

## G. The current action plan

The state and Federal Governments have developed 27 initiatives to be considered. These can group around four big ideas: (1) Recognise and esteem expertise (e.g., a National campaign to raise the status and value of teachers, streamline the current process and increase number of HALTS); (2) Improve supply (e.g., attract more of the brightest into ITE, particularly in demand subjects, improve graduation rates in ITE), (3) Reduce teacher workload (e.g., establish a workload reduction fund, provide more resources to implement the curriculum, identify most effective use of others in the school such as teaching assistants and support staff etc.; and (4) develop more effective supply and demand evidence.

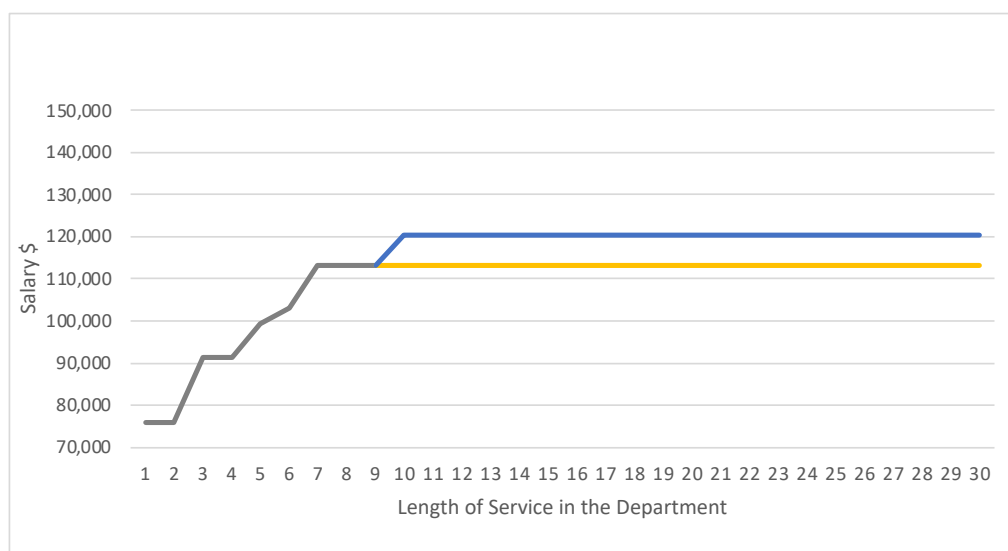
## H. The need for a new career structure

The 27 actions in the Ministerial Action Plan are likely to redress many of today's concerns, but the point of this paper is that the problem will not go away. Today's teacher supply issues are tomorrow's leadership issues. From the above analysis, it is argued that the fundamental problem is the lack of recognition of the expertise needed to make the differences we desire in the learning lives of students across Australia. Teaching is too often seen, especially by educators, as a noble profession, akin to being Florence Nightingale or Mahatma Gandhi, and the credentials for entering and staying in the profession are a love of working with students, a desire to be recognised as worthwhile, and committing to a vow of poverty.

In November 2022, a team visited almost half the schools in NSW inviting educators to help build a new career structure for teachers, 75%+ desired a career and salary structure that enabled them to stay in the classroom (<https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/rewarding-excellence-in-teaching>). So often we were regaled that talking about pay, money, and recognition was dirty, unseemly, and insulting – we are in not for money but for the love of the work. And this is from the profession. We were told all teachers were excellent, experience matters more than expertise, and every school was an island, unique, and context mattered such that being excellent in one school does not guarantee you are excellent in another school.

The teachers and leaders proclaimed that the problem was that the public did not esteem them. COVID solved this problem as parents saw the skills of teachers, realised that their students were not as motivated at school as they believed, and saw that struggling to learn was core to the skills of teachers. The Morgan Poll (2022) found the top four most highly esteemed professions were doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and teachers. But recent polls showed only 42% of educators claiming the public esteemed them. The problem is educators' notions of esteem, not the public. How do we get the profession to esteem itself, and not be the harbingers of doom and tell students not to become teachers? When teachers invite their students not to become teachers, is it because of financial problems more than the perceptions of status (Klimeik, 2019)? Students with choices of esteemed professions know that their salary decreases relative to their peers after 7-10 years as a teacher. The percentage of parents wanting their child to become a teacher is unrelated to the changes in staff-student ratios, entry standards into the profession, or changes in the nation's test scores (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). Kraft and Lyon demonstrated that teacher compensation and reductions in teacher autonomy were the primary candidates for explaining the changes in parents' desire for their children to become educators.

Teachers' starting salaries are high in Australia, ranked in the top 5 of all professional starting salaries. For example, the recent ACT agreement has first-year teachers starting at \$84,978 but reaching a maximum of \$121,038 after seven more steps and then flatlining. The graph below shows the NSW salary structure for teachers who remain in the classroom, and the flatline is most stark. The OECD reports that Australia's top teacher salary is only 40% higher than the starting salary, well below the OECD average of 80%. No wonder teachers move from the classroom to leadership, department, and other roles to engender salary rises post 7-10 years. No wonder we have a classroom teacher supply problem. No wonder the top 30% of students do not want to enter a profession that flatlines so soon.



## H. The need for a new career structure

Teaching across Australia has a four-level model of teachers: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead. After ten years of this model, it is embarrassing that less than .3% of teachers are regarded as Highly Accomplished and Lead. There are indeed many barriers, with the current processes being onerous, school leaders not always knowing how to use HALTS, but they are a marked increase in salary (<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/spotlight/halt.pdf>). Nevertheless, it is pleasing to see the target of 10,000 HALTS within a few years in the Government's response to supply issues, and this provides a (last ditch, perhaps) attempt for the profession to recognise and esteem expertise.

Ensuring roles and compensation for HALTS while they stayed primarily in the classroom was the focus of the NSW Rewarding Excellence (now relabeled as Career Pathways for Teachers; see above). The profession must welcome this policy as such career pathways that recognise and esteem excellence are the major response to the increasing issues with supply and demand. Perhaps the current situation is less of a supply and demand problem than a reward and recognition issue.

Another outcome of the NSW Rewarding Excellence initiative was the value and importance of finding ways for school principals to initiate, develop, write, and critique policy. To be fair, they are mainly asked to react to policies already well developed, and it is thus not surprising that there are few skills to initiate policy. However, COVID showed that educators could develop policies as not one initiative or policy came from head offices during COVID about how to optimise teaching and learning (other than times of opening or closing). As noted above, school-led policy development's success in coping with COVID was remarkable.

Note this is NOT proclaiming performance pay – it does not work in education (effect-size = .05; Hattie, 2023). Instead, like other professions, it recognises and rewards excellence based on a portfolio submission to apply for these higher roles and salaries. It involves professional judgement, and it is evidence-based.

### Conclusions

There is a major need to **develop a compelling narrative** about the current situation to ensure the solutions are coordinated and have the highest probability of improving the status, supply, and educators. We have less of a supply and demand problem and more of an attraction and retention problem in Australian schools. The current narrative relates more to supply and demand and any fixes thus are likely to be short-term. The fundamental problem is creating a career structure for educators to stay in the classroom (if they wish), be promoted into middle and senior leadership, and find ways for senior principals to create, critique and contribute to policy development. There is a major need to recognise and esteem expertise wherever it occurs in schools, move the profession from individual autonomy to collective impact on students, and develop methods for using the many adults-other-than teachers to support the impact of teachers on students.

Almost all who enter teaching do so for one reason – to have an impact on students. As they become more experienced, many want to expand their impact on more students, moving into teacher-leader, middle management, or deputy or principal roles. Whether in leadership or in-classroom roles, educators gain esteem, rewards and recognition from their impacts on students, undertake professional learning to magnify their impact and stay in the profession to maximise their impact. We need as a nation to recognise this imperative, as teachers make a difference, and our future depends on the 1 in 30 of the workforce in schools.

The downside of this claim is that, too often, educators see themselves in a noble profession and that discussions about pay and advancement are somehow unseemly. But no person should enter the profession and be asked to take a vow of poverty. The profession is endangered if there is the proposition that all teachers are equal and that various levels and advancement of expertise do not matter. The current flatlining of salaries after 7-10 years seriously costs the profession, making it most unattractive to enter the profession.

There is **no place to lower quality to maximise quantity**. Australia is one of the few, if only country in the world to legislate standards for teachers and principals. It is time to accelerate this opportunity to expand these standards to middle leaders/ teacher-leaders, causal and relief teachers, teaching assistants all across the sector working together to maximise their impact on the learning lives of all students. Australia has four levels of teacher standards, and there is a major need to a re-look at why they are not enacted (only .3% are currently Highly Accomplished or Lead teachers - HALTs). The presence, impact, and voices of these HALTs will do more to esteem the profession, entice more to enter, and provide pathways for great teachers to stay in the classroom, be remunerated, and be esteemed. Basing pathways more on expertise than the current experience will make entering and remaining in the profession more attractive. The most major need is a discussion on improving the **career pathways for educators**.

There is a need to have an **evidence base about supply, particularly demand**. The Australian teacher Workforce Data project is critical to understanding the nuances, the details, and the overall picture – and yes, sometimes evidence can get in the way of an opinion! Right now, the nature of the shortage is not dire overall (except in early childhood) – particularly compared to other professions, but we certainly have many pockets of problems. We do not want more teachers. We want more teachers with specific skills in certain locations and to come in and stay in the profession as teachers. Discussions about shortages also need to question the increased number of teachers and other adults relative to increases in the student school population. Adding more adults increases the demands on teachers and schools. There is little recognition of these extra responsibilities, and we need to ensure there is evidence that these extra adults lead to improving students' learning outcomes.

## H. The need for a new career structure

There is an urgent need to **change the workload discussion away from the stressors and burnout to the coping strategies of educators**. Of all skills, educators are brilliant at having coping skills to deal with the many, constant, and diverse stressors in schools. This is not defending violence against educators but acknowledging the coping strategies. This change of focus will reduce the current weaponisation that uses stress and burnout to diss the qualities of educators, drive away those contemplating entering the profession, and lower quality entry and promotion into and within the profession.

The problem is less a workload issue but **more a relentlessness issue**. The problem is the diversity of tasks, the lack of time to contemplate, the ever presence of student and colleague issues, and the lack of emphasis on efficiency within classes and schools. Continually blaming governments for policies may be easy, but it is within schools that most workload is generated and it is very difficult to de-implement within schools. Reduce the disruptions and the interruptions, as teachers rarely complain about spending workload and time on things that matter to them – and for teachers, this is teaching. Yes, there is a need to cost all initiatives from government, industrial agreements on workload, teacher supply, and their impacts on student learning. But we also need more efficiencies within schools and classrooms. Bring on de-implementation: Remove, Reduce, Re-engineer, and Replace.

**COVID has done a number on educators**. Australian educators successfully prevented major learning loss, and the overall effects on students were minor – and all recognition to educators for this work entailed major disruption, changes to how they taught, and more isolation. Every time there are negative claims about COVID causing learning loss should be met with BUT what learning loss; learning did not stop; we should thank our educators for the minimal effects. But teachers also learned they could 'teach' without many of the usual disruptions, no home-to-school travel, playground duty, etc., and fewer meetings. But post-COVID, they were demanded to return to the previous grammar of schooling with its relentlessness and distractions. The more teachers are distracted and interrupted, the higher the stressors. We need to find ways for part-time roles, job-sharing, consider a four-day week for educators, and integrate the many non-teaching adults to support teachers.

It is **not the stress that leads to burnout and leaving; it is the coping strategies to deal with stress**. Let's move the discussion from the outcomes to the causes – esteeming educators' optimal coping strategies. **Teachers stay for students and leave due to leaders**. Stress, workload, and burnout often magnify the decisions to leave, but leadership conflicts lead to attrition from schools and the profession. It is less workload and burnout, but the lack of appreciation for the workload and coping strategies within a school leads to teachers leaving a school or the profession. Similarly, it is a myth that many teachers are leaving the profession – they are not, at least no more than in other professions and similarly to before COVID.

Too many of the current initiatives ignore the school leaders. **Today's teacher supply issues are tomorrow's leadership issues**. There is a need for more than one standard within the current Principal Standard, merging attributes of Lead teachers, Deputy Principals, beginning, mid-career and expert principals. A major role for expert principals could include initiating, developing, writing, and critiquing policy. The many principal professional organisations could play a major part in such professional learning. They would finally have the profession more involved in creating the optimal policies for the many schools across Australia.

One of the important messages of the current debate is: **Be sure to ask the right questions!** Avoid self-report 'Do you intend to stay in the profession over the next 5 or 10 years'. This is highly misleading and is unrelated to actual leaving behaviour. Do not ask about stress and burnout; ask about coping strategies to deal with stress and burnout. Add the evidence of coping strategies and staying in the profession into the evidence base about supply and demand and make this ATWD the centre of addressing the right questions and policy development.

Australia is at a crossroads, has been given an opportunity to reset the critical questions as a consequence of COVID, and the mood is ripe for moving the profession into the top quality assured in the nation. It can only do this with the will and expertise of the profession, when the profession esteems itself, and when we ask the right questions and have the right evidence to then decide. The greatest issue is the career structure of the profession, embedded on expertise, celebrated as truly making the difference to the quality of the future workforce, and creating opportunities for students to exceed what they believe is their potential.