

Submission to the  
Productivity Commission Study  
on the Schools Workforce  
by the Australian Institute for Teaching  
and School Leadership (AITSL)



The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) welcomes the Productivity Commission Study on the Schools Workforce and the important questions raised in the Commission's June 2011 *Issues Paper*.

There is now considerable international and national evidence that the major in-school influence on student achievement is the quality of classroom teaching (see the reviews by (OECD, 2005); (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008); and (Jensen, 2010)). Effective teaching lifts student performance and improves school completion rates.

There are substantial social and economic benefits realised by improving students' achievement, and raising the quality of teaching is a key strategy for achieving these benefits (OECD, 2009a). The most important lesson from countries that have been successful in achieving high scores in international testing is their investment in the preparation and development of high-quality teachers, while at the same time elevating the status of the entire profession (Paine & Schleicher, 2011).

Jensen (2010) argues 'improving teacher quality has a significant impact on student outcomes. The benefits of high performing education systems which retain young people in learning and skill development longer has a bearing well beyond the education system. Enhanced student outcomes will result in greater workforce productivity, substantial economic benefits for individuals and the nation, as well as numerous other advantages a better education affords individuals and society. Increasing teacher effectiveness is thus perhaps the single most profound economic transformation open to Australian governments'.

The focus of this submission is on the *quality* of the schools workforce, and in particular on ways to enhance excellence in teaching and school leadership. This submission does not directly address issues concerned with the supply of, and demand for, the schools workforce, or staff

deployment within and across schools and regions. The submission, however, *does* recognise the issues shaping the quantity, quality and deployment of the schools workforce are interwoven and not readily separated.

As the OECD (2005) review of teacher policy in 25 countries argued, school systems facing shortages of suitably qualified teachers often find it necessary to respond by some combination of lowering qualification requirements, assigning teachers to teach in subject areas in which they are not fully qualified, increasing the number of classes teachers are allocated or increasing class sizes. Such responses, while they may address the immediate issue of supply, are short sighted and ineffective and raise real concerns about the quality of teaching and learning.

This submission highlights the important levers for improving the quality of teaching and school leadership including the current challenges facing employers, systems and sectors, regulatory authorities, teacher educators, the profession itself and national bodies.

In doing so it outlines progress to date and identifies potential additional action.

This submission is concerned primarily with teachers and school leaders. Australia has around 285,000 teaching staff, including principals, employed in over 9,000 schools (ABS, 2011).

Specifically the submission argues that a high quality teaching force is essential to productivity and that the quality of teaching and school leadership is determined not just by the quality of the teachers – although that is clearly critical – but also by the environment in which they work (OECD, 2005). Able teachers will not necessarily reach their potential in settings that do not provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge and reward. Policies aimed at producing quality teachers and school leaders need to ensure:

- clear and rigorous standards exist that define expectations and against which practice can be measured
- appropriately skilled and trained people are recruited and selected into the profession and at each career stage
- high quality preparation, induction and personalised support including coaching and mentoring at every transition point and career step including pre-service education
- action by leaders to 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 the investment of time and resources in professional development by individuals, teams, schools, networks and systems
- appropriate remuneration, recognition and opportunities for career progression
- regular review and management of performance and the provision of specific and timely qualitative and quantitative feedback.

## **AITSL's Role in the Government's Productivity Agenda**

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AITSL came into being on 1 January 2010 as part of the newly introduced 'national architecture'. It was established by the Commonwealth Minister on behalf of the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership.

AITSL is funded by the Commonwealth under the National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality (COAG, 2008). The Partnership Agreement is part of a national framework to achieve the objectives, outcomes and targets for schooling under the COAG participation and productivity agenda; the National Education Agreement (COAG, 2008); and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008).

The role of AITSL is firmly nested in this National Partnership Agreement as part of a suite of system wide reforms which specifically aim to address the significant challenges associated with lifting and maintaining the quality of the teaching workforce in Australian schools. The National Partnership Agreement targets critical points in the teacher lifecycle that relate to the attraction, training, placement, support, development and retention of quality teachers and leaders.

The expectations of AITSL by Ministers are set out in its Letter of Expectation from MCEECDYA (December 2009, see: [aitsl.edu.au](http://aitsl.edu.au)). The work plan of AITSL reflects the desired outputs of the National Partnership Agreement including:

- development of new professional standards to underpin national reforms
- recognition and reward for quality teaching
- a framework to guide professional learning for principals, teachers and school leaders
- national accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses
- national consistency in teacher registration
- national consistency in accreditation/certification of Accomplished and Leading Teachers
- improved mobility of the teaching workforce
- joint engagement with higher education to provide improved pre-service teacher education; new pathways into teaching
- improved performance management in schools for teachers and school leaders
- enhanced school based teacher quality reforms.

It is these deliverables which make the work of AITSL relevant and significant to the scope of the Productivity Commission Study into the Schools Workforce. While the Commission's terms of reference specifically relate to workforce planning, recruitment, selection, appointment and appraisal which are the responsibilities and concerns of teacher employers in the government and non government systems, the scope of the Productivity Commission's Study goes to the heart of the COAG reform agenda and progress in implementation of the Teacher Quality National Partnership in which AITSL plays a key role.

## **Quality of the Schools' Workforce – Key Levers**

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To improve the quality of teaching sufficiently to significantly improve student outcomes is a significant enterprise that will require high level performance from all teachers and ongoing commitment and collaboration from all governments.

Fullan (2011) argues that 'In the successful countries it is clear that there is an absolute belief that quality education for all is crucial to their future OECD (2011). These countries then approach the task with the knowledge that everyone must be part of the solution. They know that teachers are the key to improvement and can only work effectively when they are supported. They make major, coordinated efforts to improve the quality of teachers through various forms of support'. The McKinsey Group drew the same conclusion: 'it's a system thing, not a single thing' (Mourshed, 2010).

This section of the submission focuses on the need for a national commitment to clear expectations for teachers and the support required for them to achieve against those expectations including reform in pre-service education and registration processes, school environments that provide strong and supportive leadership, access to effective professional learning, useful feedback on teacher performance, recognition of excellence and support for improvement.

### ***Standards for Teachers***

Standards are a means by which a profession defines itself. They have a unifying role and are a basis for public confidence and respect.

Internationally, nationally and locally education systems are developing professional standards for teachers to attract, develop, recognise and retain quality teachers (OECD, 2009).

Standards-based assessment accompanied by appropriate feedback has been identified as an increasingly common approach undertaken in existing processes within Australia and is also cited in research as a critical factor for a developing an effective system. 'A reliable and valid system of performance assessment based on common standards would provide consistency in gauging teacher effectiveness...and anchor a continuum of performance throughout a teaching career' (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The National Professional Standards for Teachers endorsed by Education Ministers in December 2010 provide an opportunity for members of the education profession - irrespective of sector, level of schooling, geographic, economic or social context or jurisdiction - to describe the professional practice of an effective Australian teacher and to make it accessible and meaningful to others. This has been an important foundational step in the Australian teacher quality reforms.

The Standards reflect and build on national and international evidence that a teacher's effectiveness has a powerful impact on students. The Standards and their descriptors represent

an analysis of effective contemporary practice at four career stages - graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead (AITSL, 2011a).

In addition to defining the expectations of teachers at these career stages, the National Professional Standards for Teachers provide a basis for protecting and assuring the quality of the teaching workforce. They provide a framework for continuing professional development and offer a baseline for:

- assessing, accrediting and supporting the quality of pre-service teacher education programs
- determining the professional requirements for registration to practice
- assessing and recognising excellent practitioners
- ongoing review of and feedback on practice

The National Professional Standards, therefore, should increasingly become integral, both directly and indirectly, to the provision of a high quality schools workforce and the decisions teacher employers make in delivering education in Australian schools.

The challenge is now to ensure the National Professional Standards for Teachers are adopted promptly and implemented effectively so that they are readily and easily used by teachers and those who support, lead and employ them for both improvement and quality assurance purposes.

This will require ongoing resources to illustrate and support the Standards in ways that are meaningful to teachers. Incentives for teachers, schools, sectors and systems to actively use and engage with the Standards will also be key including a clear commitment by employers, sectors and systems to the importance and value of the Standards.

### ***Pre-service education***

Research prepared for the Business Council of Australia (BCA) shows that where rigorous standards underpin teacher education programs the quality of graduates improves and consequently positively impacts the productivity of the workforce (Dinham, S., Ingvarson, L & Kleinhenz, E, 2008).

The quality of the graduate teacher depends largely upon the abilities of those entering teacher education programs, the quality of the programs provided, the commitment of schools and school systems to deliver quality professional experience placements and the level and nature of the engagement by the students themselves throughout their teacher education (AITSL, 2011b).

As identified by the 2007 Top of the Class Report, the selection criteria for entry into teacher education have been a particular concern including low cut-off scores compared with other fields of study and whether other attributes are sufficiently considered. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007)

The BCA report strongly endorsed the general recommendations of both the Quality of School Education (2007) and Top of the Class (2007) reports that there is a need to ensure entry

standards are high enough to attract the best and brightest to the teaching profession. McKinsey (2010) claim most of the world's best performing education systems draw their teachers from the ranks of the highest performing school students.

The newly introduced Standards and Procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia have responded to this evidence base by requiring graduates to have personal literacy and numeracy skills at levels equivalent to the top 30% of the population and to show evidence they can achieve against the graduate standards by the completion their course. The Standards also require all one year post graduate teacher education courses to move to the equivalent of two years of study.

The Standards and Procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia build on and complement the National Professional Standards for Teachers. They were approved by MCEECDYA in April 2011. It is now a requirement that all graduate teachers in Australia complete an initial teacher education program that has been accredited against these nationally agreed standards. The Standards for Accreditation outline what constitutes quality initial teacher education and provide direction and structure to guide and quality assure the development and delivery of initial teacher education programs.

The ACER Staff in Australia's Schools Report found that the majority of early career teachers did not find their pre-service teacher education adequate and the majority of school principals did not consider graduate teachers well prepared (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007). This finding was consistent with TALIS report (OECD, 2009) which found that principals of over one third of Australian teachers considered a lack of pedagogical preparation hindered graduate teacher performance.

It will be important that teacher educators make explicit links between the content and pedagogy contained within their programs and the graduate standards, as required by the National Accreditation processes, and that they share 'best practice' to improve the relevance and quality of pre-service programs so that graduates are prepared for the complexity and diversity of students, contexts and settings they may face.

Top of the Class (2007) also noted that the quality and availability of the practical in-school experiences provided for students before they graduate need to be strengthened.

To capitalise on the productivity gains high performing entrants to the teaching profession will bring, the quality and availability of the practical in-school experiences provided for teacher education students needs to be strengthened. Consideration will also need to be given to providing incentives, training, time and support to practicum supervisors.

It will also be important to ensure diverse pathways into teaching are recognised where they meet the rigour of the agreed Standards and that the information available to track and target the impact of reforms in pre-service education is improved.

## ***Teacher Registration***

Registration and the requirement to regularly renew registration marks out a profession by providing the public with the assurance that the practitioner has been assessed as competent against clear and appropriate standards.

It is important to the national teacher quality agenda that a consistent and rigorous approach to teacher registration is endorsed and implemented promptly with the active commitment of all states and territories including, where required, enacting changes to legislation.

The opportunity to test and ensure teacher quality exists at the point of registration when, after a period of practical induction into their profession, teachers move from provisional to full registration.

Currently the processes, timelines and rigour associated with teachers achieving full registration vary significantly between each state and territory regulatory authority. This variation is inefficient, reduces the ease of teacher mobility between states and territories and disadvantages individual teachers.

The agreement to develop a nationally consistent registration process, based on the proficient level of the Teacher Standards to be implemented through the regulatory authorities in each state and territory, is an important systemic lever to improving teacher quality.

The OECD Report *Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Australia* (Santiago P, 2011b), supports this national approach noting that registration processes constitute a powerful quality assurance mechanism to ensure that every school in Australia is staffed with teachers with suitable qualifications and who meet prescribed standards for teaching practice. The report argues that teacher registration could be conceived as career progression evaluation which would have as its main purposes holding teachers accountable for their practice, determining advancement in their career and informing the professional development plan of the teacher. This would ensure alignment of (teaching) standards with teaching career structures to reinforce the links between appraisal, professional development and career development accompanied by appropriate recognition and reward.

The national effort to establish a consistent approach to teacher registration within Australia provides the chance to ensure the elements that constitute a comparable, publically and professionally credible registration process are in place in all states and territories. The registration process proposed requires teachers to be supported, engage with the Standards so they understand what is expected of them now and into the future, provide evidence they have met the Standards, have their teaching observed and receive feedback on their practice.

## ***Recognition of Quality Teaching***

Research has demonstrated that teacher quality varies widely, both from teacher to teacher and over time as teachers develop their expertise throughout their career (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Processes for recognising and rewarding quality teachers need to be improved to help retain those teachers and as a mechanism to encourage and identify excellent teachers who through their practice and leadership improve student achievement and contribute to school and system reform. Such teachers influence and provide models and leadership for less experienced and less capable colleagues and in so doing help raise the overall performance of the teaching workforce.

Current pay systems do not encourage the best teachers to remain in the classroom and many excellent practitioners move to leadership positions or leave the profession to increase their earnings. The OECD report *Education at a Glance* highlights the limited spread of pay available for teachers including in Australia where a teacher at the top of the scale earns only 1.39 times the salary of a beginning teacher. The report points out the most able teachers are paid the same salary as the least able (OECD, 2009).

A report for the Business Council of Australia, (Dinham S. I., 2008) suggested that approximately 30% of Australia's teachers operate at the highly accomplished level and 10% at the lead teacher level. The report suggests the remaining 60% of teachers would be seeking or have gained certification 'at the proficient/registered/competent level'.

The BCA report called for highly accomplished teachers to be remunerated at twice the salary of beginning teachers and lead teachers at 2.5 times the amount (Dinham S. I., 2008).

While the importance of valuing, recognising and remunerating excellent teachers is widely supported, the process of identifying highly effective teachers is challenging. Teachers' work is diverse and complex, and undertaken across a variety of contexts (Dinham, 2008). Fair and accurate evaluation of teacher performance is therefore difficult to determine objectively (OECD, 2011).

It is important as Australia moves to a national process of certification of highly accomplished and lead teachers that sufficient time and resources are devoted to ensuring assessment is based on common standards which clearly define what quality teachers know and do, and are directly linked to their capacity to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A variety of measures of effective teaching need to be used and 'they must be based on aspects of teaching that excellent teachers recognise as characteristic of their practice' (Gates Foundation, 2010).

A significant challenge faced by education systems where voluntary certification for improvement is in place is attracting teachers to undertake this process. Research shows that unless the certification of excellence is incentivised it is difficult to scale or sustain.



While some teachers will be motivated to embark on voluntary certification for self-driven development and improvement reasons, international data show that when certification is not linked to an incentive the investment by teachers is minimal (OECD, 2011). To address the issue of uptake many education systems have adopted varied approaches of linking certification to other inducements, whilst not diminishing the importance of development and improvement of practice as a central benefit. For the certification of highly accomplished and/or lead teachers in Australia to be successful issues of purpose and incentive will need to be confronted.

### ***Performance Management***

Salary scales, performance pay and career structures variously drive, recognise and reward professional accomplishment. While teacher remuneration and career structures are the responsibility of the employer, the Commonwealth Government has indicated that, as part of the national reform agenda, it will seek to develop a nationally consistent, transparent and equitable performance management system the 'Australian Teacher Performance Management Principles and Procedures' that will 'Enable all teachers to reflect on their practice and develop their skills by receiving constructive feedback about their performance and future training needs through a nationally consistent performance management framework built around the national professional teaching standards'.

The importance of improving the performance management of teachers is supported in research where the teachers receive feedback based on multiple sources of evidence and are able to reflect and then take action on their practice (Jensen, 2011).

Currently each state and territory and education authority has performance management processes in place but these are varied and variously applied. The National Professional Standards for Teachers are a public and consistent statement of expectations that will provide a platform on which to build a consistent approach to performance management that will inform both the teacher's professional development and feedback about their performance.

Australia has been identified as the fourth worst of 23 developed nations in recognising teacher effectiveness. Current teacher evaluation processes do not identify effective teaching (Jensen, 2009).

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 training, establishing clear evaluation processes and aligning appraisal with broader school reforms such as professional development opportunities (OECD, 2011).

Given the pervasive and potentially significant impact a universally applied, effective 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 report on evaluating and rewarding

the quality of teachers, concluded that there is little empirical evidence so far on the effects of pay-for-performance incentive schemes on teacher quality (OECD, 2009).

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 trialling and meaningful research.

### ***School Leadership***

School leadership plays a key role in shaping the environment in which teachers work and students learn. Students' academic achievement, self-concept and engagement in learning are shaped by teacher and school practices that are influenced by school leadership (Anderson, M., Gronn, P., Ingvarson, L., Jackson, A., Kleinhenz, E., McKenzie, P., Mulford, B & Thornton, N, 2007); (Leithwood, 2004). Recent research by the OECD also confirms that effective school leadership plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capabilities of teachers as well as school climate (Pont, 2008).

Leaders contribute to student learning through their influence on other staff, organisational capacity and educational focus. Consequently there needs to be clarity around the work school leaders are expected to do and how they can best be supported to retain an emphasis on improving student learning.

This is particularly significant in the context of the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments' focus on autonomous schools. The empowering initiative will require principals to have the capability to use their greater independence in decision making effectively to drive and lead school improvement. While there is evidence that most countries that performed well in PISA had substantial autonomy (OECD, 2004) (2009), without the training and confidence to use this increased authority and flexibility well, school leaders may fail to realise the potential of this reform.

The National Professional Standard for Principals, endorsed by Ministers in July 2011, sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to achieve their work. The Standard has been developed through active consultation and tested by the profession (Dinham S. , 2011).

The Principal Standard, like the Teacher Standards, is a foundational reform in the drive to improve teacher quality. It describes the professional practice of principals in a common language and makes explicit the role of quality school leadership in improving learning outcomes. It is a content standard designed to assist in attracting, developing and supporting aspiring and practising principals by providing a framework for professional learning and a guide to self reflection, self improvement and the management of self and others.

While the Principal Standard has been very well accepted and already used in some schools and systems across the country, awareness of the Standard and its uptake is in its first stage. The development and commitment of resources to support the use of the Standard by aspiring and practising principals in a variety of contexts will be key to realising the benefit of this reform, as will be active promulgation and adoption of the Standard by systems and sectors.

A particular emphasis should be given to using the Standard as the basis for developing well considered and systematic programs to support the development and preparation of aspiring leaders as well as programs that ensure all beginning principals have access to coaching and mentoring. Comprehensive principal preparation and personalised and targeted support for emerging leaders is recognised as having greatest impact on leadership quality (Barber, 2010).

### ***Professional Learning***

Research on effective teaching demonstrates that good teachers continue to develop expertise throughout their careers and that all teachers benefit from mentoring, feedback, supportive leadership and targeted professional learning (OECD, 2005); (Dinham S. I., 2008).

However, the quality of support and professional learning available to teachers and school leaders is highly variable. The OECD's TALIS survey indicated that Australian teachers were in the lowest quartile of participating countries in terms of the average number of days of professional learning experienced by teachers in the previous twelve months (OECD, 2009). While Australian teachers generally value their professional learning experiences, they have identified a number of unmet needs in areas such as methods for assessing student learning and development, making more effective use of computers in student learning (McKenzie et al, 2008). The recent OECD review has recommended better alignment of professional development with teaching standards and career development (Santiago et al, 2011).

Dinham (2008) argues the major challenge to improving teacher quality lies not so much in identifying the features of effective teaching, but in developing structures and approaches that ensure widespread use of successful teaching practices: to make best practice, common practice.

Professional learning is fundamental to improving the quality of the workforce of the school. It has become a national imperative to build a sustained commitment to, and culture that recognises and promotes, the central role of professional learning in:

- building the performance and capability of teachers and leaders to continually improve their professional practice and consequently outcomes for all Australian school students
- contributing to the confidence and ability of teachers and school leaders to apply their knowledge and skills flexibly and creatively in response to different and changing contexts
- supporting the recruitment, development and retention of high quality, effective teachers and school leaders.

Professional learning that engages all teachers and school leaders at every stage of their career is an essential component of a high achieving education system and is most effective when it is underpinned by rigorous standards of practice for teachers and school leaders.

Professional learning that has most effect is self-directed and personalised; contextualised and relevant; collaborative; futures focused; and evidence-based and sustainable. This is particularly true when it is part of a broader school workforce recruitment, development and retention

strategy (Caldwell, 2010); (Dumont, 2010); (General Teaching Council for London, 2011)); (Learning Forward, 2011).

This commitment to ongoing professional learning is required not only to maintain but to elevate Australia's position as a high achieving education system (OECD, 2011).

A culture of learning underpinned by high quality opportunities and a universal expectation that all teachers and leaders are actively engaged in their own development and that of others will result in the improved professional practice of individuals and collective improvement in the practices of teams and networks of teachers and school leaders.

The key to improvement is the targeting of resources to increase the level and value of professional learning by system, sector and school leaders.

## **Conclusion**

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At the heart of the educational reform agenda is the Melbourne Declaration which commits all governments to the proposition that 'improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives'.

The National Partnership provides the opportunity to achieve real gains in meeting this national commitment by making an investment in teacher quality that, if managed well and sustained, has the potential to increase participation, strengthen productivity, increase economic growth and achieve individual aspirations and potential. While employing authorities have direct responsibility for their respective workforces, the establishment of AITSL has enabled the quality of teaching and school leadership to be considered and further developed in an integrated, informed and consistent way across Australia.

The emerging reform agenda requires time, resources and commitment to ensure that each component is implemented, consolidated and expanded. There is more to be achieved but a foundation for further reform and improvement in the quality of the schools' workforce has been established.

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