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Yvette Goss

Education and Training Workforce: Schools
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
Melbourne Vic 8003

Dear Yvette



Business SA welcomes the Productivity Commission's public consultation into Schools Workforce. Henry B Adams clearly reflected the importance of teachers when he wrote "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops".

The education of our youth is singularly the most important factor in securing Australia's future, sustainability and growth. Schools account nationally for over 300,000 employees and a revenue of approximately \$45 billion¹, highlighting the importance for a progressive, efficient and highly motivating sector. Australia's education system is complex, with inconsistencies between jurisdictions all aiming for change that will improve school performance, reduce long term socio economic disadvantage and provide an advantage to their jurisdiction. Australia's population base is relatively small; Business SA supports all jurisdictions having consistent curriculum, training and workplace relations policy.

All Australian jurisdictions are facing significant challenges over the next decade, with an aging workforce, skills shortages and a two speed economy placing greater demand on all levels of education and education management. It is to be noted that while the Productivity Commission report and draft recommendations focuses on Schools Workforce the complexity of this issue denotes no single issue can be considered in isolation.

The Productivity Commission has highlighted a number of key challenges for the education sector, year 12 retention rates, education expenditure and the level of core foundation skills standards of Australian youth.

Information request 4.1

Teacher remuneration in hard-to-staff positions continues to be a challenge, a challenge primarily affecting the public sector. Historic staffing arrangements in South Australia saw a benefit for service in hard-to-staff positions, benefits included, public housing and a transfer of choice (when available), this provided incentives for staffing of positions traditionally not perceived as ideal, such as remote locations, low socio-economic regions and even additional incentives for curriculum areas.

¹ 2011, Productivity Commission Draft Research Report.

Teaching as a profession has changed both in training and in class room service. Ensuring the value of teachers is embedded in society, that the entrants are aware of the challenges and that teaching is not a secondary career choice are all important. Current anecdotal information in South Australia indicates trained teachers unable to secure positions, while it is understood that there may be many factors influencing this short term (semester contracts) do not promote a feeling of security and can be a determining factor in not pursuing such a career. It must be noted that permanency while called on by the teaching fraternity must have clear opportunities to ensure that non performing staff members can be removed, providing a quality education service.

The Productivity Commission has highlighted the need for a longitudinal survey of recently appointed teachers, five years as stated may not be considered "long" enough. It is common practice for recent generations to transfer career directions, to truly analyse the complex issues of schools workforces a longer time frame may provide significantly more insight into long term trends and why career choices are made.

A comprehensive understanding of why teachers leave the profession along with why trained teachers fail to enter the profession would also be valuable in determining strategies to support a sustainable schools workforce.

It has become increasingly obvious over the past decade that the role of schools in the community has shifted significantly. Schools in regional and many urban centres are still the centre of community activity, however the activities of the school has expanded to take on a far more holistic development focus. A subtle shift from nurturer / mentor / teacher to the school teaching staff providing vital links to successful career pathways, social adjustments, links to industry and further training has occurred. Nevertheless, the focus of educating students has been maintained. It could be concluded the success of the private schooling sector is in part attributed to their ability to focus and specialise in specific educative arenas, not promising to be all too everyone.

Draft recommendation 5.2

Mandating a minimum requirement of two (2) years for graduate entry teacher training is not in line with other current policy directions of accelerated learning, recognition or prior learning and competency based sign off. In light of all learning the "time" or "duration" or a course should be based upon participants gaining the skills and knowledge to perform the task at hand competently.

Information request 6.1

The "My School" website was established to provide transparency for parents and students to select schools based upon the schools merit, there is an underlying issue that continues regarding individual teaching standards. There is very little public information available to ascertain how unsatisfactory teacher performance is handled.

It is understood each year teacher registration figures are listed there is not corresponding data on teacher performance practices. There is an argument that performance management is the responsibility of the senior management of the particular school and education sector and as such support processes should be in place to provide teachers with appropriate techniques and training to address unsatisfactory performance. Unsatisfactory performance however must be acted upon with the same diligence in the teaching arena as any other professional environment, with the ability to remove bad performers without undue barriers.

Information request 6.2

The Productivity Commission has highlighted the need for aligning career structures for teachers with a performance based methodology. Ensuring teaching is valued as a career is critical in achieving any success in this area.

Productivity Commission data highlighted inconsistencies in numbers of new entrants into the teaching profession compared to the over 45 aged proportion of the workforce.

Modern schools have greater levels of career advancement than in the past, with structures that include year coordinators, subject coordinators, along with traditional levels of management introducing additional career structures may be considered as excessive. Teaching continues to have a stepped pay structure based on service providing additional incentive for service. Business SA supports the Productivity Commissions exploration of removing automatic progression and linking suitably needed accreditation or qualifications, however not dismissing progression for competent teachers not wishing to continue formalised study.

Professional development is considered mandatory for teachers therefore exploration of progression based on qualifications could be reflective of additional expertise in areas of demand, it would not seem to be beneficial for teaching staff to gain additional remuneration based on additional qualifications that do not add value to the teaching profession and school environments as a whole.

Draft recommendation 6.1

Business SA supports the Productivity Commissions recommendation to defer the full scale introduction of its proposed national bonus scheme for teachers. Based upon reports from Australian trials along with International trends there is enough conjecture to question the full benefits of such a scheme deferring implementation will allow adequate consultation and trials under Australian education conditions.

Draft recommendation 7.1

Business SA supports the development of processes to disseminate research; the challenge in this recommendation is how research can feed into the policy makers without creating an additional layer of bureaucracy. Exploring the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's capacity to perform this task can be supported.

Draft recommendation 8.1

Business SA supports increasing autonomy for schools if there is the central support that ensures curriculum and standards are consistent. Private education sectors highlight how an autonomous business model can work alongside a successful education methodology.

Draft recommendation 10.1

This recommendation is directly linked to public sector workforce issues. Business SA advocates for a strong and effective public education sector, one in which adequate resources are provided to ensure young people have the opportunity to develop to their full potential supporting the ongoing growth and sustainability of Australia into the future.

Draft recommendation 11.1

Once again Business SA supports a total integrated approach to consultation and policy development. Inclusion of non-government schools and non-teaching workforce along with parents at the highest policy development level is something that should have occurred previously. This questions how can holistic service policy be developed without full participation of all key stakeholders, because it could be argued that an expanded approach to integrate industry and higher education may be beneficial.

Yours sincerely

Peter Vaughan
Chief Executive Officer