



21 October 2022

The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission relating to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement Interim report.

As the peak body representing state and territory joint councils of teacher associations, and with a network of up to 200,000 teachers from across the various sectors, the Australian Professional Teachers Association is in a key position to provide additional comments on the report.

Our strength as an organisation lies in our ability to directly represent the interests of practicing classroom teachers across Australia. We are a voice for teachers and an effective conduit between decision-making bodies and the classroom. APTA provides an alternative to principal committees or teacher unions, with a classroom-focused, practitioner perspective that is directly connected to the student, rather than a managerial perspective of school operations.

We have provided specific feedback in response to calls for information in the interim report, but have also made some other comments relevant to the findings to date

I am able to provide further detail to the comments in this response if this will be of assistance.

We look forward to reading the final report upon its release.

Cheryl Brennan
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Submission on the Review of the National School Reform Agreement Interim Report from the Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA).

The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) welcomes the opportunity to continue to have input into the work of the Productivity Commission on the Review of the National School Reform Agreement. We appreciate the consideration given by our first submission in developing the Interim Report, particularly regarding the importance of teacher voice in policy making. We note that *Information Request 2.2* (p.76) asks about ways of ensuring teachers have effective input into policy formation – we continue to strongly recommend that Professional Teaching Associations (PTAs) be actively involved in policy development through active consultation as key stakeholders.

In addition to addressing some of the requests for information outlined in the Interim Report, we would also like to comment on some of the interim findings and highlight the valuable role of PTAs in responding to the issues raised.

Collecting evidence and data

The interim report comments on the lack of progress being made in developing the data and evidence needed for an effective national workforce strategy.

Information request 5.6 (p.160) asks about systems in place to understand what is taught in classrooms and how it is being taught, and options for effectively and efficiently obtaining more and better data on classroom practice.

As PTAs operate in every jurisdiction across Australia and in all schooling sectors, we are well-placed to support the collection of data and evidence relating to teaching in Australia.

We recommend that policy makers actively consult with PTAs when developing policies and strategies relating to the teaching workforce, and to consider the role PTAs can play in supporting data and evidence collection.

The interim report gives focus to teacher shortages as part of the workforce strategy. PTAs include members from all stages of schooling – early childhood, primary, secondary – as well as higher education and the TAFE sector. We know that Australia needs a workforce in which teachers have multiple, sustainable and higher-level skills and professional qualifications and the workforce capacity development crucial for the nation's productivity. A focus on school culture, productivity growth, improved wages, minimising attrition and raising innovation levels and an increased focus on community engagement and teacher wellbeing. PTAs can play a valuable role in supporting data and evidence collection in all of these areas, and can develop, apply and support initiatives developed to address areas of need.

A coordinated national approach

We note that the interim report recommends a focus on a small number of reforms that will directly lift student outcomes, which may include approaches including:

enabling quality teaching: Governments need to create the time, support and resources for effective teaching. Priorities could include reducing high workloads and out-of-field teaching, professional development at critical points (such as induction and support for early career teachers) and fostering best practice teaching through networks, collaboration and technology (p.2)

APTA strongly supports the need for a nationally consistent approach to address issues impacting on quality teaching. We note that issues relating to time, resourcing and funding require the commitment of systems and governments but know that PTAs can provide valuable contribution to supporting issues regarding out-of-field teaching, developing and providing professional development. In addition, PTAs are long-standing, productive, effective, and sustainable professional networks that already exist and already provide active support to educators across Australia.

APTA would also like to comment on the issue of time, and the possibility that the notion of “making time” may be misunderstood or misapplied. PTAs are largely made up of practising educators who apply their professionalism in a

voluntary capacity in addition to their work as teachers. Teachers are prepared to make time in addition to their professional responsibilities when they see their engagement in programs, events and groups as being directly relevant to teaching, learning and assessment. Thus, any approach to address issues relating to time should focus on reducing the burden from compliance, repetitive and overlapping regulatory red tape through regulatory frameworks, such as safety risk assessments and business continuity plans. Teachers require greater human resource support in terms of administrative time and reduction of duplicative efforts of record-keeping across multiple student and asset management systems, or smarter strategies standards compliance with competing Commonwealth and State or Territory governance. As documented by AITSL (Shifting the Balance, December 2020¹), a consistent focus on red tape reduction is urgently needed.

Supporting teachers

APTA supports strategies that will best support teachers in their important work in the classroom. We believe stronger consideration can be given at the policy level to the work of PTAs. *Information Request 5.3* (p.157) asks if the drivers of attribution are amendable to government policy. We believe additional policy support to PTAs could see benefits in supporting teachers, as we outline below.

We note that this section explores opportunities for building the HALT network and in using these more effectively to directly support teachers. Goss and Sonnemann (2020)² propose the development of a Master Teacher program that includes HALT accreditation as part of its structure.

However, we also note that these programs cannot occur in the immediate term. The submission from AERO suggests 10-year timing for implementing new structures, and Goss and Sonnemann indicate a 12-year timeline.

While not critiquing the value of an expanded use of HALTs or the establishment of a Master Teacher program, we believe that PTAs can play an essential role in supporting teachers in the immediate to near term while other programs are being developed (while noting that PTAs will continue to play an essential role in supporting teaching alongside other possible support initiatives). Teaching associations already provide highly relevant, learning area-specific professional development, teacher support and mentoring and resource development support to teachers across Australia. We believe our current work aligns directly with *Draft recommendation 5.3* (p.157) on maximising the value of highly effective teachers, and that the existing localised communities of practice of PTAs can be built on for added benefit for teachers.

At present there is not a consistent approach by states/territories to providing human or financial resources to professional teaching associations. Associations in populated states in key learning areas, such as English and Maths, can generate sufficient revenue from membership dues, sale of resources or corporate sponsorship: but specialised subject associations and those operating in smaller jurisdictions, like Tasmania and the ACT, can struggle to generate the revenue they need to best meet the needs of their members.

Where government funding is provided, clear evidence indicates that responsive professional learning can be delivered at scale. The Northern Territory – arguably Australia’s most complex educational jurisdiction by demography and geography – has implemented an effective policy approach that is worthy of consideration across Australia.

We recommend consideration be given by all state and Territory governments to the approach currently used by the Northern Territory Government in providing financial and human resources to the Professional Teachers Association of the Northern Territory (PTANT) which is achieving considerable success in supporting teachers.

Case study: Service Agreement between the Northern Territory Government and the Professional Teachers Association of the Northern Territory

- PTANT has signed a five-year funding agreement with the Northern Territory Department of Education. This agreement provides financial support and an administrative officer position to PTANT which is used to support the work of NT-based professional teaching associations

¹ <https://pages.aitsl.edu.au/red-tape/review-to-reduce-red-tape-for-teachers-and-school-leaders>

² Goss, P. and Sonnemann, J. 2020, Top Teachers: Sharing expertise to improve teaching, Report No. 2020-02, Grattan Institute.

- The funding agreement allows for NT-based associations to apply for up to \$20,000 in grants to be used for professional development of teachers
- In the 2021/22 financial year, 23 grants were provided to teaching associations which directly benefited over 800 teachers
- Over 800 Northern Territory teachers directly benefited from the professional learning provided by the associations
- In addition, PTANT coordinates a biennial Festival of Teaching – a one-day professional learning event which supports discipline-based and cross-curricula professional learning. In 2021, over 58 workshops were delivered to over 250 attendees
- Professional development activities are coordinated by teaching associations – consisting of practising teachers who understand the needs of teachers in the classroom
- The funding agreement provided associations with a one-off \$4000 grant to support them to re-establish effective professional learning post-COVID

The PTANT example demonstrates how a well-funded professional teaching association model can provide relevant and engaging professional learning and support to teachers. The Northern Territory is a challenging educational environment – a small, complex population spread over a wide geographic area. The funding provided by the Northern Territory Government has allowed for effective professional learning to be supported in this environment. The same level of professional support could not occur in the Northern Territory without funding – the teacher base is too small for adequate funding from membership dues.

APTA recommends that all state and Territory governments explore opportunities to fund the work of professional teaching associations. We believe the Northern Territory model – where human resources and funding is provided to the peak body/joint council to support state-based associations – is an effective way to achieve high returns from existing and sustainable networks both in the short term and into the future.

Policy makers may have concerns regarding the structure and operation of PTAs which may give pause for concern on expanded funding for associations:

- PTAs are separate from government and jurisdictional structures – they are established under federal legislation through the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) or under state/territory legislation. This may pose some concern in government, but effective consultation with PTAs and the establishment of clear funding agreements will ensure funding directly supports teachers. The legislative basis for PTAs require effective governance structures be in place. Additionally, the fact that PTAs are cross-sectoral, teacher-led and separate and independent from formal policy makers is what attracts many teachers to seek out teaching associations to engage in professional learning opportunities – PTAs will always operate alongside government and jurisdictional approaches to build teacher capacity.
- Unlike the current HALT or proposed Master Teacher programs, there are no pre-requisites for involvement in most PTAs, which rely on the professional expertise of educators in a voluntary capacity. However, the democratic structures of PTAs which require boards of management elected by members ensures high levels of professionalism and effective governance.

Lifting outcomes for all students

PTAs strongly support approaches that will improve outcomes for all students. Some associations prioritise the work of students in priority cohorts, such as the Educators of Deaf Students Association NSW and the Learning Support Teachers' Association of Queensland. Regarding *Information requests 3.1* (p.82) and *3.5* (p.102) we strongly recommend that relevant PTAs are consulted in building national policies on intensive targeted support for students and in obtaining and embedding the views of priority education cohorts in national education policies.

Supporting early career teachers

PTAs across Australia already have systems and structures in place to support early career teachers and have done so for many years. Sometimes these are done at a PTA-specific level, based on needs identified by that specific association. In other cases, these support mechanisms are established at a state/territory level through the PTA joint council. For example, PTANT has established an early career teacher working group and is currently working with the

NT Department of Education on how PTAs can work with the department's Wellbeing Strategy, which sees a significant role for PTAs. APTA's South Australian member, Educators SA, has established an Early Career Educator Hub providing resources of interest to teachers new to the profession, including those related to teaching, learning and classroom management as well as support in establishing professional networks and securing permanent employment. In some cases, associations have been incorporated to specifically support early career teachers, such as the Beginning and Establishing Teachers Association in Queensland.

Promoting the value of PTAs in teacher engagement, wellbeing and fulfilment

The interim reports noted that many teachers are initially drawn to the profession for many reasons, including wanting to impart knowledge and to have meaningful engagement with a subject area (p.137/8). The report also notes that subject-specific support in professional development can be lacking. PTAs play a valuable role in providing subject-specific support while also building supportive communities of practice. Bringing together like-minded subject practitioners in supportive and collaborative communities enhances wellbeing and reduces the sense of isolation that many subject-specific teachers can experience, particularly in rural and remote locations. Associations are led by teachers, for teachers. We work to empower both teachers and the wider profession to be confident, engaged, and proud of the work they do for Australian students. The professional support and encouragement we provide is essential for the sustainable wellbeing of the teaching workforce.

In addition to providing enhanced professional development to enhance teacher quality, additional funding and human resourcing support to PTAs can support teacher wellbeing and reduce teacher workload through sharing relevant and effective pedagogical approaches and teaching, learning and assessment programs that are known to work in the classroom.

We hope that governments and systems consider the opportunity of PTAs to provide enhanced support to teachers in the immediate to near term to address the highly pressing needs facing Australia's education system. We do not believe we have the time to wait 10 to 12 years for additional support programs to be implemented. We also hope that as new initiatives for supporting the Australian teaching workforce are established, policy makers continue to support, consult with and value the work of professional teaching associations. Some associations have existed for over 75 years, and our ongoing commitment to Australian teachers is unwavering.