# Freeing Teachers to Teach

## UNLOCKING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH CLASSROOM SUPPORT

## About the McKell Institute

The McKell Institute is an independent, not-for-profit research institute dedicated to identifying practical policy solutions to contemporary challenges.

www.mckellinstitute.org.au

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## Acknowledgement of Country

This report was written on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. The McKell Institute acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to both their land and seas.

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# Foreword

Our schools are struggling to juggle individual learning and delivering a national curriculum, while also meeting their growing reporting and administration obligations.

The burden falls to teachers, often working outside contracted hours, without adequate support. Workload pressure is driving teachers away from the classroom at a level that demands national attention.

This paper provides feedback on the Productivity Commission's inquiry *Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce*, which seeks to identify reforms and priorities for government.

The McKell Institute welcomes this inquiry as it serves a dual purpose. It acknowledges the role of schooling in shaping Australia's future workforce, while also recognising that teachers need national leadership and support to strengthen classroom learning and lift standards across the board.

Recommendations from the Commission's interim report aim to cut time spent on lesson planning and improve efficiencies by introducing new and emerging technologies.

The stated aim of these measures is to reduce the workload on teachers and strengthen Australia's future workforce by making sure young people leave school well equipped.

However, as necessary and sensible as these aims are, the Commission's recommendations are concerning for the future of our teachers.

The McKell Institute aims to show how the Commission's work to boost productivity should start with allowing teachers to be more productive and supporting them throughout fulsome, long-term careers.

Supporting teachers means recognising them as the nation's most asset in educating young people, listening to their experiences, and treating their profession as a vocation critical to national productivity.

# Executive summary

This paper addresses Draft Recommendation 1.1: The best resources to improve school student outcomes from the Commission's interim report.

It particularly focuses on this aspect of Draft Recommendation 1.1:

> *"The Australian Government should invest in a single online national platform that houses a comprehensive bank of high-quality, curriculum-aligned lesson planning materials. These materials should be publicly available to teachers in all states and territories and across all school sectors, including Catholic and independent schools."*[1]

We seek to explain how this proposed recommendation does not address teaching retention issues and why shifting administrative tasks from teachers to administrative staff will save teachers time and considerably boost their classroom productivity.

This paper notes that even optional shared lesson plans risk limiting the professional autonomy of teachers, particularly those working in under-resourced, low socio-economic schools.  Treating ready-made lessons plans as the solution to easing teacher workloads must be avoided if we are to address the key reasons why teachers are leaving.

Likewise, while there is merit in exploring the potential for AI to be used effectively in schools and as a way to reduce the administrative burden for teachers, it would be counter-productive to introduce new systems and technology for an already over-burdened workforce unless it comes with plans to address the administrative burden teachers face.

Each of Australia's states and territories oversee and deliver education in our schools. At the national level, the federal government shapes policy direction and serves as the national leader and delivers significant funding.  In referring to the 'education system', this report refers to the national system in its entirety, a system that has been designed to provide every child with a core skill base that sets them up for adulthood.

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[1] Producitivity Commission (n 5) 2.

# Findings

**1.  Teacher retention is critical for educational outcomes and should be a priority.**

Keeping teachers in classrooms is essential for lifting outcomes. Retained, experienced teachers enhance student learning, provide stability, and mentor younger colleagues. High teaching turnover disrupts continuity and disproportionately harms disadvantaged schools. Solid teacher-student relationships support engagement, behaviour, and socio-emotional development, which are all tied to boosting academic success. Retention also reduces costly recruitment and training cycles.

**2.  The Productivity Commission identifies the right issues but tackles the wrong problem.**

While the Commission's interim report recognises the complexity of teachers' work and the pressures of managing classrooms and delivering a national curriculum, its recommendations miss the source of the burden. Teachers have overwhelmingly said that administration, compliance requirements and a lack of support staff have made their workloads unsustainable workloads, yet the interim report focuses on lesson planning as the area to overhaul.

**3.  Specially resourced administrative staff in schools would save teachers time.**

Our analysis finds that reallocating some of the existing administrative and communications workload from teachers to administrative staff specifically resourced for these tasks could provide between 67 **million** and 106 **million** hours per year of additional time nationally for teachers to plan, collaborate and to restore work/life balance.

**4.  Planning lessons has been treated as an administrative burden rather part of teaching.**

Lesson planning is core professional work, not red tape. Teacher surveys have shown teachers want more time for planning, not less. But the Commission's interim report has conflated lesson planning with administration. Treating lesson risks devaluing the intellectual and creative aspects of teaching.

**5.  The Commission's draft recommendations risks reshaping the role of teachers.**

By proposing a central, digital lesson bank and AI tools, the Commission risks narrowing teachers' roles to delivering of pre-prepared content, rather than skilled educators who design and adapt learning to their students. This management consultant-style and efficiency-driven approach threatens to hollow out the role of teaching.

**6.  The commission's work does not factor in broader concerns with artificial intelligence.**

The impact of AI on how people learn and work, and how it shifts thinking, is an emerging area of study. Already, early research has shown that using AI can reduce cognitive capacity, creativity and critical thinking.

# Recommendations

**1.  The Australian Government's *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement* must directly benefit schools and teachers.**

The best way to meet the challenges that the education system faces is to invest in people. In the lead up to the *2026-27 Budget*, the Government must collaborate with the education unions to deliver the $16 billion of new Commonwealth funding promised under the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement* to directly benefit students and supports teachers.

**2.  The Productivity Commission must recognise the value in resourcing teachers.**

Drawing on the evidence given by teachers in the 2023 *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*, we recommend the National Cabinet and the Education Ministers Meeting be tasked with implanting better conditions for teachers, including reduced working hours, reduced administrative tasks, and collaborative teaching arrangements using the productivity dividend gained from the reallocation of teachers' current administration workload.

**3.  The Federal Government must invest in more support staff for schools.**

Investing in more staff for schools will give teachers the time they need to focus on teaching students. Moving administrative tasks to administrative staff and investing in more support teachers would addresses overall teacher workload and the areas teachers have identified as causing the most stress and reasons for wanting to leave the workforce.

**4.  The Productivity Commission must investigate and promote productivity gains that prioritise teaching and reduce administrative burden on teachers.**

Lesson design and planning are core aspects of professional teaching practice and must be supported, not replaced. Teachers consistently call for more time to focus on planning and instruction. Genuine productivity gains will come from reducing and reallocating unnecessary administration, improving systems, and targeting reforms that allow teachers to devote more of their time and expertise to teaching. Including teachers in this process is essential.

5.  **The Australian Government must design a proactive and research-backed policy for edtech and AI as teaching tools.**

The latest developments in educational technology (edtech) are full of potential and may improve efficiency but are not without risks.  This is still an emerging area and impacts are still under investigation and research. By collaborating with educators and drawing on best practice, a new educational technology policy should be developed which prioritises edtech and AI as tools to assist teachers and cut down on administration, rather than deskilling teachers. Further work is needed to establish short, medium and long-term impacts and review and refine practices.

# Productivity starts with supporting teachers and students

Our national education system, and everyone it employs and serves, is incredibly diverse. The responsibility of the federal government is to set standards and oversee a system that can adequately deliver a sustainable skills base across the board is massive.

Understandably, there is a persistent tension between federal governments, states and territories, schools of all stripes and the public about how this is best done.

The tensions implicit within the national system have intensified under economic pressures and technological change, and the work of teachers has become unbalanced.

Teaching has traditionally been seen as a rewarding and socially valuable career, shaping the lives of students and strengthening communities.

Almost every Australian could recall a teacher who went above and beyond for them, and helped to break down barriers and gain a greater understanding, or achieve success.

But our education system is placing unsustainable demands on teachers, making them do more and more with less.

## Teachers have made it clear why they are leaving the profession

In the Australian Education Union's (AEU) *State of Our Schools* survey of more than 15,000 educators, teachers reported being close to breaking point.[2]

Of all respondents, 66 per cent said that their workload had increased in the past year, and 75 per cent said their school was under-resourced. As a consequence, 94 per cent observed that schools struggle to retain staff, and cited reduced workloads (42 per cent) and fewer student management issues (25 per cent) as the key to retaining teachers.

The outlook is particularly worrying. One in three teachers said they were planning to leave the profession entirely, a finding that is backed up by government data as shown below.

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[2] Australian Education Union, *State of Our Schools 2024* (2025).

Since the pandemic, the number of teachers planning to leave the profession within five years rose by nearly 20 per cent. When asked to provide reasons for their intentions, teachers report increasing workload and administrative as key reasons for departure.[3]

This has wide-ranging ramifications, not only for the health and wellbeing of educators but also for state and federal budgets. Across the country, teachers are in high demand and retention grows harder. Reasons why are well-documented and informed by teachers themselves.

The Commission includes evidence of teachers leaving their roles and frames measures that can help reduce workload and improve teacher effectiveness, and by doing so, improve retention. However, as explained below, lesson planning is not the driver of the administrative burden on teachers.

*Figure 1: Teachers intending to leave the profession*
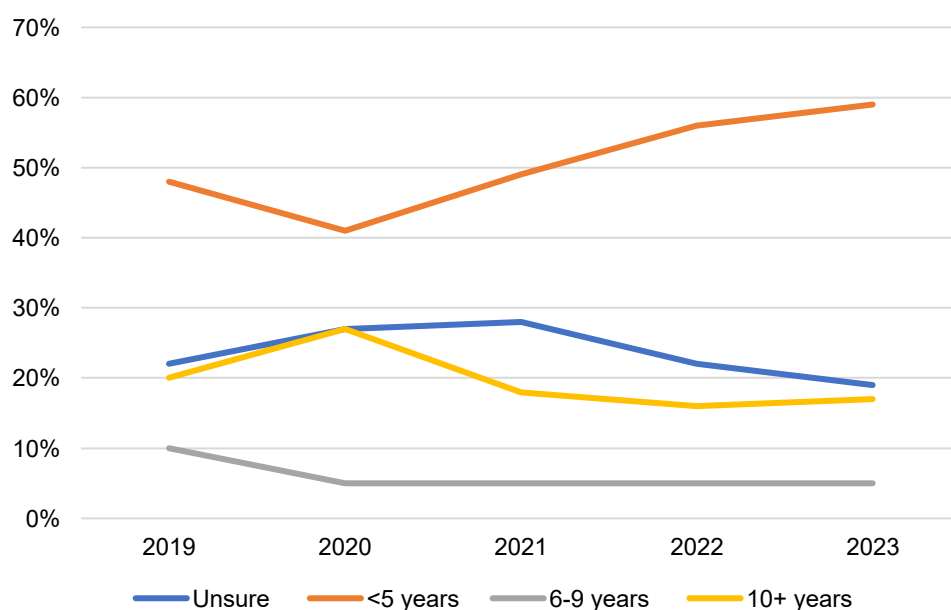


*Source: Author's calculations, drawn from Australian Teacher Workforce Data.[4]*

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[3] Australian Education Union (n 1).
[4] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Australian Teacher Workforce Data* (2025) <https://atwd.aitsl.edu.au/data/key-metrics/workforce/>.

## Teacher retention is essential for lifting education outcomes

The importance of teacher retention is well-documented and should be a driver of decision-making in any productivity or educational reforms.

Experienced teachers enhance student learning and school stability and offer mentoring and on-the-job learning opportunities for young teachers, which helps them to start their careers with strong foundations.[5]

Solid teacher and student relationships encourage more engagement, are beneficial for behaviour and classroom management, and socio-emotional development, all factors contributing to academic outcomes. Retaining teachers also reduces recruitment and training costs.

High rates of teacher turnover disrupt classrooms and impact continuity and makes schools reliant on less experienced teachers who don't have the knowledge of students that is built up over time.  High teacher turnover has been proven to have a particularly negative impact on students in disadvantaged schools and living in low socio-economic areas.[6]

Policies that support teacher wellbeing, reduce workload pressures, and create pathways for long-term careers must be government priorities, as both are essential to student success and broader productivity.

## Time pressures on teachers need urgent attention.

The number of teachers working more than 40 hours has grown by nearly 27 per cent over two decades. Teachers are forced to spend much of their time on activities other than lesson delivery, and therefore complete tasks in what should be their leisure time.

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[5] Gimbert, B., & Kapa, R. (2022). Growing and nurturing educators: Literature review on teacher retention. *Association of Independent Schools of NSW.*https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/Resources/WAL%204%20%5BOpen%20Access%5D/Growing%20and%20Nuturing%20Educators%20Literature%20Review%20-%20Teacher%20Retention.pdf

[6] Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, *50*(1), 4-36. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212463813

Data from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (AWTD) survey shows that the amount of teachers who spent more than 10 hours a week on administrative tasks and marking has doubled in just four years.

Teachers are dealing with competing priorities, working to meet the needs of each student. The tension between individualised learning and national curriculum standards is familiar and recurrent within educational policy discussion. In some respects, this tension is an inevitable of byproduct of good governance across all schools to provide a reliable and widely-relevant mass education program. But the hours teachers spend on its delivery are untenable.

The *State of Our Schools* survey found that teachers worked 51.8 hours a week on average,[7] with 87 per cent of respondents reporting they worked more than 40 hours. This is supported the latest governmental data, which shows the number of educators who routinely work more than 40 hours a week has been increasing for more than 20 years.

*Figure 2. Average Weekly Working Hours in Education*
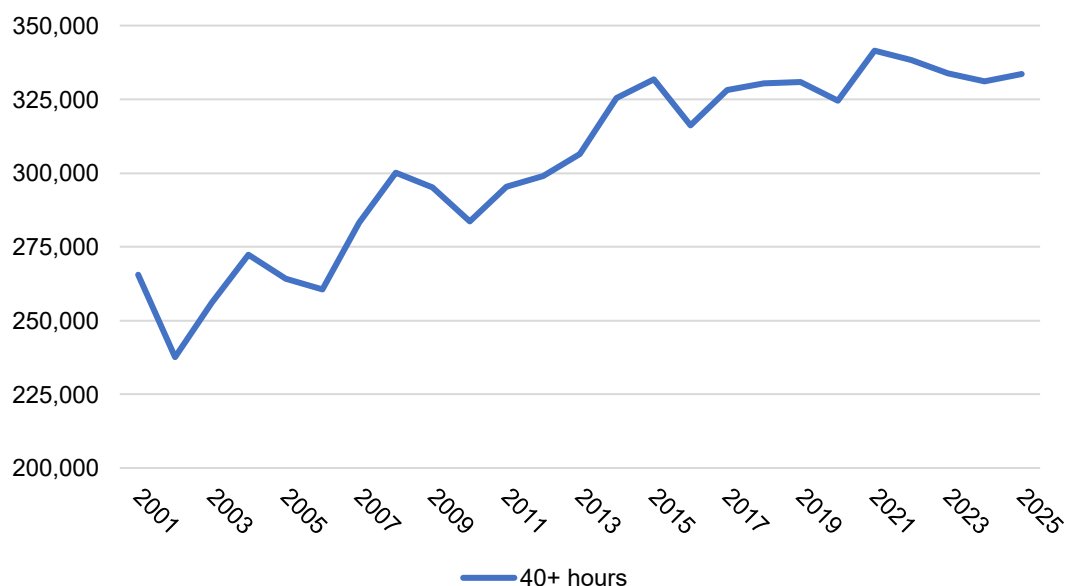


Source: Author's calculations, based on ABS 6291.0.55.001 (EQ11)

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[7] Australian Education Union (n 1).

## Freeing teachers to teach delivers significant productivity gains

Australia's 320,378 teachers[8] spend a substantial amount of time on administration work. This includes ever-increasing data collection to meet compliance requirements, and according to AITSL's Australian Teacher Workforce dataset,[9] administration alone amounts to 79 million hours of administration work done by teachers each year.

Australia's teachers spend 55 million hours a year on parent and carer communications.

The pastoral care partnership between teachers and parents and carers in supporting the social and emotional development of students is incredibly important and must be protected. Parents and carers communicating directly with teachers is critical for issues such as student behaviour, engagement and learning, student relationships with their peers.

However, there is a sizeable amount of parental communication work that is process-based, time intensive and is currently done by teachers.

The work needed to record absences, follow up on unexplained absences, managing permission forms, scheduling meetings and triaging emails quickly adds up to extra hours every day, and can be done by administrative staff.

Freeing up teachers to teach, plan and collaborate, the core work of teaching, could provide an enormous productivity dividend in the form of improved learning benefits to students. Hours returned to teachers through the better management of the administration and compliance workload and process-based parent and carer communication would allow more dedicated time for assessment, lesson planning and collaboration along with reducing the length of the working week, improving teacher wellbeing and work/life balance.

Below we present high, medium and low case scenarios for the benefit to teachers workload that could come from reallocating various proportional amounts of their current time spent on administration and communications to administration staff resources for that purpose.

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[8] Total primary and secondary FTE  https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#staff
[9] https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/atwd-reports/national-trends-teacher-workforce-jun2025 Table 11: Average weekly hours per non-teaching duty, primary and secondary full-time classroom teachers, 2021-2023

*Table 1,  High case, 100 per cent of administration time and 50 per cent of parental communications time reallocated to administrative staff*

|  | Total FTE Teachers | Admin weekly hours (100%) | Communication with parents/carers weekly hours (50% reallocated) | Average hours restored to teachers per week | Total hours restored to teachers annually over 40 weeks of schooling |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary | 162,083 | 6 | 2.25 | 8.25 | 53,487,390 |
| Secondary | 158,295 | 6.4 | 2.05 | 8.45 | 53,503,710 |
| **Total** | **320,378** |  |  |  | **106,991,100** |

*Table 2, Medium case: 75 per cent of administration time and 50 per cent of parental communications time reallocated to administrative staff*

|  | Total FTE Teachers | Admin weekly hours (75% reallocated) | Communication with parents/carers weekly hours (50% reallocated) | Average hours restored to teachers per week | Total hours restored to teachers annually over 40 weeks of schooling |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary | 162,083 | 4.5 | 2.25 | 6.75 | 43,762,410 |
| Secondary | 158,295 | 4.8 | 2.05 | 6.85 | 43,372,830 |
| **Total** | **320,378** |  |  |  | **87,135,240** |

*Table 3, Low case: 50 per cent of administration time and 50 per cent of parental communications time reallocated to administrative staff*

|  | Total FTE Teachers | Admin weekly hours (50% reallocated) | Communication with parents/carers weekly hours (50% reallocated) | Average hours restored to teachers per week | Total hours restored to teachers annually over 40 weeks of schooling |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary | 162,083 | 3 | 2.25 | 5.25 | 34,037,430 |
| Secondary | 158,295 | 3.2 | 2.05 | 5.25 | 33,241,950 |
| **Total** | **320,378** |  |  |  | **67,279,380** |

*Source: AITSL's Australian Teacher Workforce dataset*

## A national platform of content is not the solution.

There is little evidence that standardised lesson plans have a real impact on achievement. The recommendation for an online platform of planning materials aligns with Grattan Institute recommendations from 2022.[10] The interim report cites a link between a digital library in Singapore and its Programme for Internal Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes.[11] However, given Singapore's substantially higher investment in education and difference in pedagogical approaches and cultural practices in education, the link is correlative and lacks causal evidence.

A national platform does not reduce workloads, nor does it support teachers to manage students with complex needs. And, while there is a case for standardised skills assessment,[12] there is little evidence that standardised delivery achieves those outcomes.

Reform work must address the reasons why teachers no longer want to teach.

*Figure 3: Listening to teachers: stated teacher priorities*



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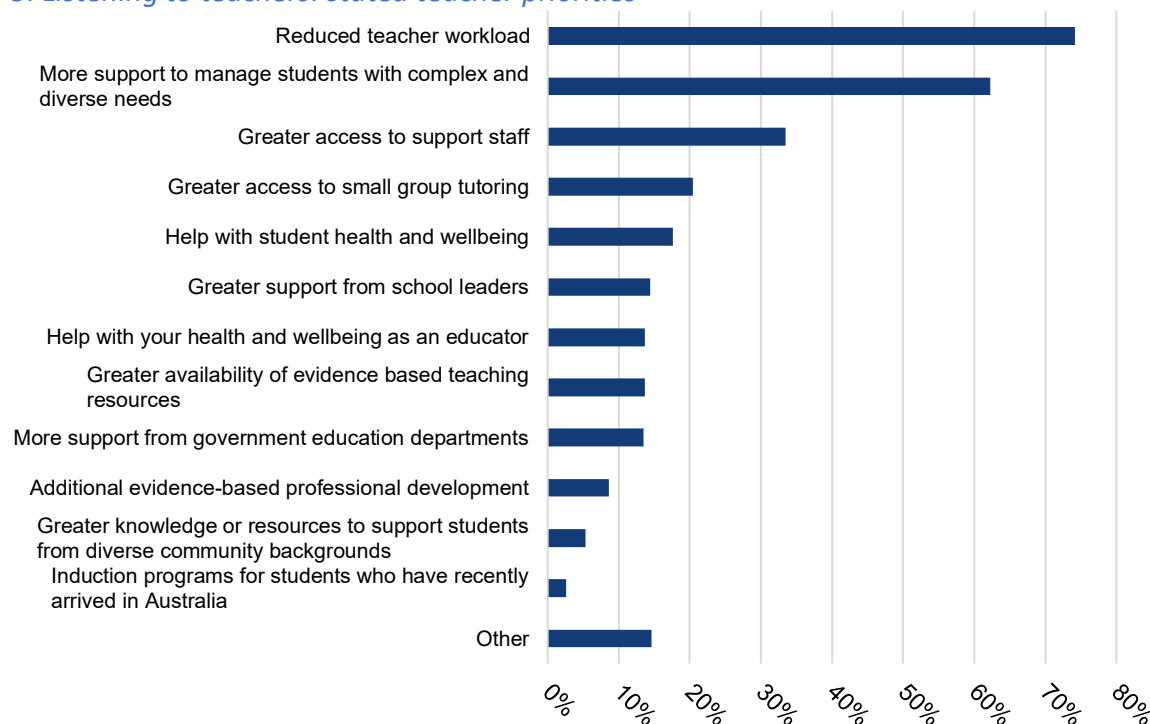
[10] Jordana Hunter, Amy Haywood and Nick Parkinson, *Ending the Lesson Lottery How to Improve Curriculum Planning in School* (2022) 4.

[11] Producitivity Commission (n 5) 19–20.

[12] I.e. testing whether students can read and interpret a text, solve multiplication problems, or construct logical sentences

*Source: Social Research Centre (2023).* [13]

## Lesson planning is core to being a teacher and is more than simply 'administration'

In the *State of Our Schools Survey*, 80 per cent of teachers reported spending too much time on administration and compliance tasks, compared with a smaller share who felt they spent too much time on lesson planning.

The Commission's interim report correctly identifies the problem, and notes the "rising complexity and administrative burden of teaching is reducing the time teachers spend supporting students". [14]

However, the report shows a conflation between the time that teachers spend on lesson planning with time spent on administrative and compliance activities. This creates an assumption that lesson planning is a burden to be minimised, rather than an essential aspect of the profession.

Analysis of the New South Wales Department of Education's Quality Time Program (QTP), which aimed to cut 'low-value' administrative tasks by 20 per cent, found a broad definition of 'administration' had included core lesson planning and assessment tasks. [15]

In their analysis, Stacey et al found that by categorising lesson planning, and assessment as "administrative" tasks, the NSW QTP had risked devaluing the intellectual and creative aspects of teaching.

Teachers themselves had reported wanting more time for lesson preparation and differentiation, not less, and positioning these activities as administrative work was counter to how teachers saw their roles and their professional identity. [16]

A key part of teaching that helps deliver better outcomes over time is the opportunity for teachers to learn through practice. Planning lessons is an iterative process, where teachers can trial approaches before adjusting or adapt them to the students in their learning community; and what works in one class will not automatically work in the next class.

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[13] Social Research Centre, *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System – Initial Consultation Surveys* (2023) 8.

[14] Ibid 21.

[15] Stacey, M., Kline, J., Mills, M., & Rowe, E. (2024). Reducing teachers' workload or deskilling 'core' work? Analysis of a policy response to teacher workload demands. https://share.google/bgTm1qGMvpWk00ypX
[16] Ibid

*Table 4: Comparative teacher duties*

| | 0-4 hours | 5-9 hours | 10+ hours |
|---|---|---|---|
| Administrative tasks (2019) | 62% | 28% | 10% |
| Administrative tasks (2023) | 52% | 30% | 17% |
| Counselling (2023) | 87% | 8% | 4% |
| Engaging with parents (2019) | 93% | 6% | 1% |
| Engaging with parents (2023) | 88% | 9% | 3% |
| Extra-curricular activities (2019) | 87% | 11% | 2% |
| Extra-curricular activities (2023) | 86% | 10% | 4% |
| Leadership roles (2023) | 94% | 4% | 2% |
| Marking (2019) | 62% | 29% | 9% |
| Marking (2023) | 54% | 30% | 16% |
| Planning (2019) | 24% | 41% | 35% |
| Planning (2023) | 24% | 40% | 36% |
| Supervision (2019) | 83% | 11% | 7% |
| Supervision (2023) | 58% | 9% | 33% |
| Team work (2019) | 77% | 19% | 4% |
| Team work (2023) | 70% | 23% | 7% |

*Source: Author's calculations, drawn from Australian Teacher Workforce Data.*

## Accommodating learning needs requires more support staff

The different ways in which students learn (drawing on *experiential learning theory*), and methods used in lesson delivery have a big impact on student ability and overall educational outcome. While many learning style models are recognised and explored by educational researchers (including Gregorc, Kolb, MBTI, Felder/Silverman, and Dunn/Dunn),[17] most

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[17] Anthony F Gregorc, *The Mind Styles Model: Theory, Principles, and Applications* (Gabriel Systems, 1982); Alice Kolb and David Kolb, 'Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: A Review of the Multidisciplinary Application of Experiential Learning Theory in Higher Education' in Ronald Sims and Serbrenia Sims (eds), *Learning Styles and Learning: A Key to Meeting the Accountability Demands in Education* (Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1st ed, 2006) 45; Thomas F Hawk and Amit J Shah, 'Using Learning Style Instruments to Enhance Student Learning' (2007) 5(1) *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education* 1; University of Technology Sydney, 'Teaching and Learning Style Guides for the Modern Educator', *UTS Online* (2022).

commonly cited by government is the VARK model: *Visual*, *Aural*, *Reading*, and *Kinetic*.[18] Recognition of differentiated learning is an essential part of Australia's educational system, 'underpinned by international agreements (e.g., the UN Convention on Children's Rights, 1989), [and] a legal entitlement (Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992)'.[19]

While this layer of variability and the adaptability it necessitates is an essential aspect of modern teaching,[20] the additional layer of learning difficulties children experience presents additional challenges when it comes to educational design.

Among many learning difficulties students face, some require additional support and accommodations that fall outside the resources allocated for recognised learning disabilities, but cannot be ignored in the classroom.

The Commission's report acknowledges that teachers often have limited time to deliver individually tailored learning, despite being expected to design lessons that meet the needs of all students. It recognises the lack of heterogeneity in learning styles and student ability. The report notes, student ability "varies significantly…and some students are being left behind".[21]

The report also refers to two different levels of differentiation, *learning style* and *learning difficulties,* and the need for individualised solutions for students with learning difficulties, and the need for differentiation across diverse learning styles and abilities within a class.

Some examples of common learning difficulties that can be found across classrooms include:

- Sensory impairments;

- Delayed development;

- Social-emotional causes;

- A history of disrupted learning due to ongoing health issues, extended or regular absences, or family issues including relocating;

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[18] Department of Education (NSW), 'Differentiated Learning', *Refining Practice* (2025) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start-great-teachers/refining-practice/differentiating-learning>; Department of Education (QLD), *Every Day Counts: Developing a Positive School Culture* (2025); Department of Education and Training (VIC), *Examples of Learning Styles* (2007) <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/documents/childhood/professionals/support/egsls.pdf>.

[19] Australian Education Research Organisation, *Current Evidence-Based Teaching Practices* (2023) 26.

[20] Moses Alabi, 'The Role of Learning Styles in Effective Teaching and Learning' [2024] (October) *Lakode Akintola University of Technology* 1; University of Technology Sydney (n 6); Australian Education Research Organisation (n 8) 3.

[21] Producitivity Commission, *Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce* (2025) 7.

- Individual and/or family trauma;

- Limited exposure to early language and literacy; or

- A family history of specific learning disabilities (for example, dyslexia).[22]

All necessitate a level of understanding and adaptability from educators. The amount of time and energy that teachers put into understanding and adapting to the myriad needs across each learning community is considerable.

The Commission recommends that lesson planning materials be 'scaffolded' to support struggling students and provide extensions for high-performers, so that resources can address this wide variation within a single class. It also identifies assessment, AI tools and edtech solutions as being part of supports for diverse student needs, such as text-to-speech and voice-to-text tools.

But the needs of these children, and the teachers working with them, go well beyond learning materials and tools. More support staff are needed in classrooms so that children are best placed to actually engage with content.

### The interim report recommendations reshape the role of our teachers

As was found in reviewing the NSW Department of Education QTP, moving parts of teaching that are central to the role, such as lesson planning, towards standardised, centrally produced resources, risks teachers being seen as deliverers of pre-prepared content rather than skilled professionals who design and adapt learning.[23]

This narrows the scope of a teacher's work changes the role of a teacher in a classroom.

Efforts to "reduce workload" cannot reduce the importance of tasks based on efficiency. This is a managerial approach and puts emphasis on streamlining and reducing duplication rather than giving teachers more time or fewer compliance tasks.

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[22] Department of Education and Training (VIC), 'Understanding Learning Difficulties', *Disability and Inclusive Education* (2023) <https://www.vic.gov.au/understanding-learning-difficulties>.

[23] Stacey et al (2024)

Teachers report this minimises and ignores their actual experiences of workload stress. This also risks hollowing out teachers' roles, stripping away enjoyable and creative parts of their work.[24]

## Risks of AI and EdTech must be investigated and mitigated

Recent research has found that the inclusion of digital lesson planning software offered no difference in observable outcomes.[25] But as the interim report noted, digital tools are being used in classrooms and this will continue to grow and evolve.

While it is welcome to see a recommendation for a quality assurance framework to be implemented regarding the use of AI and other 'EdTech' from the Commission, there is no mention of teachers being involved in the decision-making process.

Care must be taken to preserve the professional autonomy and integrity of teachers, and attention paid to the resources required to support the integration and operation of advanced digital technologies.

While it is considered in the interim report, it must be noted that the safety and privacy of students and teachers may be vulnerable. The need for teachers to maintain oversight of technology is important. The voices and input of educators into future policy work for emerging technologies will be critical to its success.

## Genuine administrative solutions must be found

The Commission's recommendations have not included solutions for the multitude of administration tasks and non-teaching time users identified by teachers as occupying their days. The report and its recommendations should capture the testimony of teachers.

The recently conducted *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System* surveyed teachers, asking where government should direct investment in order to improve outcomes.

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[24] Ibid

[25] Christina Wekerle and Ingo Kollar, 'Using Technology to Promote Student Learning? An Analysis of Pre- and in-Service Teachers' Lesson Plans' (2022) 31(5) *Technology, Pedagogy and Education* 597 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2022.2083669>.

When asked to select their top three priorities (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), teachers overwhelmingly supported strategies that 'reduced teacher workload' (74.2 per cent) and offered 'more support to manage students with complex and diverse' (62.3 per cent) as their top priorities. However, strategies which created 'greater availability of evidence-based teaching resources' (13.7 per cent), like the one recommended by the Commission, were considered of little consequence.

A national repository of materials would not alter the day-to-day time and administrative pressures that teachers face. The Commission recommends that such "materials should draw from existing materials where these are assessed as high quality and support evidence-based teaching practices that align with how students learn"[26] and that "the design and delivery of these learning resources should be funded to "effectively implement the evidence-based practices recommended by AERO".[27]

## Other retention strategies deserve consideration

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has published work exploring potential solutions to attract people teaching and help today's teachers stay in the workforce longer. [28]

For example, the burden on teachers could be reduced by expanding the workforce, through direct incentives such as scholarships for priority cohorts of teaching students, the provision of government-owned or subsidised housing, or top-up payments for teachers to relocate and remain in the geographical locations and subject specialisations where they are most needed.

The government could also invest in supports for early career teachers or offer upskilling through advanced degrees. National Cabinet could be used to coordinate responses across jurisdictions, and commit collectively to reduce workloads for educators. Collaborative teaching practices, including shared or 'team' teaching, could also be explored.[29]

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[26] Producitivity Commission (n 5) 21.

[27] Ibid 20.

[28] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 'Building a Sustainable Teaching Workforce' (2022) *Spotlight* <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/building-a-sustainable-teaching-workforce>.

[29] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 'Collaborative Teaching: Sharing Best Practice' (2021) *Collaborate* <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/collaborate/collaborative-teaching-sharing-best-practice>.

# Conclusion

While the Commission's interim report recognises the challenges teachers face, its proposed solutions do not go to the heart of why teachers are leaving.

When challenges in delivering quality education emerge across the country, and across the education system, there must be considerable input from teachers.

A focus on centralised lesson planning materials and digital tools shows a misdiagnosis of problems in the classroom and raises questions about how the Productivity Commission views the role of teachers.

Teachers are not calling for pre-packaged content. Teachers have long called for adequate time and support to give them the space to use their professional expertise to teach.

Evidence from across the sector shows that workloads, administrative burdens, and a lack of support staff are the real drivers of teacher attrition and declining morale. Teachers spend excessive hours on compliance and reporting while sacrificing practice-based lesson planning that lies at the heart of quality education.

Automating or outsourcing class preparation and planning also risks deskilling teachers and devaluing the profession. Good quality classroom teachers must be more than lecturers delivering cookie-cutter plans.

Full and fair funding, as promised by 2034 in the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, is essential now to provide every public school with the resources students need.

Reforms that support teachers are urgently needed to prevent burnt-out teachers from leaving the workforce. Australia risks losing a generation of teachers and undermining its future skills base. With them, we can build a system that values teachers as professionals, meets the diverse needs of students and prepares them for adulthood.

Strengthening teacher conditions, reducing administrative load, and expanding the pool of support and specialised staff will ease pressures on the workforce and lift retention rates.

Responsible adoption of educational technology must complement, not replace, teacher judgment, with governance frameworks that guarantee safety, equity, and professional autonomy

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