

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

Response to Productivity Commission

Draft Research Report

Into

Schools Workforce

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Association

PO Box4741, Higgins ACT 2615

Phone: (02) 6241 5759 Fax: (02) 6241 8839

contact@actparents.org.au

www.actparents.org.au

Education and Training Workforce: Schools

Dear Secretariat

On behalf of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council) I would like to provide this submission to the Productivity Commission's commissioned study on the Education and Training Workforce: Schools. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback both in this written form and during the discussions last December in Canberra.

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations is the peak body representing Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) in government primary schools, high schools and secondary colleges in the ACT.

It is a representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, to provide support services for affiliates, and to make representations to the government on behalf of parents/carers in government schools. It plays a particularly important role in promoting parent participation in schools and the system as a whole.

Council's submission to this inquiry is based on Council's policy, consultations with P&C Associations and members and previous submissions to the inquiry. Council has responded to several of the draft recommendations, draft findings and information request coming from the *Schools Workforce: Draft Research Report* (Productivity Commission 2011)

Please contact me on (02) 6241 5759 if you have any questions about this submission.

Yours sincerely

Vivienne Pierce

President

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

Professional Development and Performance review

Council encourages the report to consider the role of casual relief teachers in its professional development and peer based performance review sections in line with our earlier submissions.

The education sector in Australia is undergoing a period of significant changes. Classrooms are becoming digitalised, a national curriculum is being rolled out and greater resources are being given to teacher performance reviews and evaluations, to name a few. The draft report of the Productivity Commission into Schools Workforce touches on these issues to varying degrees and makes numerous suggestions around how to improve them. One theme that emerged in both Part 5 and 6 was the extra work to be done by teachers.

Council strongly encourages the Commission to consider a recommendation of increased numbers of appropriately trained casual relief teachers that can fill in for teachers when they undertake professional development or performance review that takes them out of the classroom.

Part 5.5 recognises the difficulties some staff have in attending professional development which may account for Australian teachers spending less time in professional development. Council strongly supports professional development for teachers. Australian education is going through exciting changes for the better however if teachers are not properly trained, these changes may fall by the wayside. Given the amount of work done by teachers already Council feels it is unfair and inappropriate to require teachers to undertake professional development out of school hours. What this means however is that the time teachers spend in front of the class will be compromised.

In its recommendations to the problem the report suggested an increase in teacher numbers and conducting professional development in the school could help more teachers attend however council feels neither of these completely address the issue. Increased teacher numbers is primarily aimed at addressing issues of systemic teacher shortages and not shortages derived from teachers attending professional development. Council supports the recommendation for undertaking professional development within schools as it allows a more school oriented focus however it does not come close to solving the issue of what happens when teachers leave the classroom.

Additionally Part 6 suggests that a peer based performance review of teachers would be a viable option. Council agrees with the sentiments of the report in that teachers' performance reviews should occur and should be made meaningful and beneficial to both the teacher and the students they teach. A peer based teacher review system, together with other methods of performance review, where skilled teachers from a different school come to evaluate teacher's efficiency in the classroom has numerous benefits. However it means taking an experienced teacher out of the classroom to conduct such reviews. Whilst Council is not opposed to this we would like to see the report address the issue of what happens to the students left behind in the classroom of the skilled teacher, especially in primary schools.

Performance pay schemes

Council is encouraged by and supports the report's recommendation to delay the roll out of a performance based bonus scheme until proper research has been conducted into the effects of such a program.

Council is encouraged by the Productivity Commissions **Draft Recommendation 6.1**. As noted in our earlier submissions and in the draft report itself Council is opposed to performance based pay for teachers. Council is opposed to this due to a lack of evidence to suggest that performance based remuneration necessarily translates to better student performance. Council also has serious concerns on the way student performance can be defined and measured so as to assess the teacher's performance, on the possibilities of teachers simply teaching to meet performance requirements and neglecting other areas of education, and a greater level of competition between teachers in order to achieve the bonus which is at odds with the team based collegiate approach that teaching requires. Additionally Council is concerned that given the collegiate system of teaching the bonus may not necessarily go to the correct teacher with more senior teachers receiving the bonus when other teachers significantly contributed to the performance increase of students. Any evaluation of ongoing performance based pay schemes should be reviewed and assessed with these issues in mind to ensure they do not transpire, or if they do transpire how they can be avoided in the future.

In line with our initial submission Council supports a merit based advancement system. This system can be linked into an advanced-skill teacher career path however in line with Information Request 6.2 Council has some reservations with this system.

As our initial submission noted and the report acknowledged, Council supports a merit based award scheme. Council recognises the report's hesitation in adopting a merit award scheme as it could simply become another automatic advancement point, which in turn could lead to funding issues. Council feels however that if the teachers possess outstanding abilities and wish to further their abilities through higher attainments there is no reason additional advancement points should not be added in an attempt to keep them in education.

As the writers of the report may well be aware Canberra is initiating an executive teacher position (similar to the Advanced-skill teacher the report identifies). In line with **Information Request 6.2** and a performance based career structure Council has some suggestions. Council feels the need to have the final criteria for performance-based career structure clearly identified and easily understood; this is to ensure teachers know what must be achieved so they can strive to reach these goals. The criteria for advancement should be well rounded; it should tie in with the national teaching standards whilst also addressing the candidate's role in the development of newer teachers and their activities in the school community outside of the classroom.

Council has serious concerns about capping the number of advanced teacher positions; Council feels this goes against the collegiate spirit and team work required in teaching. If the numbers are to be capped the decision should be made by an independent third party and not the school Principal. This will reduce pressure and politicising on the Principal and will enable the independent third party to stick closer to well rounded but clearly defined criteria.

Council also has concerns about the promotion process being overly burdensome on the teacher. If the process of applying for the Advanced-Skill teacher positions is made too burdensome on the teacher this could lead to a negative impact on the teacher's ability to teach in the class room as their time is taken up applying for the promotions. As such if an advanced-skill teacher career path is implemented Council would like to see it not be overly burdensome for teachers who apply.

Finally as the report points out there is a significant risk that taking on an Advanced-Skill Teacher position will mean that the teacher receives greater administrative duties and has less time in the classroom. Council would like to see advanced skilled teachers remain in the classroom as much as possible so students can receive the most from these teachers. Council would like to see minimal administrative duties placed on these positions. Council supports the Advanced-skill teacher providing mentoring and guidance to newer teachers to pass on their skills but this should not come at the cost of face time with students. In line with our submission above where the teacher is taken out of the classroom they should be replaced with an appropriately trained teacher.

Reducing Educational Disadvantage

Council supports the report's finding in relation to education disadvantage however encourages the Commission to consider making a recommendation solely on this point and not having it form part of a larger draft recommendation.

Council is encouraged to see the report address the area of educational disadvantage in a positive way. Council supports the report's definition of equality in education. Council would like to see a more concrete recommendation coming out of the report's findings as to appropriate ways to tackle educational disadvantage. However we recognise the constraints the Commission faced due to a lack of comprehensive evaluation of all the programs. As such Council suggest the Commission consider adding a recommendation in line with Draft Finding 9.1 and Draft Recommendation 10.1 that focuses solely on the issue of a review of programs tackling educational disadvantage in order to give the issue more weight and not have it as part of a larger recommendation.

Workforce imbalances

Council supports the report's Draft Finding 4.1 for building in more explicit remuneration advantages to address hard-to-staff areas. In line with Information Request 4.1 Council has several suggestions for the review to take into consideration.

As noted above Council supports the use of additional remuneration incentives to attract more candidates and a higher quality of candidates to hard-to-staff subjects and locations, particularly for low socioeconomic status schools. As the report noted schools have particularly hard times finding appropriately trained staff specifically in maths, science, technology and languages other than English, and low socioeconomic schools are having generic staffing difficulties. This inevitably leads to students receiving a lower quality of teaching. Nobel Laureate Professor Brian Schmidt has indicated the need to pay maths and science teachers more in order to keep the field competitive and prepare Australians for the future (*Canberra Times* 'Nobel winner says maths counts' February 2012). Council supports the

report's **Draft Finding 4.1** as an appropriate way to ensure students receive the quality teaching to which they are entitled.

In line with **Information Request 4.1** Council suggests that keeping the structure as simple as possible so new teachers are aware of exactly what they are eligible for would be best. As part of the complementary arrangements to direct remuneration bonuses for teaching in a hard-to-staff position, Council would recommend more support staff be brought in to assist teachers. This would be particularly beneficial for attracting quality teachers to low socioeconomic schools. This would also be of benefit for hard-to-staff subject areas as it would reduce the out of class responsibility of the teacher making the job more attractive to prospective teachers.