Submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)

June 2022

AITSL acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, sea country and waterways from across Australia.

We honour and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

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Executive Summary

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is pleased to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's Review of the National School Reform Agreement.

As a Commonwealth company responsible for developing national frameworks in a policy area where state and territory governments hold responsibility, AITSL is uniquely placed to comment on the National School Reform Agreement and its National Policy Initiatives.

AITSL's work spans three main areas of focus:

- **Initial teacher education:** We provide support, resources and tools to help ensure that every pre-service teacher is classroom ready upon graduation.

- **Quality teaching:** We help teachers be the best they can be, and provide tools and resources to maximise their impact on student learning.

- **Educational leadership:** We help leaders become highly-effective by giving them the tools, resources, policies and practices needed to succeed in their important role.

Teaching is the number one in-school influence on student learning. There are a number of pressing issues in teaching policy where national, collaborative action could contribute towards achieving the National School Reform Agreement's aim to lift student outcomes across Australian schools.

These include a shortage of teachers in particular geographic areas and teaching disciplines, the quality and consistency of initial teacher education programs in Australia, and ensuring that teachers have clear career pathways and opportunities to be recognised for their expertise.

Accordingly, there are a number of high-impact, strategic reform opportunities that are proposed in this submission which could be pursued as part of the next National School Reform Agreement to be negotiated in 2023. These include:

- updated and fit-for-purpose Standards for the profession of teaching and school leadership

- improved regulation and oversight of initial teacher education programs

- procurement models to match supply through initial teacher education to employer needs

- expansion of teacher certification and stronger career pathways that recognise expertise

- national teacher labour market modelling.

To ensure these opportunities have their intended effect, the next National School Reform Agreement must be underpinned by an appropriate set of performance indicators by which to measure outcomes, and provide accountability for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work collaboratively to ensure effective and timely implementation of the National Policy Initiatives.

About AITSL

Who we are

AITSL is a Commonwealth company that was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. We are here to develop teaching and leadership expertise and empower teachers and leaders to create better education outcomes for Australian students.

How we work

For over a decade, AITSL's work has been grounded in a combination of evidence and professional practice. AITSL delivers a complex, interconnected, and interdependent program of work across quality teaching, school leadership, and initial teacher education

We are proud of our reputation as an honest broker and agent for impact in the education architecture. We have clear and effective frameworks for undertaking genuine consultation and collaboration with our broad range of stakeholders, including teachers and leaders in schools and early childhood and other education settings, and representatives from government systems, Catholic and independent school sectors, teacher regulatory authorities, initial teacher education providers, teacher unions, principal and other professional associations and community organisations.

What we do

We focus on the areas where national work can have the greatest impact. Our evidence-based advice and guidance has led to national educational reforms that support quality teaching and leadership in Australia. In over ten years of operation, AITSL has supported all Australian governments to develop and implement teacher quality and school leadership improvements, including:

- national standards for teachers at all career stages
- high-quality professional learning strategies for teachers and school leaders
- pre-service and in-service teacher support, resources, and tools
- principal and school leadership tools, resources, policies, and practices.

Additionally, AITSL undertakes national projects agreed to by all state and territory education Ministers, as well as state and territory-specific projects through bilateral arrangements with jurisdictional education stakeholders.

In undertaking these projects, AITSL has developed comprehensive experience in conducting consultation and research with diverse groups of stakeholders, often working through complex requirements and contexts. All of AITSL's work is underpinned by research and evidence.

Drivers of student outcomes

In the equation of learning, student outcomes are determined by a complex interplay of factors. Prior student achievement; student attributes, background and context; and school and teacher quality all contribute in important ways to student learning.

When it comes to in-school factors, we know that teacher quality is the single most important driver of student outcomes (Hattie 2003). Recent Australian research, which used Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data to examine the contribution of school quality to student outcomes, supports Hattie's findings and demonstrated that teaching practice, particularly teacher efficacy, is an important driver of student outcomes (Deloitte Access Economics 2017).

In fact, when various drivers of student outcomes are ranked by their ability to account for variation in PISA and TIMSS scores (with drivers explaining more variation being those with the largest impact), teaching efficacy – practice, classroom organisation and environment, and school leadership are the top three most important factors (Deloitte Access Economics 2017). These are consistently crucial drivers of student outcomes, irrespective of student background and context (Deloitte Access Economics 2019).

Within the domain of teaching practice, the most important drivers of student achievement relate to targeted teaching and instruction approaches, which suggests improvements in pedagogy can boost student outcomes (Deloitte Access Economics 2017). There are potential policy levers in this space – for example, high quality professional learning can build individual and collective efficacy in schools, leading to gains in student learning (AITSL 2012).

While teaching practice is consistently identified as the most impactful in-school factor affecting student outcomes, it is important to note that the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement is mediated by the amount of time students spend in the classroom (AITSL 2019a). Regular school attendance is crucial for long term student outcomes. However, we know that attendance is affected by a range of factors including, but not limited to, a student's sense of 'belonging' to the school community (De Bortoli 2018), feeling safe at school (particularly safe from bullying and racism) and having positive connections to peers and school staff (AITSL 2019a). These

are all important contributors to student wellbeing, which encompasses more than just physical health – wellbeing also includes a person's emotional, social and mental health as well as how they view themselves and their life in general (Student Wellbeing Hub 2020).

Wellbeing is not only crucial for child development but is also inextricably linked to learning – evidence consistently demonstrates that students with greater levels of wellbeing perform better academically and experience better outcomes (Cárdenas et al. 2022). There is also evidence to suggest school-based wellbeing programs lead to small-to-moderate increases in student achievement (Dix et al. 2020). Ultimately, it is educators who play a vital role in developing "confident and creative individuals who have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing – and have a sense of optimism about their lives and the future" (Education Council 2019, p.5).

Consideration and prioritisation of wellbeing in schools is not new, though the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to protecting and maintaining strong wellbeing among students and school staff. It is likely that the lessons drawn from repeated COVID-19 induced lockdowns will become increasingly prominent in future. In fact, the 2021 State of the Children report, which focused on mental health, argued the pandemic has likely affected the mental health of a generation of young people (UNICEF 2021).

UNICEF (2021) suggests rising awareness of mental health issues provides an opportunity to prioritise the promotion of wellbeing for all young people across all proven areas of intervention, including education. While evidence is still emerging regarding the potential lasting impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, early findings indicate that the disruptions to learning, social isolation and stress of remote schooling has negatively affected Australian school children, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts (AIHW 2021).

Teachers and school leaders play a vital role in supporting and developing student wellbeing (AITSL 2022). Given this, as well as the proven importance of teaching practice, school leadership and classroom environment to student learning, educators are crucial drivers of improvements in student outcomes.

Assessing the appropriateness of the National Policy Initiatives

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Information request 2: Assessing the appropriateness of the National Policy Initiatives

a. The NSRA (s. 43) provides some guidance on the nature of national initiatives. Are there other principles that should be applied when identifying NPIs suitable for inclusion in a national agreement? What should these be?

b. What policy areas are best suited to national collaboration and why? Of those, which are best pursued through the NSRA?

c. Are there ways to maximise the benefits of national collaboration?

d. Are the three reform directions — supporting students, student learning and student achievement; supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement; and enhancing the national evidence base — still the best statement of priorities for reforming schools?

e. Do the NPIs align well with the reform directions and are they the best opportunities for collaborative reform?

f. Is there any unfinished business associated with implementing the NPIs that would justify including additional actions in the next national school reform agreement?

g. Are there other initiatives that would better address key needs or government priorities for schooling?

h. What policy initiatives (or actions) would be appropriate to include in the next national school reform agreement? Why?

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Policy areas suited to national collaboration

Constitutionally, responsibility for school education sits with Australian states and territories. At the same time, there has been a long and productive history of national collaboration. In the area of improving teaching and school leadership, achievements include agreement on national standards for teachers and principals, joint action to improve standards in initial teacher education (ITE), and creating the first national dataset on the teaching workforce.

Areas for national collaboration need to be carefully selected to add value beyond what individual jurisdictions could achieve on their own. They also require a compelling case for collaboration, to motivate jurisdictions to participate and stay the course when there are many competing priorities.

There are two broad types of policy area where collaboration is most fruitful:

- **Where there are economies of scale.** With eight states and territories, and three school sectors within each, there is a high risk of duplication in Australia's education system.

National initiatives make sense when there are economies of scale that override the benefit of tailoring solutions to local needs.

For example, there would be little value in maintaining eight sets of standards for teachers or principals. A common standards framework creates further economies of scale in that resources developed across Australia can be mapped to the standards for ease of use in both schools and early childhood settings in any part of Australia. A risk with nationally agreed standards frameworks is that processes for udpdating them can be cumbersome. Agreed processes, such as regularly scheduled reviews, should be put in place.

Similarly, it is more efficient to have one national dataset on the teaching workforce, with easy access for jurisdictions, especially in a national labour market.

- **Where actions in one jurisdiction affect the others.** In an increasingly connected world, the actions of a single jurisdiction can have effects on all Australian jurisdictions. The rise of online ITE means prospective teachers living (and planning to work) in one jurisdiction can study at an ITE provider based in another jurisdiction. A quarter of ITE students study fully online, and a third of these live in a jurisdiction other than the one where there provider is based and regulated (AITSL 2018).

For example, one jurisdiction might decide to introduce high entry standards for ITE courses. Prospective teachers in this jurisdiction who do not meet those standards could simply enrol online with a provider based in another jurisdiciton and still graduate with the right to teach across Australia. The policy would have some effect, but would not be as effective as a national approach.

The operation of mutual recognition for registered teachers means each jurisdiction has a legitimate interest in the standards applied across the nation.

Maximising benefits of national collaboration

Collaboration on major initiatives requires genuine commitment from all parties. It is important that National Policy Initiatives (NPIs) are selected to have the maximum impact, and a compelling case is made for them to build commitment to implementation. Success factors for collaboration include:

- Clarity of what is agreed to be implemented
- Genuine commitment of all parties to the success of the initiative
- Sufficient flexibility to allow legitimate differences in context and priorities between jurisdictions to be accommodated.

Different jurisdictions will have differing priorities at different times. In addition, some national initiatives will be more attractive to smaller jurisdictions than to larger ones, who are better able to bear the costs of developing their own policies, frameworks and support materials. National initiatives in education have traditionally operated by consensus, only being implemented when all jurisdictions agree. There would be benefits in some NPIs being opt-in, so that jurisdictions that would benefit from them could participate without waiting for all jurisdictions to agree.

The reform directions

The three reform directions – supporting students, student learning and student achievement; supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement; and enhancing the national evidence base are laudable and are supported by the sector. In reality, the reform directions are necessarily

high level, and their meaning for the purpose of the NSRA is defined by the policy initiatives that sit under them. The reform directions provide an opportunity to be ambitious and rigorous and future agreements should consider strengthening the choice of language to be more ambitious and ensure accountability.

Unfinished business

There are varied and often valid reasons for reforms to not be completed as originally envisaged. While policy reform can be complex and the unexpected, such as the COVID-19 pandemic can arise, it is crucial to remain focused on the original issue that required addressing. A renewed National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) will no doubt focus on new NPIs. These new initiatives should build on the work that has already been completed on the current set of NPIs.

Reviewing teacher workforce needs

Issues identified in *Teaching Futures*, AITSL's 2020 background paper on strategic issues for teacher workforce planning, have become more pressing. Australia is facing a critical shortage of teachers due to a number of factors including growing school enrolments, a drop in the number of individuals enrolling in teaching degrees, an ageing workforce and a percentage of teachers leaving the profession to embark on different careers each year. Continued funding for the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative is a welcome step toward realising the vison outlined in *Teaching Futures.*

While Ministers agreed that the *Teaching Futures* background paper had helped shape the future direction of Education Ministers' national and collaborative work on teaching, no actions were agreed as part of a national teacher workforce strategy. In the current climate of constrained teacher supply, the need for a comprehensive national teacher workforce strategy that articulates what will attract and retain quality teachers is more pressing than ever.

While jurisdictions are progressing their own initiatives to address teacher workforce concerns, the extent of critical workforce shortages requires a national response with all teacher employers, ITE providers and teacher regulatory authorities (TRAs) working collaboratively. *Teaching Futures* and subsequently the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review contained important work to scope a national teacher labour market model, which is discussed below as a high-priority future reform.

Clear action is also needed to ensure that a career in teaching is an attractive one. In order to raise the status of the profession, it is critical to dependably identify, esteem, and privilege expertise amongst educators – especially by the profession itself. Australian educators and policy makers need to be greater advocates for basing the esteem of the teaching profession and the future of education on this notion of expertise. This is explored further in the *Prospective new initiatives* section below.

Improving national data quality and the Unique Student Identifier

The collection of long-term empirical data could be used to provide evidence about the connections between the various current and future reform initiatives. It is worth noting that some of the unfinished business of the current NSRA is directly relevant to this.

For example, the Unique Student Identifier (USI) would allow research that shows the relationship between performance in:

- local and national assessments including the Year 1 Phonics Check, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), school completion rates, and the National Assessment Program (NAP) proficiency standards.

- international studies and assesssments including the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

This would provide schools with a clearer understanding of whether students have the skills necessary to successfully progress in their education.

Strengthening the initial teacher education accreditation system

Another area where further work is needed is ITE. The existing NPI reflects decisions taken by Education Ministers in 2018. Despite the implementation of teaching performance assessments (TPAs) to provide a mechanism for developing and ensuring classroom readiness in recent years, the quality and consistency of TPA implementation is mixed. There are gaps in the quality assurance of TPAs across Australia, with no requirement for periodic re-endorsement, no conditions for continuing approval and critically, no evidence that all TPAs meet a minimum common standard.

It is critical that all students are taught by teachers who have both the subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills to be effective teachers. Survey data from recent graduates, as well as anecdotal evidence from teachers and school leaders, indicates that many Graduate teachers are not 'classroom ready' upon completion of their ITE program. The lessons of implementing these reforms, and the work of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Expert Panel, can inform an updated approach to quality assurance in ITE, as outlined below.

Prospective new initiatives

Fit-for-purpose Teacher and Principal Standards

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) and Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Principal Standard) provide clear, detailed, and nationally agreed definitions of what it means to be an outstanding teacher or leader, and a pathway to achievement. Since Ministers agreed to these standards over a decade ago, they have provided the basis for collaborative work and national reform to improve teaching and school leadership across Australia.

While AITSL has gained national support for the nine evidence-based policy frameworks that collectively drive national reform and underpin each stage of the profession's career lifecycle, from pre-service to Lead teachers, the level of implementation varies across jurisdictions.

The central planks of this policy framework are the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard. These Standards were approved over a decade ago, and it would be timely to revise both in consultation with the profession. This would provide an opportunity to address issues raised around the currency of the Standards, including their applicability to early childhood teachers, whether the work of middle leaders in schools is sufficiently reflected, and whether they are specific enough about the elements of effective teaching.

Revision of the Standards would be an appropriate NPI in the next NSRA. A fit for purpose and current set of Standards for Australian teachers and school leaders will help maintain quality teaching and leadership across all settings, and ensure these factors have maximum impact on students. Strengthened Standards will also have a direct impact on the quality of ITE, teacher and school leader development, and allow for better career pathways, improving attraction to the profession and ongoing retention.

Regulation of initial teacher education programs

Responsibility for the accreditation of ITE programs and teacher registration is set out in the legislative framework of each TRA. Each TRA has a different perspective on their roles and obligations because they operate under different authorising environments and legislative frameworks.

If teacher registration were being implemented for the first time in Australia, it would be logical for a profession using a common set of professional standards to be developed under a common framework by a single body. Consideration should be given to whether the existing arrangements are delivering optimal outcomes for teachers, teacher employers, and students; especially given the implementation of mutual recognition and the mobility it enables for the workforce.

Progress has been made in ensuring quality and consistency of ITE programs; nationally agreed program standards provide a base level of quality assurance for all ITE programs across Australia. However, the experience of implementing national reforms under the current NSRA has revealed that quality assurance mechanisms could be more specific and rigorous in some key areas.

AITSL recommends the establishment of a national board to oversee, develop and promulgate information about the quality and consistency of ITE programs. This Board could be established by reforming the existing Expert Advisory Group (EAG), whose remit is currently limited to teaching performance assessments (TPAs). The EAG has built a reputation for providing expert and constructive advice to providers over the course of its tenure. It is well regarded and respected by ITE providers and TRAs and would be more effective with a stronger mandate.

The responsibilities of the expanded Board would include developing a performance assessment framework, overseeing the quality of TPAs including approving standard setting methods for TPAs, determining the endorsement status of a TPA, introducing an endorsement period for each TPA, undertaking national moderation across TPAs and reviewing all cross-institutional moderation activities that have been undertaken by TPAs. The Board could also investigate program quality in specific targeted areas, for example to strengthen reviews of evidence-based curriculum.

It is proposed that the Board is established as a joint initiative between state and territory governments and the Australian Government, with membership to be decided by Education Ministers based on a skills and expertise matrix. This may include TRAs, teacher educators and principals. It would provide an annual report to the Education Ministers Meeting, which would also be published to ensure accountability and promote informed public debate on the quality of ITE.

The structure and governance of the expanded Board will follow other best practice models such as the National School Resourcing Board. The Board would be an independent body, and AITSL could manage its secretariat functions, as it does successfully for the current EAG as well as the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) Oversight Board.

Procurement models in initial teacher education

The current issues affecting the teacher workforce require flexible approaches to match the supply and demand of teachers, to speed up entry into the classroom, and to improve the quality of school experience within ITE. The success of these approaches requires co-operation between employers, TRAs and ITE providers.

School systems can do more to shape the supply of graduate teachers into their schools by procuring specific programs from ITE providers. For example, a school system may procure a two-year equivalent postgraduate ITE program where the academic component is conducted over 12-18 months. The employer could also include a 6-12 month paid internship or residency as a core element of the 2-year program; giving employers the ability to choose the schools and curriculum areas that

pre-service teachers are placed in, and to have greater influence over the nature of the internship and the pre-service teacher's induction to the profession. This model can also be applied in the final year of an undergraduate ITE qualification.

Similar models are currently operating in some jurisdictions (with others moving in this direction). The procurement model also enables employers to work with ITE providers to offer places in hard-to-staff schools and areas of subject shortages. The specific targeted support provided to pre-service teachers in placements increases the likelihood of these teachers remaining and continuing to work in these schools. The Accreditation Standards and Procedures accommodate flexible programs and do not pose any barriers to their implementation. A number of TRAs are enabling their pre-service teachers to access limited forms of registration (such as alternative authorisation to teach) to smooth their registration pathway under these models. This model helps reduce the foregone earnings for mid-career professionals who may wish to move into teaching.

The implementation of paid internships or residencies encourages high-quality candidates to complete an ITE qualification reducing the financial disincentives of undertaking study, including a lack of income. At the same time, internships increase the time spent in the classroom prior to full-time employment. Structured time spent in the classroom supports the pre-service teachers' skill development in curriculum delivery and critical skills including classroom management and student engagement. It can also provide employers with greater oversight of the nature of the teaching in ITE programs. Under this approach, employer demand for quality teachers in areas of shortage is used to drive supply in teaching priority areas. This can be applied in a range of schools including rural and remote schools.

As examples, the Australian Government (thorough the High Achieving Teachers Program) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (through the Employment-based pathways funding) have procured specific programs from providers to address teacher supply issues. A further aim is to increase the partnership between schools and ITE in the preparation of classroom ready graduates. The current example of innovative postgraduate ITE programs in Victoria require prospective entrants to train and work in a content area of workforce shortage to be eligible for entry into the program.

Providers in other states and territories have also implemented 'fast-tracked' programs that include increased professional experience components. This indicates a recognition of the need for a change in the current structure of ITE programs to meet workforce demand and improve the preparedness of pre-service teachers.

Teacher certification and career pathways

The public reputation of the teaching profession must be increased so that the societal contribution of educators is valued and understood – and, in turn, so that that teaching is an attractive career choice. High esteem for the teaching profession is most likely to occur when the profession itself advocates for its own expertise, rather than basing its status on seeing the profession as a job or vocation. In calling for improved remuneration, greater autonomy, and more time, the profession must also promote what this money, autonomy and time is for – to develop, esteem, and privilege teaching and leadership expertise.

One example of this is seen in national teacher certification – a standards-based measure of teaching expertise and instructional leadership against the higher career stages of the Teacher Standards, assessed by an external assessor from outside of the teacher's school. A national process for certifying teachers at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages of the Teacher Standards was agreed in 2012, and certification is now available in some form in all states and territories (although not yet in each sector). As well as increasing the status of the profession by highlighting teachers'

expertise, certification opens up possibilities for using the expertise of our best teachers to spread excellence across the system.

Although certified teachers and their principals report that the certification process is of great benefit, to date only 1,025 teachers, or approximately 0.3% of the workforce, have achieved certification. A concerted national effort is required to ensure the benefits of certification are realised across Australia. Such a national effort would have three pillars:

- Establish national targets for the number of teachers achieving certification

- Review and streamline the certification process, including methods to avoid duplication where teachers have undertaken other similar processes

- Finding ways to make best use of certified teachers in and across schools.

In having nationally agreed targets, employers would move from seeing national certification as a boutique offering, to expanding and creating internal frameworks to support teachers to seek the recognition for their expertise, which all Ministers agreed to in 2012. Employers could work with their industrial relations partners to achieve this.

A review of the certification process could be undertaken to identify areas that could be streamlined, such as evidence requirements and decision-making processes. This review would be informed by key stakeholders in certification, including employers, certifying authorities and Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs) themselves. The review could also include the development and adoption of domain-specific HALT applications, an approach to 'banking' standards by providing evidence and being assessed against one at a time, as has already been adopted in the ACT, and feedback after each of these 'banked' assessments to improve the evidence provided against future standards. If the process can be streamlined (while maintaining the rigour of the standard) then it would reduce the time and resourcing required to assess applications and allow certifying authorities to increase their intake of HALT applicants. Similarly, a reduced time commitment for prospective HALTs may lower barriers to entry, increasing the number of applicants.

An opportunity exists to leverage existing strategies and programs that recognise teaching expertise, which do not currently include or have a track to national certification, applying provisions to enable these teachers to then apply for national certification (similar to the process of gaining credit through recognition of prior learning in tertiary education). For example, a teacher that has previously been assessed as an Advanced Skills Teacher 2 through the South Australian Department for Education could be supported to undertake an abridged national certification process where they 'fill the gaps' between the two processes, or are supported to transfer existing evidence to a certification portfolio.

Through implementing this national approach, a greater number of teachers will be able to access certification and be recognised at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages while maintaining the existing rigour and transparency of the national certification process.

Education systems and sectors could assist in achieving these targets and realising the benefits of teacher certification by creating roles for certified teachers, similar to the 'master teachers' seen in some high performing education systems such as Singapore. These teachers would retain a significant classroom teaching load, but also be responsible for coaching other teachers to improve practice, supervising pre-service and beginning teachers, and leading initiatives to improve pedagogy within and across schools. Their pay should recognise their expertise and reward them for taking leadership roles in the system. There is evidence that increasing the level of pay for high-level positions would make the profession more attractive than (more expensive) generalised pay rises (Goss & Sonnemann 2019, BETA 2022). Each jurisdiction would need flexibility to implement this reform in line with the timing of expiry of existing industrial agreements and in negotiation with their

workforces. Evidence shows that these types of professionalisation practices promote high quality teaching and the retention of the teaching workforce.

AITSL's consultation with HALTs themselves shows that they are keen to take on these roles. Many HALTs are frustrated that schools and systems do not gain more value from their expertise. Working with other teachers, including but not limited to pre-service and beginning teachers, should be built into their job descriptions.

Teacher labour market modelling

Teaching Futures outlines a proposal for a national labour market model, including a conceptual framework of national teacher supply and demand, which identifies the various elements and critical influences in the teacher labour market. This recommendation was reinforced by the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review.

A national labour market model for the teacher workforce would identify the critical factors affecting supply and demand. Additionally, such a model would enable more effective predictive modelling of the supply and demand for teachers nationally, locally and by specialisation. It would provide a national view of teacher supply and demand including, the supply of teachers from diverse backgrounds as well as within urban, regional, and remote locations. It would measure the impact of economic, social, demographic and policy changes on the teacher workforce. It could also be used for scenario modelling to predict the likely effects of potential policy or economic changes on the teacher workforce.

The Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative is designed to deliver accurate, useful, and longitudinal data on and insights into supply in ITE and the teacher workforce. This data supports predictive modelling of supply and workforce trends at national, jurisdictional and sector levels. The ATWD progressed from its initial implementation phase into providing annual supply data and is currently funded until 2025. It would provide a strong foundation for developing the national labour market model proposed in *Teaching Futures*.

A successful labour market model will require ongoing commitment to ensure the currency and validity of its data and modelling, and active collaboration among systems, sectors, employers, agencies and stakeholders to generate and provide necessary data. It will also require a broad consideration of factors that influence supply and demand, such as the status of the profession and trends in technological advancement, as macroeconomic and behavioural factors have the potential to act both as barriers to attracting and retaining teachers, or as motivators for growing specialisation demand. Most critically, systems and sectors must commit to provide timely demand data to match the increasingly sophisticated supply modelling available through the ATWD.

Better supply and demand data would open up a more informed debate on methods for addressing shortages. There is still much to be learned about what incentives, including salary, can attract teachers with the right skills to the schools where they are needed most.

Assessing the effectiveness of the National Policy Initiatives

> **Information request 3: Assessing the effectiveness of the National Policy Initiatives**
>
> a. Is there evidence that the NPIs have achieved expected short- or medium-term outcomes (such as States and Territories, schools or teachers using resources produced by the NPIs)?
>
> b. Are there any major barriers to realising the benefits of the NPIs (including barriers to finalising implementation)? If so, how could governments address these?
>
> c. Are the NPIs (likely to be) equally effective for all student cohorts, including equity cohorts, or are more tailored measures required?
>
> d. Taken as a whole, are the reforms set out in the NSRA likely to improve student outcomes in the future?

Lessons from the previous NPIs

While there is evidence that some National Policy Initiatives (NPIs) have achieved expected short- and medium-term outcomes, there are lessons to be learnt from the experience of implementation.

Those initiatives that have been most successfully implemented have been relatively clearly defined, such as establishing the Australian Education Research Organisation, or ensuring all teaching performance assessments (TPAs) are approved by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG). More complex, multi-staged initiatives, such as the Online Formative Assessment Initiative (OFAI) and the Unique Student Identifier (USI), have progressed more slowly.

In future, these more complex projects may be better placed as opt-in initiatives, so that they can continue with a 'coalition of the willing' rather than stalling when some jurisdictions are hesitant about participating. It should also be clear up front that jurisdictions see benefits in a national approach that outweigh the costs of change. It appears that many of the initiatives relating to measurement have yielded limited results because jurisdictions do not see a case to modify their current approaches.

Realising the benefits of the NPIs

The current suite of National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) reforms including the USI and OFAI, should continue until they are fully implemented. AITSL has suggested proposed NPIs for a new agreement above. The next NSRA should also include effective mechanisms to ensure that successful implementation is achieved in a timely manner – accurate measurement that captures the nuance and a more holistic picture of progress, to foster accountability.

The Webbe Review on the National Architecture for Schooling highlighted the need for better oversight of national initiatives by the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) and

Ministers and recommended that careful consideration should be given to the governance of the NPIs to ensure there is adequate oversight going forward. The OFAI governance structure provided a framework for national collaboration which could be considered as a model for future NPIs. The project established a governance model which employed an overall decision-making body with a Board, independent managing director to ensure clear accountability for progress, and independent project management. A similar approach has been successful in implementing the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative. A key accountability for any such Board should be to maintain momentum of the relevant project, ensuring that stakeholders are well informed and are in a position to support the next stages of the project. To achieve this, once established these types of governance bodies require the ability to exercise authority within their delegation.

Accountability for implementation

The progress of implementation of some NPIs raises questions about the ongoing commitment of all jurisdictions to reforms they initially agreed to. Aside from public reporting on progress, which has not had a high profile, there is little incentive to continue with reforms, to ensure they are followed through, or disincentive if reforms are abandoned. Independent assessment of progress, with incentive payments for jurisdictions fully implementing reforms, may be a way of addressing this.

Measurement Framework and performance indicators

At present, both the performance reporting framework in the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) and the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia narrowly focus on measures of student achievement on national and international assessments and specific metrics of student participation (attendance). Despite the importance of teachers and school leaders as drivers of student outcomes, there are no direct metrics of teaching quality in either measurement framework. As identified by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), the lack of measures relating to teacher quality, data consistency, collection and quality in the Measurement Framework means progress against these reform areas is "difficult to establish" (ANAO 2021).

Evaluation of policy initiatives targeting improvements in teaching practice, to boost student outcomes, necessitates the inclusion of measures of teaching quality in future performance reporting under the NSRA. The current approach of relying on metrics of student performance as proxy indicators of teacher quality is flawed – it obscures variations in teacher performance, takes a reductive view of a teacher's role and is insensitive to student context. While some work has been done internationally to identify indicators of teacher quality (for example, the International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching), no single approach has been widely adopted, and this sort of approach would be difficult to implement as a nationally consistent measure in a devolved education system. As suggested in a previous section, one potential national policy lever to boost teaching quality in Australian schools is to target Highly Accomplished and Lead teacher (HALT)

certification. Certified HALTs are capable of leading improvements in teaching and learning both within and beyond their own schools by contributing to a culture of professional learning and sharing of teaching expertise (AITSL 2019b). Setting national targets for the number of HALTs in schools would be an important metric to monitor the progress of this initiative. However, it would also be important to monitor the usage of HALTs in schools – the roles and responsibilities HALTs adopt – to ensure they are deployed in ways that maximise their effectiveness. Such monitoring could be captured at the national level as part of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative (ATWD).

The Mparntwe Declaration commits the education community to supporting all young Australians to "have a sense of belonging, purpose and meaning that enable them to thrive in their learning environment" (Education Council 2019, p.6). This broadly aligns to the outcome in the NSRA relating to student engagement – "all students are engaged in their schooling", which is quantified using attendance data only (the target set in the NSRA is "increase the proportion of students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time, including students from priority equity cohorts" (p.8)). This is a limited conception of student engagement. Given the important role student wellbeing plays in learning, this is a notable gap in the current NSRA and associated measurement framework. As per the Productivity Commission's recommendation in its 2020 Mental Health Inquiry, the NSRA should include a student wellbeing-focussed outcome that includes specific targets and associated measures (Productivity Commission 2020). There is a national Student Wellbeing Framework, informed by state and territory frameworks, already available to support this. Any measures in this area should have demonstrable links to learning outcomes. At the national level, there is precedent for investigations into population level health and wellbeing. For example, in 2020-21, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), as part of the Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study, conducted the first cohort of the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, involving Australians aged 16-85 years (ABS 2021). This study, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health will be used to understand the mental health of Australians.

A more holistic view of engagement may be particularly relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Despite repeated commitment to close the attendance gap, no progress has been made (Australian Government 2020a). At the same time, the gap in Year 12 attainment has decreased as more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are completing Year 12 or equivalent (66% in 2018-2019, up from 45% in 2008; Australian Government 2020b).

Improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involves more than merely boosting attendance rates – in fact, evidence suggests the factors influencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' affective engagement with schooling, that is, their sense of belonging at and liking school, differ from factors affecting attendance (Dunstan, Hewitt & Tomaszewski 2017). Recognising and supporting students' relationality to community and Country, forming genuine student-teacher interactions and offering language and cultural programs in schools are all crucial in this regard (Guenther, Harrison & Burgess 2019). Affective engagement is positively associated with achievement – more engaged students are more likely to learn. In this sense attendance offers an incomplete picture of engagement, at best. Cultural competency of the teaching workforce is a critical part of creating culturally safe learning environments for all learners.

The Mparntwe Declaration calls for the education community to create partnerships and connections with communities to value and centre the local, cultural knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to "foster a culturally supportive learning environment where all young Australians can thrive educationally and in all facets of life" (p. 10). Truly capturing progress towards this goal will require measures with a more holistic conception of engagement that go beyond student attendance data. Such measures could be included in a broader, national student survey – for example, the *Tell them from me* survey in NSW includes items relating to belonging.

While the current performance measures provide important data on the state of Australian schooling, additional metrics are needed to truly monitor progress and ensure the education community is on track to deliver the commitments outlined in the Mparntwe Declaration. The gaps in the current measurement framework outlined here relate to key drivers of student outcomes, particularly teaching quality and student wellbeing for learning, and will benefit from a national approach to promote consistency, collaboration and accountability.

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