



Australian College of Educators

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Education and Training Workforce: Schools  
commissioned study

February 2012

# **ACE Submission to Productivity Commission Review of Education and Training Workforce - Schools**

## **Introduction**

The Australian College of Educators (ACE) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission, on behalf of College members, to the Review of Education and Training Workforce - Schools.

The College welcomes the emphasis in the draft Report on the importance of high quality research and evaluation especially in relation to addressing equity issues in education and best practice models of teacher education. We also appreciated the fact that the Commission took into consideration both the national and international research of relevance. Finally we commend the Commission for recognising that there are no 'magic bullets' in education. Building a high quality profession requires setting in place measures and processes that are interrelated and that address the full gamut of the teaching life cycle from entry to training right through the careers of practitioners.

ACE is highly supportive of the decision to produce a draft report and provide opportunities for consultation to inform preparation of the final report. It is often much easier to provide input to a considered piece of work than to a set of Terms of Reference with a few key questions. We have based our submission largely in response to the points raised, information sought and recommendation made by the draft Report.

## **The Australian College of Educators**

ACE is well placed to assist the Review in its further deliberations. The College has a long history as a professional association. ACE members are drawn from both the government and non-government sectors of schooling and across all levels of education – including many from the teacher education and higher education research sectors.

The College also has a long history of supporting the profession and advocating for the advancement of the education profession. The College has played a significant role in the early work to develop the conceptual framework for professional standards for the profession and to build professional support for the development of appropriate standards. This work culminated in the development of a broadly supported national statement on principles for professional standards in 2003.

## **Overview of our submission**

In this submission, ACE has taken the view that other bodies are in a better position to comment on the Productivity Commission's findings in relation to the first element of its brief:

- factors affecting the supply of, and demand for, school workers

Our submission is directed mainly to the second and third elements relating to:

- whether the knowledge and skills base of the workforce, and its deployment within and across schools and regions, are appropriate to meet the community's needs
- whether policy, governance and regulatory arrangements (in place or in prospect) are conducive to maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of the schools workforce and, if not, what changes may be required

Our response covers the following

- Ø *The importance of the recently endorsed Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the associated Charter for the Profession as setting the framework for addressing teacher workforce challenges being considered by this Review*
- Ø *Our response to the Productivity Commission recommendations related to recent decisions to mandate a two-year course for graduate entry to the teaching profession*
- Ø *Endorsement of the need for further and better research about teacher education models and their effectiveness*
- Ø *Our position that the best way to recognise and reward high performing teachers is through the career and salary structure aligned to the national standards*
- Ø *Our support for building an effective performance management system and the principles that should inform this*
- Ø *Our concerns about the endorsement of school autonomy without good quality research backing*
- Ø *Our suggestions for getting a richer mix of high performing teachers to high need schools*
- Ø *A plea that the Commission's recommendation on representation on national decision making bodies include representation of the teaching profession*
- Ø *Endorsement for the importance of giving consideration to the role and importance of non teaching staff*

## Body of Submission

### 1. The importance of the recently endorsed Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the associated Charter for the Profession

This review comes at an interesting time in the history of Australian schools education because the endorsement of National Professional Standards for Teachers<sup>1</sup> by Education Ministers in December 2010, was an historic outcome built on over a decade of significant engagement across the professional education community at all levels.

It builds on the important profession driven work coordinated through Teaching Australia – the predecessor organisation to AITSL. It was this work that laid the conceptual groundwork for teaching standards in Australia and built a broad base of support for it across the profession.

It has been an important foundational step in the Australian teacher quality reforms and it is our view that much of the current debate around teacher recruitment, education, induction, school improvement, ongoing professional development, career structure and pay rates and performance management can best be considered through the lens of professional standards.

Policies aimed at producing quality teachers and school leaders need to ensure that:

- clear and rigorous standards exist that define expectations at different levels of expertise and against which practice can be accessed
- appropriately skilled and trained people are recruited and selected into the profession and at each career stage
- high quality preparation, induction and personalised support at every transition point and career step including pre-service education
- system level support and school leadership that create the conditions and a culture that supports and values professional learning
- access to multiple opportunities to engage in rigorous and relevant professional learning and by individuals, teams, schools, networks and systems
- appropriate remuneration, recognition and opportunities for career progression aligned to the endorsed standards framework
- regular review and management of performance and the provision of specific and timely qualitative and quantitative feedback
- a clear and central role for the profession – as custodians of the standards.

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<sup>1</sup> National Professional Standards for Teachers, AITSL, February 2011

URL :

[http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Static/docs/aitsl\\_national\\_professional\\_standards\\_for\\_teachers\\_240611.pdf](http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Static/docs/aitsl_national_professional_standards_for_teachers_240611.pdf)

*We recommend that the revised Schools Workforce Review Report acknowledges that the standards provide a core framework and that in further deliberating on its recommendations the Commission use the teacher standards framework as a lens in developing its recommendations around performance management, career and salary structures, teacher education, and professional development.*

## **2. Productivity Commission recommendations related to recent decisions around graduate entry to the profession**

The decision taken by MCEECDYA to endorse *the Standards and Procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia*<sup>2</sup> was the culmination of widespread consultation with education systems, policy makers, teachers and their associations, unions, teacher education institutions, education researchers and key stakeholders. The introduction of a two-year timeframe for graduate entry to the profession was an important component of that agreement. It was not a decision taken lightly, and in fact securing this level of widespread support is quite rare.

It was a response to a significant body of evidence and logical reasoning based on the evidence:

- the agreement to adopt professional standards reflects and builds on national and international evidence that a teacher's effectiveness has a powerful impact on students;
- the different elements of effective teaching encapsulated by the standards framework draw on the best evidence research about the factors that contribute to high teacher impact on students. This has also been reality through extensive consultation across the profession;
- now that we have an agreed standards framework, it is only logical that this must now be used as the baseline for assessing, accrediting and supporting the quality of pre service programs -indeed this was one of the fundamental purposes for developing the professional standards;<sup>3</sup>
- As noted by the draft Report, there is considerable evidence that

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<sup>2</sup> Standards and Procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia, AITSL, April 2011

URL:

[http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/resources/Accreditation\\_of\\_initial\\_teacher\\_education\\_FAQ.pdf](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/resources/Accreditation_of_initial_teacher_education_FAQ.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> National Statement from the Teaching Profession on Teacher Standards and Professionalism, Australian College of Educators, May 2003

This document was the culmination of over three years of collaborative work by the profession on teacher standards. It was signed by 15 National Professional Bodies. The document specifies the purposes for which the standards should be used, the first one being pre-service education, teacher registration and induction.

current teacher education courses leave the full task of equipping teachers to be effective practitioners to the school where they commence their careers - overwhelmingly our more hard to staff schools.

This has been underscored by the most recent release of the 2010 Staff in Australia's Schools survey,<sup>4</sup> which confirms that 50% or more of graduates believe that they are less than fully prepared for the following very important aspects of their work:

- using teaching standards to improve their teaching practices;
- selecting and adapting curriculum and instructional materials;
- handling a range of classroom management situations;
- assessing students' performance;
- working effectively with parents/guardians;
- teaching students with learning difficulties;
- teaching students from Indigenous backgrounds; and
- teaching students from different cultural backgrounds.

It is unacceptable for 50% of our teacher education graduates to feel inadequately prepared for their chosen profession. We need our graduates to be fully equipped to make a high impact in the classroom. The students who make up their first class are more likely to be in low SES schools, regional or remote schools (SiAS 2011 p. 74). These are likely to have first year teachers in the majority of their classes. Learning on the job is effectively learning on the children of the disadvantaged.

The decision to mandate a two-year timeframe for graduate entry was taken after extensive assessment of:

- the breadth and depth demanded by the national standards for teachers;
- the need, identified time after time in reviews of teacher education, to extend and improve the nature of the practicum (or professional experience) and to better integrate it with the academic discipline knowledge required of the profession;
- the understanding that teacher education is not just about immersion in the discipline knowledge of education, which is extensive; nor is it just about an apprenticeship/ internship into the practice of being an educator. It necessitates the integration of these two aspects.

There is broad consensus across the education sector that it will not be possible to meet these enhanced requirements without moving to a two-year course.

This is in keeping with the approach that has been taken by those countries regarded as the leaders in education. It is also consistent with the recommendations of a US based National Commission on teacher quality

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<sup>4</sup> Staff in Australia's Schools, ACER, 2012

convened by the National Education Association<sup>5</sup> but with a clear mandate to take an independent non union position where the evidence demanded.

They set out their requirements for effective teacher certification as follows:

*Teaching is complex work [and underpinning this work is a]...clear, rigorous, universally accepted body of knowledge and skills identifying what a prospective teacher should know and be able to do before entering the classroom. ...[education] candidates acquire this knowledge and learn these skills through significant school-based experiences.*

*It is important that those who receive a teaching license have demonstrated specific skills and knowledge [and have the opportunity to] ... spend significant time in schools working alongside effective teachers.*

The draft report suggests that the caution on moving to a two-year program stems in part from its concerns about some research that suggests that the link between certification and teacher quality is not strong. It is worth noting that this research question is not one of any relevance to the high performing countries identified through the PISA testing regimes. They do not have uncertified teachers in the classroom so there is nothing to research.

The research body referred to by the draft report, only some of which raise doubts about this relationship, are all US based. The US is not among the high performing group of countries and in terms of policies and governance arrangement for education is considered to be an outlier.

Their certification situation is also highly non standard in that the employment of teachers who do not have teacher certification is widespread and, even where teachers are certified; this can mean many different things. For example an NEA Commission report cites the following extremes:

*For full licensure in Massachusetts, teachers must have an undergraduate degree in the arts and sciences, pass a literacy and mathematics test and a test of content knowledge, teach successfully for at least three years, and complete post-baccalaureate work in content and pedagogy. For licensure in Mississippi, however, teachers may have a bachelor's degree in any subject, and they need only pass a content area test and complete as few as three weeks of training.*

This means that research that appears to be comparing non-certified teachers against certified teachers could be comparing very divergent groups of people.

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<sup>5</sup> [Transforming Teaching: Connecting Professional Responsibility with Student Learning](#)  
Report of the Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, National Education Association, 8 December 2012

### **3. The need for further research about teacher education models and their effectiveness**

The decision to move to a two-year course for graduate entry does not mean that teacher education programs need to take a uniform approach or even that there is one best model. There is still a need for research and evaluation to identify good practice and effective models and we support the draft Report recommendation that more research is important, including tracking teacher education entrants into different programs through to their teaching years.

Some of this research could look to the research on effective certification, different models of preparation and accreditation models developed in other professions.

There is also a need to undertake quite specific research related to the teacher education practicum including whether it is adequately funded. The University of Melbourne clinical practice model has seen the University utilise most of its additional funding to enhance aspects of the practicum – including investing in building capacity of the teacher supervisors. The Australian Council of Deans of Education’s submission to the base funding review argues that the funding formula for the teacher education practicum is inadequate and needs to be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

The research could also focus on whether there is merit in having the new category of lead teachers play a role in overseeing the practicum and whether this should be considered as part of the teaching career structure and job specification.

There are also other challenges and opportunities associated with this move to a two-year timeframe that would be worth further research and consideration.

We believe that the profession of education has been enriched by entrants to the profession who have come from other career paths – either as graduates or as highly experienced employees. There would be benefit in looking at ways of ensuring that the change from a one-year program to a two-year program does not cut out access to potentially high quality career change entrants – especially those who may not necessarily be in a financial position to forego two years of salary due to family or financial commitments. This is currently a significant and important sub group of graduate teacher entrants - a group that we would not want to be discouraging from entering into teaching.

One possible model that would fit very well into a two-year education program is the internship model of teacher practicum – including the option of students being paid as para-professionals for this work. This is a model adopted by medicine. A pilot study should be considered to assess the resourcing implications of such a model.

*It is recommended that the Productivity Commission withdraw its opposition to*

*the mandatory two-year course for graduate entry to the profession, but continue to recommend a greater research and evaluation effort, focusing on effective models – including longitudinal studies, ways of ensuring continued access to teacher education by high quality career changers, and a pilot study of an internship model for the practicum.*

#### **4. Recognising and rewarding high performing teachers through the career and salary structure**

The Productivity Commission recommendation 6.1 in relation to merit pay for teachers and the Government's decision to adopt this position was very welcome. This initiative would certainly have been a significant distraction from the important work of developing and bedding down a fully-developed standards architecture for the teaching profession.

However we do see that there is merit in recognising and even rewarding outstanding teacher practice. We would like to see this developed in ways that align with the teacher standards framework. Now that we have an agreed standards framework we suggest that the best way to recognise and reward high quality teaching is through the career progression and remuneration structure.

A number of educators have proposed models along these lines (Dinham<sup>6</sup>, Ingvarson<sup>7</sup>). For example Dinham talks about new career structures in terms of a life-time career structure with appropriate salary progression that: stays within teaching; that recognises and rewards those classroom teachers who demonstrate high standards of expertise and that leverages this expertise to further build capacity and improve the teacher education practicum.

*A key factor in the ongoing effectiveness of this plan to develop and reward teachers will be the extent to which discrete industrial awards for teachers migrate to the new standards. There needs to be commonality across the nation but not a single award, something long accepted in the university sector where we have five broad levels from tutor to professor.*

The 2010 *Staff in Australia's Schools* report (ACER 2012) found that a preference to stay in the classroom and concern about time demands were among the main reasons for a continued reluctance of teachers to take on leadership positions. There is clearly a demand for leadership positions that allow for continuing involvement in classroom teaching.

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<sup>6</sup> Dinham, Stephen, Let's get serious about teacher quality: The need for a new Career architecture for Australia's teachers, Dean's Lecture, University of Melbourne, 27th September 2011  
Available at  
<http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/news/lectures/pdf/S%20Dinham%20PowerPoint%2027.9.11.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ingvarson, Lawrence, Getting performance pay right, ACER, *Research Developments*: Vol. 17, Article 3, 2007.  
Available at: <http://research.acer.edu.au/resdev/vol17/iss17/3>

Indeed the OECD *Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education – Australia*<sup>8</sup> document concluded that the Australian teaching profession would benefit from the alignment of teaching standards with a competency-based career structure for teachers. This would strengthen the incentive for teachers to improve their competencies, and reinforce the matching between teachers' levels of competence and the tasks that need to be performed in schools to improve student learning.

The salary structure for teaching is quite flat relative to comparative professions and we believe that there is a strong case for increasing the pay progression rate.

According to 2006 census data, at age 30, of those with at least a bachelors degree and working full time in 2006, 15% of teachers, but 39% of all earned \$1300 per week or more, and, more strikingly, only 2% of teachers and 22% of all earned \$1600/week or more<sup>9</sup>.

Once again the professional standards framework for teachers with its four levels of proficiency provides a solid and comprehensive framework for addressing this – one that is likely to have the support of the profession.

*Dinham argues that “it will be essential, ...to those teachers who attain Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher status, that individual employers and jurisdictions modify and provide salary scales to provide further recognition and reward. Ideally those teachers who attain Highly Accomplished status - perhaps 30% of the overall teaching service - should earn at least twice the salary of a beginning teacher, whilst those who attain Lead Teacher status - perhaps 10% of the overall teaching population - should be able to earn up to two and a half times the salary of a beginning teacher.*

*If this can be achieved then we will really have a salary and career architecture fit for a profession and one that will act to attract, prepare, retain and further develop teachers to achieve the overall goal of a quality teacher in every classroom ...*

This is a particularly important matter for the government school sector because of the large drift of high performing teachers to the non-government sector, because of the capacity of some non-Government schools to cherry pick and offer considerably more favourable financial and other incentives. There is a great deal of anecdotal information about this drift, confirmed in part by the recently published *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010*<sup>10</sup> but what is not known is the degree to which this impacts on the relative quality and experience of teachers within and between the respective sectors. The

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<sup>8</sup> Paulo Santiago, Graham Donaldson, Joan Herman and Claire Shewbridge, OECD Reviews of evaluation and Assessment in Education – Australia, 2011 available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/44/48519807.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Preston (by personal communication)

<sup>10</sup> note: Comparisons between the SiAS 2007 and 2010 survey suggests that this drift might have eased somewhat but more research into this matter would assist in understanding the dimensions of this problem

issues of pay relativities and the size and impact of teacher drift needs to be openly acknowledged, researched and better understood.

It is also worth noting that the establishment of a such lifetime career structure with appropriate salary progression that stays within teaching that recognises and rewards those classroom teachers who demonstrate high standards of expertise using the teacher standards framework, may lead to a further decrease of suitable applicants for the position of school principal. This is already noted as a problem so this would also need to be examined, researched and addressed. The importance of investing in high quality school leadership should remain a priority.

*It is recommended that the Productivity Commission consider recommending the tying of rewards and recognition to a consistent career and salary structure aligned to the four tier teacher standards framework.*

*We also urge the Productivity Commission to consider identifying the issues related to a continued stream of high quality applicants for principal positions and the comparative teacher quality issues across sectors as ones requiring further investigation and research.*

## **5. Building an effective performance management system**

We agree with the general assessment that there is room to improve the performance management system in Australian schools and that this is a high priority. However we should be under no illusions as to the challenging nature of this. It is easy to design a great system but very hard to establish it in a sustainable way in any employment context. Schools are not alone with this challenge.

However, this issue related to recognizing and rewarding high performing teachers through the career and salary progression structure.

Dinham argues that it is vitally important that in operationalising the kind of salary and career structure outlined above we get the process of teacher assessment and performance management right.

*Many commentators have advocated simplistic solutions to the issue of judging and improving teacher quality, none of which are likely to be successful. .... [I]t will be essential to develop credible, valid, reliable means of assessing teachers that meaningfully engage the profession. ... This will not be easy but it can be done. We must however avoid the 'rubberstamping' and inconsistencies that have blighted previous attempts to assess teachers' performance. We need a process which is truly developmental as opposed to being largely judgemental and the process must be based on the National Standards.*

*The Commonwealth is to be commended for taking the lead with this approach but it will be up to the entire profession to see that it works.*

In the New Zealand based best-evidence synthesis of teacher professional learning and development, Timperley and others<sup>11</sup>, assert that teachers need many and continuing opportunities to learn through a range of approaches if they are to realise the complex and difficult goal of achieving change in their practice.

They argue that the most powerful approaches are ones that promote professional, self-regulated learning, with individual teachers (working as individuals or as members of professional groups) knowing what their goal is, how they are progressing in relation to that goal and what they will need to do next in order to make further targeted progress.

While the need to reform teacher evaluation is real, the need to get it right is critical. This means being clear about the purposes of such a system.

The research suggests that teachers want support to continuously improve their practice. As reported in OECD Background Report to the International Summit on the Teaching Profession<sup>12</sup>, the vast majority of teachers welcome appraisal of and feedback on their work, and report that it improves their job satisfaction and effectiveness. Overall, too many teachers report that they do not receive any feedback on their work.

Teachers also see the value of a four-tier professional standards framework. Any system that is developed needs to build on these two aspects. This means starting with identifying what processes and structures will most support teachers - as individuals; as members of teaching teams; as members of school communities; and as members of professional communities to engage with processes that will provide feedback and learning that will improve their practice.

It should not be designed solely around 'weeding out the unfit' as the current draft report implies. This means building it in a way that: aligns with the professional standards; recognises the fact that teachers are part of schools and not just isolated autonomous individuals; and involves the profession.

Any perception that the priority purpose of a performance management system is driven by the need to identify and get rid of poor performers will lead to further distrust and lowering of morale.

We commend the Productivity Commission for not recommending going down the path taken by the US Race to the Top Legislation. The idea that an individual teacher's effectiveness can be measured through Value Added

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<sup>11</sup> Helen Timperley, Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES), Education Counts, new Zealand, 2007  
Available at [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/16901/TPLandDBESentire.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/16901/TPLandDBESentire.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Building a High Quality Teaching Profession, Background Report for the International Summit on the Teaching Profession, OECD March 2011  
Available at <http://asiasociety.org/files/lwtw-teachersummit.pdf>

Measures (VAM) using student test scores is not supported by the research data on the stability, reliability and validity of test score results below a critical population level.

The challenge in developing a fair, valid and rigorous system of performance management that is relevant to all teachers regardless of their context, can be meaningfully applied and which will result in improved teacher quality, lies in developing the expertise of teachers and their leaders to link performance appraisal with meaningful and instructive feedback and action. This will necessarily involve investments in training, establishing clear evaluation processes and aligning appraisal with broader school reforms such as professional development opportunities (OECD, 2011).

Given the potentially significant impact a nationally consistent, performance management system could have on teacher quality, it will be essential to build consensus, ownership and flexibility into a national system. It will also be essential to consider the evidence of other countries and professions and avoid simplistic or formulaic practices that result in ineffective practice or bonus schemes. The OECD *Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education – Australia*, concludes that “to ensure performance management processes in Australia are focused on improvement and result in system improvement, will require time for broad and extensive consultation and trialing and meaningful research”.

*It is recommended that in proposing an enhanced and nationally consistent approach to teacher performance management the Productivity Commission makes it clear that its purpose is to develop teacher capability across the board and that it will rely on developing the expertise of teachers and their leaders to link performance appraisal with meaningful and instructive feedback and action aligned to the standards framework.*

## **6. School autonomy**

In light of the Productivity Commission’s strong stand on evidence based decision making and the need to proceed cautiously in areas where research is not strong, we were somewhat surprised and dismayed by the apparent unproblematic acceptance of school autonomy as necessarily a positive innovation.

The Australian Education Union submission to the Productivity Commission in August noted that the strategies school leaders cite as most important to support their work cover issues such as more support staff, less imposed change, more positive public image and a reduced workload. Greater autonomy is not in the top rated category.

There is substantial anecdotal evidence of the unintended consequences of autonomy. This includes: the reported high and growing numbers of teachers on contract in Victoria because it suits principals to have that degree of hire and fire flexibility (It is likely that many of these teachers will not stay in

teaching if they continue to face uncertain employment year after year); reports of schools getting rid of ESL resources and librarians to fund other priorities; concerns by principals in NSW that this could be a way of reducing overall funding for important elements such as special education; and concerns by some principals about the additional impacts on their already high workload.

The recent ABC *Four Corners* program, *Revolution in the Classroom*, framed the efforts by its profiled schools to improve teacher quality entirely in terms of autonomy. But the autonomy itself was described exclusively as being about the capacity to hire and fire teachers.

When looked at from the point of view of an individual school this might make some kind of sense, but when looked at from the bigger picture of all schools there are serious problems.

This is because, in a mass profession such as teaching, the free flowing and intense competition to hire the best and move on the weakest will have considerable flow on effects – that will impact negatively on our most hard to staff schools, who already operate with a higher than average cadre of less experienced teachers. The principal in the *Four Corners* program who talked about getting rid of a large number of staff, including his entire senior team, did not mean that the teachers were fired. They must have been relocated elsewhere.

The Productivity Commission has endorsed the principle that there is value in strengthening Australia's approach to teacher performance management but making it easier to hire in new talent and move out the weaker staff will not encourage a principal to put effort into developing current staff. That is, it makes it easier to replace staff than to improve them through effective performance management. And inevitably schools that already battle to fill their teaching vacancies, schools that already have high staff turnover and high numbers of novice teachers will be the ultimate losers in such a system.

The oft quoted OECD conclusion that the 2009 PISA results confirm that school autonomy increases student learning should be treated with some caution as many researchers question its assumptions that correlations confirm causation.

It is also important to question whether autonomy is in the best interest of all schools. The McKinsey Report, *How the best performing school systems come out on top*,<sup>13</sup> points out that there is not a one to one correlation between high performing school systems and school autonomy.

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<sup>13</sup> McKinsey and Company *How the best performing school systems come out on top*, September 2007

All the different school systems that have improved significantly have done so primarily because they have produced a system that is more effective in doing three things: getting more talented people to become teachers; developing these teachers into better instructors; and ensuring that these instructors deliver consistently for every child in the system. The way in which they have done these things varies somewhat. Singapore's school system is managed from the centre and they have used this to drive through improvements. In England policy makers have relatively less control over its more decentralized school system and they have used standards, funding, public accountability and strong support mechanisms to create the conditions under which improvements can occur. In other systems the strength of unions or other political actors has had influence over the pace and the path of reform, though maybe not its ultimate direction. (page 40).

It is also worth asking, what is the problem that school autonomy is intended to solve? Why has it become such a popular panacea, and for what?

There are three possible problems for which autonomy has been touted as the answer and all of them have other possible solutions.

Firstly, the recent popularity of the idea of school autonomy appears to be, in part, a reaction to the high stakes accountability environment and the implicit school-to-school competition this creates. The Productivity Commission made a decision not to comment on the broader national education policy framework in Australia. This is a pity because this test driven accountability regime is not the policy environment that characterises high performing education systems. Putting in place a solution to a problem created by a non-evidence-based policy framework seems to be adding to our problems not reducing them.

Secondly the call for autonomy can be seen as a response to the common practice of tying equity based funds to particular programs rather than providing additional funding as core funding for low SES schools. It doesn't take a full autonomy agenda to free up funds so schools can respond in more flexible ways to their identified local priorities.

And finally, it is almost certainly seen by principals as a solution to the problem of having underperforming teachers imposed on them by the department. This happens because performance management is not effective and the answer is to improve it, not undermine it.

The policy architecture that is developed to build the capability of teachers, and to build a culture of career long collaborative professional learning and feedback, needs to be directed to improving the instructional practice of all teachers and supporting all schools, principals and teachers. Intensifying competition and creating winners and losers is not consistent with this.

*It is recommended that the Productivity Commission take a more cautious approach to the issue of school autonomy.*

## **7. Getting a richer mix of high quality teachers to high need schools**

We support the Productivity Commission's view that equity issues need to be considered when developing an effective schools workforce planning framework and should not be seen as a problem to address after the framework has been designed.

The research is clear that the decisions about teacher placement should not just be left to the market place, but we also believe that reliance on the traditional economic tools used to influence demand and supply may not be enough. Paying teachers differentially to overcome staff undersupply whether in hard to staff schools, in mathematics, ESL, or special education, is not a panacea, as the draft Report itself notes.

After all, in high need schools we want to be doing more than just filling vacancies. We need to find ways to identify and attract a richer mix of high performing teachers. We don't know if economic incentives alone will be enough. We need to have a better understanding about both incentives and disincentives. What attracts high performing teachers to high need schools and, just as importantly, what puts them off? These may not be the same things.

There have been a few research projects looking at these challenges. Susanna Rice of the University of Melbourne recently investigated what might motivate high performing teachers to choose high need schools and her research<sup>14</sup> concluded that high performing teachers actively looked for schools that were innovative, that had leadership positions that were focused around supporting quality classroom practice (e.g. lead/master teacher type positions as mentors and learning development managers), schools that partnered with researchers in the higher education sector on interesting and relevant research projects or schools that are centres of excellence and so on. This requires the investment of research funding.

The US National Education Policy Centre recently released a report<sup>15</sup> that recommended a number of approaches to attract high performing teachers to high poverty schools. They argued that direct monetary incentives, while potentially important if set at meaningful levels, comprise only one type of incentive and only part of the solution to the problem of inequitable distribution, inadequate supply, and inadequate retention of teaching talent. They argue that teachers desire choice in how they receive monetary benefits, and teachers' choices and actions may respond to incentives through non-monetary factors, as well, the most important of these being the

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<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Rice, Getting good teachers into challenging schools, Curriculum Leadership, Volume 6 Issue 14, 2010

<sup>15</sup> Scott R. Bauries, Proposed legislation for teacher Incentives for Schools Excellence and Equity, National Education Policy Centre, January 20112

working conditions in schools.

*Highly effective teachers tend to value professional autonomy, collaboration, and opportunities to use and share their expertise.*

They urge consideration of the specific conditions in challenging schools that influence whether effective teachers will work and be able to teach effectively in them and point out that such working conditions are far more important than bonuses in persuading teachers to stay or leave their classrooms. National teacher turnover survey data indicate that teachers dissatisfied with their jobs leave for a variety of reasons that can be addressed: e.g., low salaries, poor support from school administrators, a lack of student motivation, a lack of teacher influence over decision making, and student discipline problems. Yet current policies rarely recognise these realities.

They also noted that factors such as strong principal leadership, a collegial staff with a shared teaching philosophy, access to adequate resources, and a supportive and active parent community prove to be far more powerful determinants than salary in enticing them to move to high-need schools.

*This report also points out that “teaching in a high-need school is often a frenetic and challenging experience. While the challenge and the pace is appealing for many idealistic, committed educators, these conditions must be acknowledged as many teachers must manage multiple interventions, meet the social and emotional needs of their students, mediate conflicts when out-of-school turmoil spills over into the classroom, cope with the complexity of teaching highly mobile students, and deal with the constant pressure to prepare for high-stakes tests that are often not tightly aligned to the standards to which they are expected to teach or the very real needs of the students. Moreover, many teachers in high-need schools, because of a host of factors, are forced to teach out-of-field.”*

Of course, feeling confident that one’s training has equipped one to teach effectively in culturally diverse and chaotic environments with higher levels of behavioural and other challenges is also a relevant factor and should be considered in terms of the Productivity Commission’s deliberations about teacher education.

It is also worth noting that working in difficult environments for long periods can be personally taxing. Some consideration could be given to arrangements whereby teachers who do like to teach in difficult to staff schools could, after a nominal period of time, be provided with some type of sabbatical – perhaps at an “easy” school or on study leave to enable them to recharge their batteries before returning to difficult to staff schools.

*It is recommended that the revised report acknowledge that while pay differentials may play a role in addressing hard to staff areas of teaching, in relation to hard to staff schools specifically there are a number of other aspects about the quality of a school experience that could be addressed to improve the attractiveness of hard to staff schools to high quality teachers.*

## **8. Representation on national decision making bodies**

The Productivity Commission puts the case for the development of a national school education decision-making body that includes Catholic and Independent system representation as well as parents but doesn't mention the representation of teachers. This is a glaring omission. One of the reasons why teachers have embraced the concept of professional standards and a charter for the profession is because they desire to have the standing of a profession. This means that the knowledge and experience of teachers and principals must be included in the deliberations and decision making processes.

Teachers, through their networks of professional associations, need to find ways to engage with education policy – where they can speak of the impact of different policies and programs – suggest new ways of looking at issues.

*It is recommended that the Commission acknowledge the importance of the profession being engaged in the consideration and implementation of workforce matters that are the subject of this report and that this is how occupations defined as professions operate in practice.*

## **9. The role and importance of non teaching staff**

The Draft Report suggests that schools could make better use of the non-teaching workforce in schools and the potential this has to enhance the teaching profession. This is a very under-researched area but one worthy of more investigation. We commend the Commission for raising this issue.