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Time for a nationally-coordinated approach to teacher quality

Background

There have been a variety of suggested approaches to the challenge of improving teacher quality. These include 'merit' or 'performance' pay; payment by student examination results; raising entry standards to teaching; higher teacher pay generally; smaller class sizes; standardised testing; publishing 'league tables' of school performance and sacking poorly performing teachers. While some of these approaches individually may have merit, they frequently lack finer detail on how they might operate, are not supported by evidence and represent an *ad hoc*, fragmented response.

Earlier this year, the Business Council of Australia commissioned staff at the Australian Council for Educational Research to write a position paper for the BCA on quality teaching. This paper, 'Investing in Teacher Quality: Doing What Matters Most', written by Stephen Dinham, Lawrence Ingvarson and Elizabeth Kleinhenz, was released on May 26 as part of a BCA publication *Teaching Talent The Best Teachers for Australia's Schools*. To date, the report has received wide publicity and general support from the profession.

Where the approach outlined in the BCA report differs from previous efforts in the area of raising teacher quality, and therefore student achievement, lies in the nature of the comprehensive, national, integrated approach that is advocated.

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What Did the BCA Report Find?

- The quality of teaching is the main driver of successful student learning outcomes.
- Australia's teaching profession and its schools constitute an infrastructure that is critical to its survival in an increasingly global economy.
- Every student deserves teachers who are suited to teaching, well trained and qualified, highly skilled, caring and committed to moving forward the learning of their students.
- One of the main roles of leadership in professions is to build a framework for professional learning from registration to advanced levels of standards, and systems for providing assessments and certification for members who reach those standards. It is important, therefore, to strengthen leadership in quality teaching at the wider professional level as well as at the level of the individual school.
- Education in Australia is still highly bureaucratised, and it is time to question whether bureaucratic management of schools by state education departments is sufficient to deliver the kind of leadership that influences teachers' practice significantly or improves student learning outcomes.
- Stakeholders are unanimous that the first step in achieving improved outcomes in education is to attract the best people into teaching.
- Salary may not be a strong reason why current teachers have chosen to teach, but it is a strong reason why many abler graduates choose not to teach, and this is cause for considerable concern if we want our education system to remain among the best in the world. There is no justification for assuming from this that our society can continue to get away with not paying teachers what they are worth. Research studies also constantly confirm that salary and working conditions are the main reasons why many good teachers leave the profession.
- Present arrangements in teaching do not encourage, reward or indeed require advanced professional learning.
- It is clear that there is a broad consensus that action is needed to radically strengthen procedures for recognising and rewarding teachers who reach high teaching standards.

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- Who really believes that a top salary for classroom teachers of about \$70,000 means we place sufficient value on teachers' work to attract the best university graduates? Who really believes that the typical office spaces in which teachers are expected to prepare and assess student work and carry out their business are indicators of an attractive and esteemed profession?
- Attracting enough people into teacher education and attracting people of suitable quality are two major issues that tend to work against each other. Any decline in the attractiveness of teaching is cause for concern, particularly if this results in universities lowering entry standards to fill their allocated quotas for teacher education students. When decline in the attractiveness of teaching as a career coincides with projected teacher shortages, this increases the pressure for entry standards to fall. This is the situation we face at present. Entry standards to teaching must not be allowed to fall further. Rather, they should rise.
- The next step is to prepare future teachers through teacher education programs that meet the highest standards. It is becoming clear that the most effective way of achieving quality and consistency will be through a system of national accreditation of teacher education courses.
- There is a pressing need for a unified national approach to managing teacher demand and supply.
- There are no cost-neutral ways to ensure that in the future Australia will have a teaching profession equal to the best in the world. But there will be major costs if we do not. Fortunately, there is broad public recognition of the need for better pay and conditions for teachers. This is conditional, however, on guarantees that it will be linked to sound evidence of improving teacher quality and professional performance.
- Newly conceived career paths are needed for the teaching profession to ensure that teachers have strong incentives to engage in the type of professional learning that leads to high teaching standards and improves student learning outcomes. Salary structures for teachers need to be more effective as instruments for promoting widespread use of successful teaching practices.

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- Although there is strong agreement that teacher quality is fundamental, it is currently difficult to find evidence of coherent, concerted, coordinated policy efforts at state and federal levels focused on teacher quality. Accountability for ensuring quality teachers and school leaders is unclear and diffused.
- Education policy needs to focus more clearly on what matters most to student learning – concerted, long-term policies and strategies to assure quality in the teaching profession. We know that good teachers matter, but we must start to act as if we really believed it.

What Does the BCA Report Advocate?

1. A new national agency should be established with one sole function: to establish and provide a voluntary advanced certification system for teachers. (Initial registration is compulsory and remains the responsibility of state registration bodies).
2. This agency should be constituted so that it brings together all the major stakeholders with an interest in recognising and rewarding quality teaching.
3. The agency should offer certification at two levels beyond initial registration as a competent teacher: the *Accomplished Teacher* level and the *Leading Teacher* level. Salaries for Accomplished Teachers should reach a level that is twice the starting salary for graduate teachers. Leading Teacher salaries should reach a salary that is 2.5 times starting salaries.
4. Standards at the Accomplished Teacher level should differentiate between what accomplished teachers know and do within each specialist field of teaching (e.g. early childhood specialist, primary school specialist, high school English specialist, etc.). Standards at the Leading Teacher level should differentiate between what teacher leaders know and do to promote improved learning outcomes among teams of teachers.
5. The main purposes of the system will be twofold: to provide a basis for offering more attractive salaries and career paths to graduates and those who seek to change careers; and to strengthen incentives for professional learning and widespread use of successful practices.

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The BCA report also called for national standards for teacher education courses; national accreditation of such courses and a minimum ENTER score of 75 for entry to all courses.

The BCA report estimated that it will take 10 years or more to reach a stage where 50 percent of teachers have been certified at the *Accomplished* and *Leading Teacher* levels, based on the voluntary certification of approximately 10,000 teachers per annum. Contrary to recent press reporting and reaction, only a minority of teachers – no more than 20 percent – would receive a salary equivalent to around \$130,000 in today's value. This proposal does not call for or constitute a doubling of the teacher wage bill.

Conclusion

What is clearer now is the necessary relationship between the development of teaching as a profession and the development of more effective systems for teacher evaluation and professional development based on profession-defined standards. As we contemplate strategies for revitalising the teaching profession and assuring the quality of Australia's education system in the future, the strategy of establishing an independent national body with a clearly defined certification function has become an imperative.

Link

Teaching talent: The best teachers for Australia's classrooms was released by the Business Council of Australia on 26 May. It can be downloaded from the [BCA website](#).

This summary was prepared for [Australian Policy Online](#) and posted 26 May 2006.

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Australian academics satisfied with jobs

The first results from a major international survey of the state of the academic profession shows that the majority of Australian academics remain satisfied with their jobs despite reporting a decline in working conditions since the start of their careers.

Conducted by the University of New England's Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy (CHEMP) and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) the Changing Nature of the Academic Profession (CAP) project is the largest of its kind in the world. The international comparative study is running across 20 countries including Australia.

In Australia around 1250 academics from 21 institutions completed an online survey of their job satisfaction in the second half of 2007. First results were released in late March 2008.

Researchers describe the state of the academic profession in Australia through case studies of fictional academics dubbed 'Colin' and 'Cheryl.'

Through Colin's and Cheryl's experiences we find that almost two thirds of respondents believe working conditions in higher education have deteriorated since the start of their careers. Only 9 per cent felt they had improved.

Academics are critical of the levels of secretarial support, teaching support and research support staff. On the other hand they are happy with the physical facilities provided by Australian institutions including labs and libraries.

On average academics work 50 hours per week regardless of whether classes are in session. This is more hours than they are contractually obliged to work.

According to the survey responses, a defining characteristic of the academic profession in Australia is a 'top-down' managed style described as having cumbersome administrative processes and a strong performance orientation.

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Collegiality is not very apparent and communication between management and academics is considered poor.

“These results support and often held view by observers of Australian higher education that change in the sector has been profound,” said the report’s author Dr Jeannet van der Lee.

“This research will enhance our understanding of the sector.”

Further findings and background information to Changing Nature of the Academic Profession (CAP) study, is available from the [University of New England website](#).

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ACER UPDATE

HPAT - Ireland

ACER has been awarded the contract to develop and manage the administration of a new undergraduate medical admissions test for University College Cork, University College Dublin, National University of Ireland Galway, The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and Trinity College Dublin. The test will be known as HPAT-Ireland.

The first sitting of the test will be on 14 February 2009. The results of HPAT-Ireland will be combined with the Leaving Certificate Examination results to select students for admission to medicine at each of the five Irish universities.

ACER is now responsible for all the undergraduate and graduate medical admissions testing in Ireland.

Employment of postgraduates with science and mathematics research skills

ACER has been contracted by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to conduct a research project on the employment of postgraduates with science and mathematics research skills. The study is intended to analyse trends in the supply of, and demand for, graduates with higher degree research skills in mathematics and science, and identify good practice among employers in attracting and retaining such graduates. The project will run from May to December 2008.

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Gambling and Young People

Gambling Research Australia has contracted ACER to conduct a two-year national study focusing on young people and their gambling within an Australian context. The project will research the extent and the patterns of gambling in young people, the context, nature and practices of where and why young people gamble; and the risk enhancers and risk inhibitors relevant to gambling for young people. The results of the project are intended to inform policy and practice related to effective harm reduction measures for young people. The project will commence in June.

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