooling's perceived problems.

The AEU supports the development of standards and believes they have much to offer teachers. There is, however, a need to keep a balanced view about their importance and what they will contribute to improving the quality of teaching.

They are most effective when welcomed by teachers as a roadmap to their own professional development. Their application as punitive and judgemental benchmarks will undermine their usefulness and be resisted.

ACTION

Action 1:

A national science and innovation education program be established to assist schools and education authorities to introduce exemplary, sustainable and transferable initiatives which are an investment in the development of teachers' and students' science, technology and mathematics knowledge and their capacity to be innovative. A program of this kind would provide funding for many of the actions in this Agenda, including:

- the creation of a national network of local and regional science clusters linking schools and teachers with science organisations, tertiary education institutions and industry organizations [see Action 50];
- limited term teacher placements in science, technology or mathematics related jobs beyond their schools [see Action 40];
- substantial professional learning opportunities for teachers of science, technology and mathematics [see Action 5];
- the forging of interdisciplinary links among, and multi disciplinary approaches to, science, mathematics, technology and other learning areas [see Action 46]; and
- visits or short exchanges to other schools by highly competent and committed school leaders and teachers capable of acting as agents of change in their own or other schools [see Action 51].

RESPONSE

Actions 1 to 9 place some emphasis on Science, Mathematics and Technology, as was required within the terms of reference.

The AEU supports these proposed actions. There are good arguments for enabling the strengthening of science, mathematics and technology teaching, and the measures recommended will go a considerable way to doing this.

It is, however, important to note the context within which these proposed actions are set in the Report.

The AEU notes, for instance, that the Report sets these in a context where all subjects and learning are important.

“While the Committee has been charged with a focus on science, technology and mathematics, it sees these areas in the context of a broad education which balances the many different requirements teachers and schools have to meet.”
(MR p.175)

It also notes the importance of environmental sustainability and the ethical implications of innovation (see for instance MR p.20).

Therefore the emphasis on science, mathematics and technology is not at the expense of an undervaluing of the other aspects of

Action 2:

A cadre of primary science and mathematics specialists, able to support, mentor and guide other primary teachers in science and mathematics teaching, be developed.

Action 3:

Primary teacher education programs provide a substantial focus on science, technology and mathematics teaching.

Action 4:

Primary teacher education programs offer students opportunities to specialise in science and mathematics teaching, and students be encouraged by teacher education institutions and education authorities to pursue those opportunities.

Action 5:

Primary teachers be afforded greater opportunities and support to extend their knowledge and professional skills relating to science, technology and mathematics teaching.

Action 6:

Scholarships and other incentives be offered to primary and middle school teachers to undertake studies to advance their knowledge and skills in science and mathematics teaching.

schooling. The AEU would resist such an interpretation, and the singling out of particular subjects as “more important” than others within the curriculum.

In this spirit, proposals to increase support in these particular areas and to offer incentives to encourage teachers to either take up teaching these subjects or to develop their skills in them, would be welcomed, but seen as a precedent for their introduction to other areas where this was considered desirable.

The Commonwealth should assume responsibility for funding these initiatives.

Action 7:

Science and mathematics education co-ordinators be appointed for clusters of secondary schools and their feeder primary schools to work across schools, stimulating science teaching and learning in primary schools and ensuring that science and mathematics teaching and learning is well articulated between the two sectors.

Action 8:

Scholarships and/or other incentives be provided to selected teachers to undertake advanced [including postgraduate] studies in science, technology and mathematics.

Action 9:

Undergraduate science students and science researchers be engaged to assist school students and teachers.

Action 10:

Comprehensive statistics relating to teachers, teacher workforce trends and teacher education be consistently, reliably and regularly collected on a national and collaborative basis.

The conditions under which this might happen require negotiation.

This is strongly endorsed. The AEU has long argued that Governments have been in denial about the real situation in regard to teacher supply.

Action 11:

Research be undertaken on the working lives of teachers, their professional aspirations and ways in which changed conditions of schooling and employment might enhance the attractiveness of careers in teaching.

Action 12:

High quality teacher education programs and sufficient teacher education places, particularly in science [especially physics and chemistry], technology, mathematics and LOTE, be provided to meet the future teaching workforce needs and circumstances of all metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

Action 13:

Prospective teachers of science, technology and mathematics be offered incentives, including payments of their HECS debt, housing assistance, scholarships, and/or paid internships, to qualify as teachers in those fields and to take up teaching appointments.

Action 14:

Teachers of science, technology and mathematics not pay more HECS than other teachers.

The AEU supports this. In particular, such research should address teacher workloads, class size, and the detrimental impact on life style of some teaching conditions.

This is supported.

This is supported within the context stated in response to Actions 1-9 (pp. 8-10). The AEU believes that incentives, particularly “HECS forgiveness” should be used more broadly to attract teachers and staff to “hard to staff” schools.

The AEU is generally opposed to HECS for teachers, and regards it as particularly unfair for some subjects to attract a higher charge than others.

Action 15:

Close collaboration be developed between education and other [particularly science, agriculture and engineering] faculties at higher education institutions, with arrangements established for students in science, technology and mathematics related non teacher education programs to undertake teacher education units within their course packages.

Action 16:

All initial teacher education programs promote as a core competency in qualifying teachers, an understanding of the diversity of students and their communities – most especially in relation to Indigenous students – and provide in-school experiences in a range of settings, including rural communities.

Action 17:

Prospective Indigenous teachers be offered special incentives, including scholarships and payment of their HECS debt, to qualify as teachers and to take up teaching appointments.

Action 18:

Prospective teachers of Indigenous students be offered assistance to undertake practical experience in schools with significant cohorts of Indigenous students and be offered incentives to take up teaching appointments in schools with predominantly Indigenous enrolments.

The AEU supports this where it enhances the possibility of recruiting quality teachers. It may also enable people highly qualified in particular subject areas to contribute to a teaching program through being invited as guests in classrooms. It should not, however, be seen as a way of putting people in charge of classrooms who are less than fully qualified.

This is strongly endorsed by the AEU. Indeed, the AEU argues such courses should be mandatory.

This is strongly endorsed. It is extremely important to attract more Indigenous teachers into teaching.

This is strongly endorsed.

Action 19:

The continuing professional learning of Indigenous education workers, including study to qualify as teachers, be encouraged and supported.

Action 20:

Actively recognise and credit the knowledge, capabilities and experience of prospective teachers now engaged in other professions, and implement recognition of prior learning arrangements in ways that reinforce high standards for the teaching profession.

Action 21:

Financial incentives, including scholarships and payment of their HECS debt, and internships be offered to high calibre prospective teachers of science, technology and mathematics from other professions to qualify as teachers and to take up teaching appointments.

Action 22:

A range of new, flexible, cross-faculty, intensive and accelerated teacher education pathways be established for those seeking to enter science, technology and mathematics teaching from other relevant professions.

This is strongly endorsed.

The AEU endorses this in the way it is expressed. Genuine recognition of prior learning is desirable; watering down of entry qualifications is not. Subject knowledge and experience cannot be substituted for pedagogical knowledge.

This is supported within the context of statements made above and general opposition to teachers paying HECS. However, it would create anomalous situations compared with younger graduates which would need to be addressed.

This is supported on the same basis as **Action 20**.

Action 23:

Financial assistance be provided for the start-up and piloting of new, flexible, cross-faculty and innovative science, technology and mathematics teacher education programs targeted at entrants from other professions.

Action 24:

Superannuation arrangements be investigated and applied to enable teachers who wish to remain longer in the profession to do so without financial detriment.

Action 25:

National professional standards for beginning teachers be developed and adopted, and guide initial teacher education as well as provide the basis nationally for teacher registration and accreditation, and portability of teaching qualifications.

Action 26:

National generic and learning area specific professional standards that specify teachers' capabilities, performance and knowledge at different career stages continue to be developed and adopted by the teaching profession.

Action 27:

A national, credible, transparent and consistent approach to assessing teaching standards be developed and implemented by the teaching profession, with support from governments.

As above **Action 20**

This is supported with an emphasis on the “without financial detriment”. It should also be noted that in current arrangements there can be a loss of status and promotion, and that this should also be addressed.

The AEU supports this within a context which involves collaboration and consistency amongst existing state or territory statutory bodies (Boards of Registration, Institutes of Teachers, etc.)

This is supported within the existing AEU policy on teaching standards.

As above. The phrase ‘assessing teaching standards’ is assumed to mean for those individuals who seek it within the frameworks agreed to date.

Action 28:

The National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership be run by and for the teaching profession, and work to enhance the profession and improve teaching practice and school leadership by:

- developing and supporting current and potential school leaders;
- supporting the work of teacher professional associations;
- supporting the development and assessment of national professional standards;
- providing and facilitating advanced professional learning;
- recognising highly effective schools and facilitating teacher and school leader visits and exchanges to and from such schools;
- undertaking or sponsoring research and data collection;
- providing a physical and virtual clearinghouse of research and materials to inform teaching and school leadership;
- promoting collaboration and partnerships among schools, education authorities, governments, teacher associations, parents, education and other faculties of higher education institutions and other organizations; and
- quality assuring courses for teachers and school leaders.

This is supported in principle. However, the AEU notes that consultations are currently under way in regard to the creation of this National Institute and the AEU will be making submissions to this process.

There are many questions regarding how this Institute will develop, and the AEU reserves a final view until these have been resolved and the final shape of the Institute determined.

Action 29:

Teacher career progression and salary advancement reflect objectively assessed performance as a teaching professional.

See general comments in Introduction on Page 4.

Action 30:

Recognition, including remuneration, for accomplished teachers who perform at advanced professional standards and work levels be increased significantly.

As above

Action 31:

All teacher education programs prepare prospective teachers for the digital age where ICT is an important tool in information and knowledge management and integral to student learning.

The AEU supports this. There is also a need for research about the most effective way to use ICT in curriculum and pedagogy.

Action 32:

All initial teacher education programs link strongly to schools, including through internships, and equip students with a full range of practical skills required to commence teaching as a competent professional.

Actions 32 - 38

The AEU supports the proposals in the Report to further develop teacher education and believes that the directions suggested of stronger ongoing links between teacher education programs, schools and student teachers are well framed.

Action 33:

Different models for funding and structuring the practical teaching experience, based on the contemporary and expected skills needs of beginning teachers, be investigated, considered and adopted.

However, the AEU also notes that there have been a plethora of inquiries and reports in this area, but that developments have generally been by individual institutions in an uncoordinated and overly diverse way.

Action 34:

Teacher educators have continuing direct involvement in schools – including as part time teachers, as mentors to beginning teachers, and as experts conducting or guiding action research – and education faculties and education authorities conjointly employ significant proportions of those staff.

Action 35:

Numbers of highly accomplished teachers and school leaders be placed in education faculties as teacher educators for specified durations, under joint arrangements between education authorities and universities.

Action 36:

Beginning teachers receive appropriate professional support, including thorough-going induction and mentoring, and time to reflect on their practice.

Action 37:

Partnerships between education authorities, schools and teacher education faculties be established to support jointly the transition to teaching for beginning teachers – and this additional responsibility for teacher education faculties and schools be formally recognised and resourced.

Actions 34 -37

It must be recognised that matters of induction and mentoring have impact not only on the incoming student/teacher, but on the teachers who are asked to mentor them, as recognised in Action 37. This requires appropriate release time and should be negotiated within EBAs.

Action 38:

A national forum on teacher education be convened, bringing together the key stakeholders to set future directions and develop agreed common principles and protocols for teacher preparation including effective recognition of prior learning arrangements, course structure, content and delivery arrangements, practical teaching experience, quality assurance and flexible pathways into teaching.

Action 39:

The professional learning opportunities provided by employers of teachers, higher education institutions and teacher professional associations be directed to the achievement of the standards to be established for advanced teaching competence and improved student learning outcomes, relate to the situational needs of schools and their students, and reflect the expressed professional learning needs of teachers.

Action 40:

Opportunities be created through professional leave or other arrangements for teachers, especially of science, technology and mathematics, to gain relevant work experience in research and industry.

Action 41:

Opportunities continue to be created for teachers to upgrade and update ICT knowledge and skills relevant to their professional roles.

The Commonwealth should take a leading role in convening roundtables of all interested parties, including the teacher unions, to progress developments in regard to the education, induction and mentoring of new teachers, as a matter of some urgency.

As a general direction this is supported, but it places too much emphasis on standards that are not yet developed and integrated into professional learning. Such a move needs to proceed with caution.

This is supported within the general comments to Actions 1-9. There are existing programs which can be evaluated for effectiveness, accessibility, and so on.

This is endorsed, but there is also a need for more opportunities to be created.

Action 42:

Specially tailored courses be provided to enable selected teachers not currently qualified to teach in science, technology or mathematics and who wish to teach in those areas, to acquire the professional expertise needed.

This is supported provided that appropriate conditions are agreed.

Action 43:

Specially tailored courses be provided to enable teachers of science, technology and mathematics who need to upgrade their subject knowledge or qualifications in those areas to do so.

This is similarly supported

Action 44:

Specially tailored courses be provided to enable those regularly teaching science, technology and mathematics “out of field” to gain the specialist expertise required to teach in those learning areas.

This is similarly supported

Action 45:

A “virtual clearinghouse” be established to make available online to teachers, school leaders, researchers, policy makers and the wider public the findings of research about and materials for Australian schools, school leaders and teachers.

This is supported. However, more may need to be done to ensure effective use of such a “virtual clearing house”.

Action 46:

Resources be provided for the piloting of innovative multidisciplinary approaches especially with a focus on science, technology and/or mathematics teaching and learning.

This is supported

Action 47:

The nature and processes of learning become the focal concerns of initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

Action 48:

School leaders, and especially principals, be given periodic opportunities to take on new, professionally relevant challenges in a range of different settings.

Action 49:

Schools and their governing bodies be given strengthened autonomy over and responsibility for their education programs, staffing, budget and other aspects of their operations; as necessary within a supportive framework of broad systemic policies.

Action 50:

A national network of local and regional science clusters linking schools and teachers with science organizations, tertiary education institutions and industry organisations be created.

Action 51:

Outstanding school leaders and teachers be funded to undertake visits or exchanges to other schools, in Australia or overseas, in order to exchange ideas and champion improvements in school and teaching practice, especially but not only in the fields of science, technology and mathematics.

The general direction is supported. However, it is must also be recognised that there are other important aspects to teacher education and development. Such courses must include cultural and social awareness factors .

This is supported, and must include all teachers.

See introductory comments pp.5-6

This is supported.

This is supported, but opportunities should be more generally available for teachers, not just those judged to be “outstanding”, to share knowledge, problems and solutions. A structured process of both short and medium term exchanges focussed on schools with similar backgrounds should be made generally available.

Action 52:

Sufficient suitably trained paraprofessional staff be deployed in schools to support teachers in school based non teaching work.

This is supported. The words “non teaching work” are important in this context, and the AEU would not support arrangements that put people not qualified as teachers in teaching situations.

Action 53:

High speed bandwidth internet access, leading edge connectivity and computing technologies, digital educational content, and appropriate software and ICT services be accessible for all Australian schools.

This is supported

Action 54:

A national project to identify and distil excellent policy and practice in the use of school intranets [including in providing useful and immediate information to students, teachers, parents and education authority managers], and to disseminate and promote those policies and practices, be undertaken.

This is supported.