

Australian Catholic University

Online submission to the Australian Government

Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

November 2022

ACU response to the *Draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan*

(Submission made online through web portal)

1. Elevating the profession

Where on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": **Neutral**

Maximum of 300 words (or 2,200 characters) of further feedback:

ACU does not object to Action #1, a national campaign to raise the status of teaching, #2, new national teaching awards, or #3, more teachers nominated for Order of Australia awards. #2 and #3 are designed to honour individuals and while they are positive actions, they are unlikely to elevate the status of the profession.

Associated with elevating the profession is ensuring that any initiatives indicate a trust in teacher professionalism and an expectation of professional judgement. ACU encourages initiatives that acknowledge teachers' autonomy. In addition, a commitment to improving the salary and work conditions of teachers (the latter especially) would send a strong message of high value for the profession, given the Federal Quality Initial Teacher Education Review found that perceptions of low salary and unfavourable working conditions constitute a barrier for school leavers.

The National Plan will help improve working conditions through its fourth section, "Maximising the time to teach." Research has found that teachers' work intensity deters people from entering and drives people who have entered away from the profession. Therefore, ACU recommends some acknowledgement in this first section that improving the working conditions of teachers, including a reduction in administrative duties and additional recognised time for planning for learning and teaching, will attract more people to the profession, and keep them there.

Finally, action #4, to increase the number of HALT teachers, should be moved to the final section and sit below Action #27, streamlining HALT accreditation processes, where it more logically fits.

2. *Improving teacher supply*

Where on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": **Strongly agree**

Maximum of 300 words (or 2,200 characters) of further feedback:

ACU strongly supports Action #5 for more teaching places at universities, but questions whether directing these places to “the right subjects and specialisations” is necessary given the acute teacher shortages at present. This reference to “the right subjects and specialisations” is an unnecessary limitation given all teaching places, even those once oversupplied in the past (e.g., P.E. or Art teachers), are now in high demand.

ACU recommends that Action #6, for 5,000 bursaries of \$40,000 to attract the best and brightest into teaching, focus on targeting diverse candidates. The criteria for the bursaries need to be carefully developed to ensure no unintended consequences ensue, particularly if they go to recipients who were always going to study teaching, and that the right mix of academic achievement and non-academic capabilities are considered. In many communities, especially regional and remote areas, the best teachers are from the community, and partnerships between higher education institutions and communities to “grow your own” teachers should be supported. In summary, this scheme should improve the status of the profession in a way that ensures the teaching population matches the variety of Australia’s school populations.

ACU supports Action #7 for more places in the High Achieving Teachers program. ACU’s strong support extends to #8, on using the High Achieving Teachers’ Program to trial new ways to get teachers into schools most in need. As a long-standing participant in the “Australian National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools” (NETDS) program, and as the largest provider of graduate teachers in Australia, ACU would be willing to participate in any such trials.

3. *Strengthening initial teacher education*

Where on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": **Agree**

Maximum of 300 words (or 2,200 characters) of further feedback:

ACU strongly agrees that Action #11, which calls for a consistent measure to recognise previous work and experience to be developed by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, is urgently required, as are strategies to attract and retain more First Nations teachers (#12) and moving LANTITE to the first year of a teaching degree (#13).

Action #10 involves strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE through an Expert Panel to be chaired by Professor Mark Scott. ACU recommends that careful calibration of any performance measure is needed to determine ITE quality, and hence funding, to ensure a level playing field. For example, ITE attrition rates, if they are used, will likely favour postgraduate programs that teach a small, elite cohort. ACU is concerned that universities doing the bulk of meeting a teacher shortage may be unfairly penalised.

ACU also recommends Professor Scott's panel focus on assessing the progress in ITE made through the TEMAG reforms and building on those reforms to improve the professional experience placement system. To ensure high quality professional experience will require appropriate resources. Teachers need release time and professional development to supervise teacher education students. Professional experience for employment-based models needs to be thought through carefully to ensure that teacher education students receive appropriate mentoring and support, as well as appropriate industrial considerations. Appropriate time for study and degree completion while participating in these models is essential.

Finally, ACU recommends that teacher education students spend more time in schools as paid paraprofessionals and the Expert Panel could recommend more systematic adoption of this initiative.

4. *Maximising the time to teach*

Where on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": **Strongly agree**

Maximum of 300 words (or 2,200 characters) of further feedback:

There is a pressing need to free up more of teachers' time to teach, not least because it will make teaching more attractive to high quality applicants (see first section comments).

ACU strongly supports Action #18, where ITE students (along with teaching assistants and other non-teaching staff) have opportunities to be embedded in the school community.

ITE students working as paid paraprofessionals can help relieve the administrative burden on teachers and perform tasks such as teaching small groups, modifying curriculum activities for individual students, assisting with administrative recording of marking, and helping with extra curricula programs. The deployment of student teachers in this way would provide them with:

- greater immersion in schools, strengthening their understanding of the relationship between theory and practice,
- an early exposure to the realities of a teacher's life, and,
- a part-time salary, with the de facto stipend making teaching a more attractive option.

ACU recommends this initiative occur via networks of schools or 'Hub Schools', where a group of schools liaise with a university to offer professional placements to that university's students. In addition, teachers from those schools can work with the university on joint research projects to help improve student outcomes at the schools. Students become familiar with the culture within a cluster of schools and ACU has found this model to be very effective and recommends using it to develop Action #18.

Teachers would benefit from the practical support, but this option would only be applicable to students in their early years, as final-year students already receive conditional registration to teach as teachers, rather than work as paraprofessionals. Conditional accreditation or 'Permission to Teach' is not consistent across states and ACU strongly recommends that states adopt similar criteria and processes to enable employment-based models of teacher education to be implemented more widely across Australia.

5. *Better understanding future teacher workforce needs*

Where on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": **Agree**

Maximum of 300 words (or 2,200 characters) of further feedback:

ACU supports the collection of nationally consistent ITE graduate supply data (Action #20) but questions how it will be used to cap teaching places.

ACU supports more publicly available information on teaching workforce needs, including disaggregated ITE graduate data, but this should be to aid decision making rather than restrict the supply of teachers.

ACU has long experience of state governments miscalculating teacher supply and demand, and strongly recommends the Federal government avoid trying to centrally plan, allocate or restrict ITE places to meet expected workforce demand. ACU's research institute in learning sciences and teacher education is leading a workforce studies program that shows the variables that can be used to predict outcomes in ITE and also identify barriers to completion. This longitudinal research can be used to intervene in programs and reduce attrition.

There is a clear role for government to provide better teacher workforce projections and fund data-rich longitudinal studies in attraction, progression and retention in initial teacher education. These have not been strongly pursued in Australia. Such deficiencies can and should be rectified.

6. *Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession*

Where on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree": **Strongly agree**

Maximum of 300 words (or 2,200 characters) of further feedback:

Action #25, on support and mentoring of early career teachers, is essential.

ACU would support a wider “settlement” between universities, employers, and accrediting authorities that extends university support beyond employment at the school gate. Universities are only resourced to support preservice teachers and would welcome additional funding to provide quality mentoring and improve induction for early career teachers. This is an opportunity to ensure graduate teachers are supported and remain in the profession. The early professional support, once in the workforce, would also open advancement opportunities for teachers to take up advanced teacher and leadership roles, while ensuring they do not need to leave the classroom.

ACU notes that reducing the price of HALT accreditation is one way to make it less burdensome (#27), as would be making the accreditation process across states consistent and transferable.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, Action #4 should be inserted between #27 and #28, because increasing the number of HALT teachers (#4) logically follows streamlining HALT processes (#27).