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Current role: Economics teacher

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Relevant inquiry: Building a skilled and more adaptable workforce

Focus area: secondary school teaching

Submitting on behalf of myself

Response to draft recommendations:

Draft recommendation 1.1: invest in a single national platform for all teachers to access lesson planning materials

- This is a worthy goal, however, I note that the draft report makes no distinction between the resourcing needs of primary vs high school or between different high school subjects. It may indeed be a waste of resources to recommend the same approach for all the different stages of education. For example, resource banks have proved less useful for social science subjects because they are typically outdated and not aligned with current issues that are most relevant to the school or its cohort of students. As a consequence, high school social science teachers in particular carry a heavy burden of creating curriculum materials and lesson plans due to the inherently dynamic nature of these subjects. The Grattan Institute's report on the amount of time a typical full-time teacher spends on creating their own lesson plans also doesn't distinguish between subject areas or stages of education (Hunter et al 2022 a p35). I think it would be useful to make these distinctions in the recommendation so that the extent of its application is clear.
- If a national open-access curriculum resource bank were to be produced, there would need to be transparency around which subject-matter experts are to be involved in their production and how often the materials are reviewed and updated. This would empower teachers to make their own judgments about the usefulness of such resources to their subject area. It would also save teacher time if resource banks for specific subjects were associated with some sort of subscription service so teachers could be notified of updates and avoid wasting time scrolling through endless resources.

Draft recommendation 1.2: Lead national efforts to ensure equitable access to educational technology (edtech) and artificial intelligence

- The use of GenAI tools in high schools is already proving to be transformative for teachers, particularly in terms of lesson planning. In my experience, teachers have been very adaptive in this space already and may not need as much training and support as has been suggested. Once again, the use of GenAI will be quite subject-specific in high school so there may be less need for 'a national AI skilling program for teachers', as suggested by one submission (Microsoft). It would be advisable to consult with classroom teachers directly and **target where training and support is needed before subjecting teachers**

to more mandatory training. For many teachers, the uptake of GenAI is unfolding in an exciting, organic and collaborative way, with experienced teachers and subject specialists best placed to know how and when it is useful.

- Far more pressing than teacher training, is the need to upgrade school IT systems and properly resource school IT departments to ensure that **student use of AI tools can be blocked or restricted in some way.** High school teachers now have to assume that the minute students open their laptop they will be accessing AI tools. The implications of this go far beyond a change to the nature of assessment tasks and require a re-think of student access to search engines and online resources, and the “BYOD policy” more generally. There is a very real risk that current laptop use means students are not actually thinking in class anymore. Not only is student learning negatively impacted, but the situation is creating even more work for classroom teachers as they scramble to find photocopiers and provide hard copy sets of resources to students.

Separate recommendations:

I appreciate that Productivity Commission was limited in its terms of reference. However, it was disappointing that this report was unable to address other more **ingrained and systemic problems** that are weighing on teacher productivity, including:

- a. **Lack of career development** – unlike other careers, there is no career pathway for teaching specialists (subject specialists in high school, for example). The only way to get ahead in the teaching profession is to do everything other than teach. As a result, it is no surprise that we lose good teachers 5 or even 10 years into teaching because they have not had any sort of promotion.
- b. **Lack of labour mobility** – many teachers find it difficult to move within the profession. They are often beholden to their existing employers for a reference which can leave them powerless, the onboarding process can be complex and time-consuming (for example, when moving from the private sector to the public sector) and travel times to alternative schools may be prohibitive. The system effectively encourages teachers to stay where they are. This may act as a **disincentive to performance improvement**, particularly if there are a few promotional opportunities at their current school. It also means that high-performing teachers in specialty subject areas may be **under-utilised**.
- c. **High levels of workers compensation claims** – the Productivity Commission has already reported on this, estimating that workplace bullying in Australia is costing up to \$38 billion per year, with psychological injury claims from teachers and nurses being the highest of any profession. These claims take a huge financial and personal toll on teachers and involve lengthy and avoidable delays, keeping teachers away from classrooms for too long. Many **valuable resources are unnecessarily diverted to processes** that fail to achieve satisfactory outcomes. Teachers in these circumstances are faced with the prospect of returning to an unsafe workplace or (as typically happens) forced to leave. This again results in wasted talent.