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The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession.

The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) is a federation of state and territory joint councils of teacher professional associations representing over 160 000 teachers, from government and non-government schools within Australia. The purpose of APTA is to provide national leadership that supports and advances the teaching profession.

Should the committee require further input or seek clarification from APTA please do not hesitate to make contact.

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APTA's submission:

APTA's submission deals with the status of the teaching profession and provides advice about opportunities to improve outcomes for teachers in a range of areas including:

Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures

An attractive profession is one that is recognised by the community as such. Professional attractiveness is created by the positive energy and excitement of a profession's members and those they engage with on a daily basis. To get there teachers need to:

- be well respected
- be qualified
- have expertise
- have continued opportunities to learn and progress their careers.



The attractiveness of the teaching profession would benefit from focusing on **clearer career progression opportunities and incentives for teacher retention**, especially for those who wish to remain teaching in the classroom or become subject specialists rather than shifting to administrative roles. These incentives could include funding teachers and principals to access professional learning that they choose as part of their professional growth. In many jurisdictions educators are being restricted to professional learning that is determined by their system and are discouraged from accessing professional learning provided by other professional sources.

Governments/employers needs to subsidise study options for teachers to gain further qualifications aligned to their teaching career aspirations. There needs to be monetary rewards to encourage teachers to aspire towards the higher levels of accreditation. Leadership roles in professional teacher associations should also be recognised, which would encourage greater participation and enhance impact. At the other end of the career spectrum, more early-career teachers would be retained through ensuring that outstanding young teachers are given permanent employment rather than being placed on extended contract systems. A whole-of-career development is a strong impetus for attractiveness to teaching. Permanency should be offered to those proven to be the future of the profession.

APTA members believe that implementing a mentoring system similar to Singapore where all teachers are both mentored and act as mentors for others. This approach provides support, accelerates professional growth and builds a sense of not being alone as a professional.

APTA also advocates that all educators should join professional communities such as professional associations.

The attractiveness of the profession would also be enhanced by **raising the positive profile of teachers** and recognising the essential role that teachers play in the wellbeing of young people and communities. Teachers enter the profession because of a desire to care for children and teenagers and to improve learning outcomes. Greater media attention on the rewards of the profession and thanking teachers for the impact that they make, especially through the work of volunteer teacher associations, would make teachers feel more valued. Current government and media attention tends to focus on the shortcomings of teachers and systems rather than successes, which has a negative impact on morale and can deter potential teachers.

The attractiveness of the profession would be improved by providing **extra time allocation for teachers to address student wellbeing**. The reality is that teachers work long hours due to pressures to complete many tasks. The days are gone where teachers spent most of their time on preparing lessons, delivering lessons and marking student tasks. With the shift in society to dual income families, the increased rate of divorce and increasing rates of child and teen depression and anxiety, teachers are expected to fill roles that were previously filled by parents, extended families and support networks in the community. Children and teenagers look to their teachers to provide advice and support with family stresses, mental health issues and relationship issues such as bullying or sexting. Extra time allocation for

teachers to address student wellbeing would enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Working conditions are also impacted by the increased administrative burden on teachers. For example, student reports take longer to prepare than in previous decades, while being less clear to parents; work samples need to have student's identifying data removed and be scanned; and teachers are held accountable for programs of coursework that need to specifically document the ways a teacher addresses a multitude of elements within the one class such as students with learning disabilities, gifted and talented students, and students from different backgrounds. This is all at the same time that the content requirement of syllabuses has increased in breadth compared to past decades, often referred to as a "crowded curriculum". The expectation to raise Australian student results compared to other countries is difficult when teachers are expected to do more with the same time allocation. The **streamlining of administrative tasks and the provision of extra support staff** would significantly enhance the attractiveness of the profession.

Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources

Professional teacher associations provide support for teachers by providing an environment for collegial support and the sharing of specialist knowledge. This is largely through professional learning courses (face-to-face, online and blended) and networking opportunities, provided by expert teacher volunteers in a cost-effective manner. There is an opportunity for state and federal governments to **expand the support provided to professional teacher associations** so that they can reach more teachers, particularly those in regional and remote locations where costs in providing expert support can be prohibitive.

Evidence-inspired **peer coaching programs** for teachers should be investigated, including release time for teachers to observe each other's classes and hold reflective conversations. These peer coaching programs should not add to the administrative burden of teachers and should be focused on building trust and capacity rather than be a means for supervisors (many of whom have been years out of a full-time classroom teaching role) to "fix" subordinates. Keeping control of the process with classroom teachers (rather than supervisors) has the potential to make teachers feel more valued as well as improving learning outcomes for students.

Greater support to assist teachers with the bureaucracy of non-core teaching tasks is another important strategy to consider. This could include increasing the use of **lower-cost human resources** (administrative staff, teacher's aides, counsellors, youth workers, IT staff) **and IT resources** (up-to-date software and quality training in how to use it). All teachers should be provided with up-to-date laptops to enable upskilling and work off-site, and there should be encouragement for and acknowledgement of educators who innovate using IT for their own administration and for the benefit of their students' learning.

Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced

Teacher associations, led by teacher volunteers, play a crucial role in ensuring teachers are at the leading edge in their knowledge and skills. Through sharing resources, networking, and classroom-focused professional learning courses by expert specialist teachers, teacher associations increase efficiency and reduce time pressures on teachers with their out-of-hours, at-home work. Teacher associations are very cost-effective in achieving this impact. **Increasing government support to professional teacher associations so that they can expand the services they provide**, particularly in the areas of curriculum and assessment, will increase teacher capacity. It needs to be acknowledged that the increased teacher workload over recent decades has eroded the time that teachers can give to their professional teacher associations. It is beneficial to the entire teaching profession if this trend can be reversed to amplify the powerful benefits of peer collaboration across schools and educational sectors.

Another way that the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced is through providing more cost-effective **support staff to assist teachers** with their non-core teaching tasks. These support staff could include teacher's aides, administrative assistants, youth workers, IT support staff, and counsellors. Teachers could then spend more time on effective lesson planning, delivery and assessment, and less time out-of-hours on such tasks. Student learning outcomes would also benefit.

Increasing **release time during the work day for classroom teachers to engage in collaborative planning, assessment and moderation** will also reduce the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work, with the added benefit of improving staff morale and student learning outcomes. Currently most staff are expected to conduct these collaborative tasks in their own time after school or in rushed lunch breaks.

Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers

Professional teacher associations provide essential support to teachers in the form of cross-sectoral professional learning and networking. The services these organisations provide are high quality, classroom focused, provided by expert subject specialist teachers and are cost effective compared to corporate providers of similar services. There is the potential to **expand the services provided by professional teacher associations to more effectively assist early-career teachers and regional and remote teachers**. Relying on volunteers, professional teacher associations would benefit from government funding to capitalise on the unique opportunities that are available to them.

Early career teachers are under particular pressure, and it is worth considering a sliding scale of classroom commitments. For example, the first year could be a sixty percent load, the second year could be an eighty percent load and the third year could be a full load. **Mentoring programs for early-career teachers** should be adopted. All young teachers should have access to a mentor who is not in a power position over them, and consideration

should be given to providing giving the young teacher a choice of mentor. This may need to be an external person for the case of small, regional or remote schools.

Other opportunities to improve outcomes for teachers

Governments and key decision makers should involve teacher associations such as the Australian Professional Teachers' Association (APTA) in the process of educational review. Relying solely on people who have never taught in a classroom or left full-time teaching a long time ago is very limiting given the rapid rate of change in today's educational environment.

Recommendations

1. Development of clearer career progression opportunities and incentives for teacher retention
2. Raise the positive profile of teachers
3. Provide extra time allocation for teachers to address student wellbeing
4. Streamlining of administrative tasks and the provision of extra support staff
5. Evidence-inspired peer coaching programs for teachers should be investigated, including release time for teachers to observe each other's classes and hold reflective conversations.
6. Greater support to assist teachers with the bureaucracy of non-core teaching tasks. This could include increasing the use of lower-cost human resources (administrative staff, teacher's aides, counsellors, youth workers, IT staff) and IT resources (up-to-date software and quality training in how to use it).
7. Increasing government support to professional teacher associations so that they can expand the services they provide, particularly in the areas of curriculum and assessment, in order to increase teacher capacity.
8. The burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced by providing more cost-effective support staff to assist teachers with their non-core teaching tasks.
9. Increasing release time during the work day for classroom teachers to engage in collaborative planning, assessment and moderation will also reduce the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work, with the added benefit of improving staff morale and student learning outcomes.
10. Professional teacher associations provide essential support to teachers in the form of cross-sectoral professional learning and networking. The services these organisations provide are high quality, classroom focused, provided by expert subject specialist teachers and are cost effective compared to corporate providers of similar services. There is the potential to expand the services provided by professional teacher associations to more effectively assist early-career teachers and regional and remote teachers.
11. Mentoring programs for early-career teachers should be adopted.