



Australian Alliance of Associations in Education (AAAE)

Submission to the Federal Government’s Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Consultation

2 August 2023

Introduction and Background

The [Australian Alliance of Associations in Education](http://www.aaae.edu.au) (AAAE) is a network of professional teacher associations that aims to represent the individual educators from our member associations. AAAE is a constituted body with the purpose of representing and speaking on behalf of Australian national professional teacher associations. It was established in 2013. AAAE members are national professional teacher associations that are largely funded by membership fees, the production of teaching resources and the provision of professional learning for teachers.

AAAE welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Federal Government’s *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*. As the peak national teacher association, AAAE works collaboratively with a wide network of teachers and other key stakeholders. With a network that extends to every state and territory, and reaches teachers in urban, regional, and remote areas; whose membership includes teachers of every cohort of students, AAAE is in a key position to provide informed comment on the Federal Government’s *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*.

General Comments

AAAE notes on page 10 of the report that “The panel has already undertaken a number of consultations in the lead-up to this paper, talking to people in every state and territory, meeting with Education Ministers, departments, stakeholders, and experts, and visiting a range of schools to understand the issues faced on the ground.” However, AAAE urges the panel and the Commonwealth Government to engage with teachers and teacher associations more actively through consultation processes, including this review. Teachers and teacher associations are best placed to provide expert advice regarding education.

The Alice Spring’s (Mparntwe) Education Declaration’s goals are rightfully at the centre of this consultation report.

AAAE particularly supports the first three key areas the panel has been tasked with delivering recommendations on: Lifting student outcomes; Improving student mental health and wellbeing; and Attracting and retaining teachers.

Specific Comments

Quality teaching and curriculum resources

National education associations, including our members, have long been leaders in providing high-quality teaching materials, prepared by experts in their teaching discipline, to our teachers and schools. This has been under-appreciated and under-utilised by the education system. AAAE, and our member associations, would welcome the opportunity to collaborate to increase access and expand these materials across all schools. If curriculum materials are to be developed as part of this reform, then it is essential that national education associations, and the expertise within them, are central to this process.

While workload intensification for teachers is an issue, providing teachers with a bank of lesson plans will not improve the learning outcomes of our most vulnerable students. Differentiation of learning is not possible with a 'one size fits all' approach to delivery of education. Teachers need time to plan and design learning that improves the learning outcomes for all students. Collegial and collaborative planning is one mechanism that assist in maximising teacher knowledge on planning for maximum learning. Teacher professional associations provide one vehicle that facilitate access to collegial, collaborative planning.

A 'one size fits all' approach often does not work when it comes to supporting the individual learning needs of students, particularly of those students who have 'fallen behind'. More resources are needed in schools to support students who are not achieving at the expected standard. There is a need for increased investment in professional learning programs for teachers, trained support staff (including teacher aides/school officers), and increased ratios of Inclusive Practice educators within schools. At times 'intensive, targeted support' programs for students have taken the form of commercial programs that can be reductive in nature. Greater support is required for educators to meet the individual learning needs of students, which means that teachers need more time to appropriately plan interventions.

AAAE advocates for an increase in individual and collaborative planning time for primary and secondary teachers across Australia.

Improving student mental health and wellbeing

AAAE commends the panel on including a strong and much needed focus on improving student mental health and wellbeing within this report. We note that learning and wellbeing are inextricably linked, and we are pleased that this is recognised within the report. A focus on this area should also include additional professional learning for practicing teachers to continue to support teachers and school leaders to improve student wellbeing.

Teacher Workforce

AAAE, as a network of peak national teaching associations is concerned about the teacher workforce. We have been disappointed by the Teacher Workforce Action Plan's recommendations that 'tinker around the edges' of teacher workforce and workload, without addressing the locus of the issues. Research has suggested that between 30% and 50% of Australian teachers are leaving the profession within the first five years of teaching. We contend that there are three critical issues impacting teacher attrition:

1. **Teacher workload** – Workload has intensified, however, teacher release from face-to-face teaching has not changed in most Australian jurisdictions in decades. Government policy should aim to increase teacher release from face-to-face teaching and increase time to plan for teaching and learning. We believe teacher workload intensification and time limits are the more significant reason teachers are leaving the profession.
2. **Teacher Remuneration** – Teacher pay does not reflect the intensity and value of the work being performed. We argue that performance pay is not the answer. In order for Governments to reduce teacher attrition, teacher remuneration needs to be competitive with other industries. If the Government intends the teaching profession to be as respected and as attractive medicine and law, then teachers will need to be remunerated at a competitive level.
3. **Lack of support and professional growth** – Many initiatives are done *to* teachers, not *with* teachers. Teachers need to continue to grow through professional development and engagement. A stronger emphasis needs to be placed on teachers' continual professional learning, so that they continue to develop their skills and are challenged and rewarded throughout their careers. This requires additional time and resources. Teachers need more support throughout their careers, as research and practice change, to implement best practices across education to improve student academic and well-being outcomes.

Data and Research

While data collection and data-informed decision making is important within the classrooms, schools, and across the broader education system, AAAE contends that any additional data collection must be evaluated to see if the initiative will increase teacher workload.

AAAE is concerned about the narrow approach taken by some organisations within Education regarding research. Government should be taking advantage of **all** research in education, from schools, systems, universities, non-government organizations, and government organizations. Privileging one organization over all other educational researchers is problematic and will have unintended consequences for the rich ecology of educational research that occurs in Australia.

Conclusion

We thank the panel for inviting submissions and offer our expertise to help continue to improve the future of Australian education.