

NSW Productivity Commission

# Rewarding Excellence in Teaching

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Submission to the Options Paper

November 2022



## Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in human history.

We pay respect to Elders past and present and commit to respecting the lands we walk on, and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the land, seas and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices, and recognise our responsibility to work together with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes.

Artwork:

*Regeneration* by Josie Rose



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## Executive summary

The NSW Productivity Commission welcomes the NSW Department of Education's *Rewarding Excellence in Teaching* initiative. Providing strong teachers with opportunities to help other teachers improve, and a higher-paying career path that keeps them in the classroom is a key recommendation in the NSW Productivity Commission's 2021 *White Paper*:

### **RECOMMENDATION 2.6: HELP GOOD TEACHERS KEEP TEACHING**

Develop an 'instructional lead' career pathway for highly effective teachers as an alternative to an administrative career progression. Highly effective teachers should be identified using a suite of robust measures, as outlined in Recommendation 2.4.

Evaluate uptake, rollout, and effectiveness of these new pathways against implementation key performance indicators, with one instructional lead teacher in every school within three years.

Leverage instructional lead teachers to spread best practice across the school system through a Centre for Teaching Excellence (see Recommendation 2.5). Incorporate these teachers into a long-term teacher supply strategy (see Recommendation 2.1).

In the Commission's view, the Rewarding Excellence initiative has the potential to fulfil Recommendation 2.6 of the NSW Productivity Commission's 2021 White Paper, depending on how it is designed and implemented. Recommendation 2.6 of the White Paper is interrelated with, and its success dependent upon the simultaneous implementation of other key recommendations, especially Recommendation 2.4, which calls for robust performance measurement and feedback for teachers.

Views expressed in this submission are only of the NSW Productivity Commission. They do not reflect NSW Government views or policy. It is a matter for the NSW Government to align the *Rewarding Excellence* initiative to the Commission's recommendations, in whole or in part. The Commission is providing this submission to elaborate some key considerations and elements the Commission considers important, consistent with the *White Paper*. In doing so, it also addresses some issues raised in the *Rewarding Excellence in Teaching Briefing Paper* and *Options Paper*. The Commission hopes this submission will support the success of the program.

The key principles, outlined below, are that:

1. the primary focus of these roles should be on promoting systemic excellence
2. roles should be targeted to where they are needed most
3. excellent teachers can only be reliably identified with robust measures
4. robust performance measurement would make selection less burdensome
5. selection can combine local knowledge, central oversight, objective measures
6. mobility opportunities can help to both reward and spread excellence
7. spreading excellence requires an institutional architecture
8. integration with HALT accreditation is a medium-term aspiration
9. a piloting approach is desirable, with robust evaluation
10. tenure should be limited, especially in the piloting phase.

The Commission has generally not commented on the operational aspects and technical detail of how these roles would function. The Commission supports these aspects being designed and refined through piloting and evaluation, and consultation and feedback from frontline stakeholders.

## 1. The primary focus of these roles should be on promoting systemic excellence

In the Commission's view the primary focus of the program, and its key outcome, should be **leveraging** excellence within the system to improve the system and provide greater support to the whole body of teachers to excel. The focus should be on promoting excellence for all teachers, rather than singling some teachers out as embodying excellence to the exclusion of the rest. A focus on systemic excellence has the highest potential to improve student outcomes.

A primary focus on promoting systemic excellence would also assist with defining clear responsibilities for *Rewarding Excellence* roles. The Grattan Institute, for example, recommended two tiers of responsibilities: instructional specialists leading teaching in their schools and master teachers who work across schools to spread best-practice.<sup>1</sup> The role descriptions of *Rewarding Excellence* roles should reflect the goal of championing, supporting, and embedding a culture of continuous improvement to achieve system-wide excellence.

The Commission agrees with feedback noted in the *Options Paper*: '[i]f there is additional remuneration for excellence in teaching, this needs to be associated with additional roles and responsibilities. We have consistently heard that teachers should not be paid more for the same role.' As the *White Paper* outlined, the lack of clearly defined additional responsibilities separate from teacher's core responsibilities has undermined the purpose of HALT roles and resulted in them being perceived by some as primarily being an extra pay band.

In this context, *Rewarding Excellence* role titles (discussed at p. 19 of the *Options Paper*) should reflect the additional responsibilities of *Rewarding Excellence* roles to the education system and to body of teachers, rather than attributing the characteristic of 'excellence' to the person who holds the office. This is especially so when systems for robustly identifying excellence are nascent. Robust performance measurement is discussed further below.

A focus on promoting systemic excellence would assist with setting an appropriate number of *Rewarding Excellence* positions. All teachers have the potential to achieve excellence in their roles, so it is not appropriate to try to match the number of roles to the number of excellent teachers in the system. Rather, the number of roles should be proportionate to the system's need for instructional leadership, facilitation of practice-sharing, coaching, and mentoring. The Grattan Institute's proposal recommended 0.5 per cent of teachers being master teachers and 5-8 per cent becoming instructional specialists.

## 2. Roles should be targeted to where they are needed most

The Commission agrees with the proposition in the *Options Paper* that "[b]ecause a key aim of this reform is to strengthen teaching and learning for the benefit of all students, the department could target support provided by these teachers, such as professional learning, to teachers in small schools, rural and remote schools, or schools with specific equity needs." (p. 14).

## 3. Excellent teachers can only be reliably identified with robust measures

In the Commission's view, excellent teachers should be identified through a combination of robust measures that can also be used to provide all teachers with feedback to improve. A suite of measures such were outlined in the 2021 *White Paper*:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://grattan.edu.au/report/attracting-high-achievers-to-teaching/>

## RECOMMENDATION 2.4: IMPROVE TEACHER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

...The Government should require schools to implement robust measures of teacher effectiveness by 2023, including classroom observations, measures of individual teacher 'value-added', and 360-degree feedback from students, school leaders and peers. The Government should:

- train teachers and supervisors to use these new measures of teacher effectiveness to genuinely support continuous improvement
- develop a blueprint for measuring individual teacher value added in NSW schools from 2023, including key milestones and timings...

As noted in the *Options Paper* (p. 10), *Rewarding Excellence* type roles in other jurisdictions are supported by a 'rigorous, universally applied performance assessment framework where all teachers are independently assessed and graded'. For reasons outlined in the NSW Productivity Commission *White Paper* (pp. 70-73), NSW's Performance and Development Framework for teachers does not currently meet this standard and requires reform to enable excellent teachers to be reliably identified.

The Commission considers that participation in classroom observations, 360-degree feedback, and individual teacher value-added assessment (discussed further below), should be universal, and should be preconditions for being eligible to be identified as an excellent teacher. The *Options Paper* (p. 24) mentions these measures as potential sources of evidence, along with other forms including case studies of impact, documentary evidence as per HALT application (e.g., student records or work samples), and referee reports. In the Commission's view, 360-degree feedback, classroom observations, and value-added assessment should be the core measures, and given the most weight when identifying excellent teachers.

Central support from the department could help implement these measures to promote consistency, validity, moderation, quality, and ease of use across NSW schools.

**360-degree feedback** could be supported by the central provision of survey instruments, platforms, data gathering policies, and analytic services. The private sector provider Educator Impact hosts an online tool for schools to provide 360 feedback and professional development programs for teachers, school leaders and support staff.

**Classroom observations** could be supported by centrally supported models and resources. Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) are a key example of a successful model (*White Paper* p. 75). QTRs are being scaled-up through the QT Academy, focusing on integrating QTRs into a broader professional development framework.

**Value-added measurement** could be supported by centrally prepared analytics using the results of standardised tests, which can also be provided centrally. Tennessee's Value-Added Assessment System exemplifies this kind of analytic service (see **Box 1**).

## **BOX 1: HOW OTHER COUNTRIES USE VALUE-ADDED MEASURES**

*A growing number of international educational systems measure the value added by schools and teachers as part of their routine evaluation processes. These include the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and most US states and districts.*

*In Australia, Victoria and the NSW Catholic education system have incorporated value-added measures into their evaluation processes. The value-added information is used by these systems for a range of purposes including school and teacher improvement, school self-evaluation, monitoring policy initiatives, and boosting accountability.*

*The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is a longstanding statistical model for measuring the value that schools and teachers add to student learning growth. It uses a statistical methodology to adjust for demographic background and starting achievement level. It increases reliability by using multi-year averages whenever possible. These considerations enable a fair comparison of school and teacher performance.*

*Tennessee uses the TVAAS to rate the effectiveness of individual teachers, schools, and districts. The TVAAS shows the growth in students' performance by comparing them with their peers with similar previous outcomes, over their schooling life.*

*Tennessee began exploring ways to measure teaching quality in the 1980s and began using TVAAS in 1993. TVAAS reporting began at the district level, shifting to school-level reporting in 1994 and finally to teacher-level reporting in 1996.*

*In 2011, Tennessee elevated TVAAS from an informational tool to a formal evaluation system. While controversial at the time, the 2011 transition coincided with gains on national tests. These earned Tennessee the title of America's fastest-improving state in math and reading in 2013.*

*TVAAS scores are not the only evidence used for evaluation of a teacher's performance in Tennessee. Classroom observations, 360-degree feedback, and notable student achievements are all considered to provide a holistic assessment.*

The Commission considers that individual value-added measurement is a particularly important element for more robust performance measurement for NSW teachers. It provides an objective measure of teacher quality which allows subjective measures to be normalised against. Value-added systems objectively measure teaching quality by comparing the improvement in standardised test scores of their students against the scores of other students across the school system. A statistical model collates this data and isolates the impact of teacher on student learning. Value-added measures have successfully been used in international jurisdictions, particularly the USA.

Value-added measurement is already used in a more limited way in NSW. As noted in the *Options Paper* (p. 12) the 'Best in Class' initiative 'draws on HSC results – filtered to eliminate variables other than the teacher'. The Department of Education also reports annually on value added at the school level, using NAPLAN data.<sup>2</sup>

Measuring individual teacher value added, however, needs substantial supporting infrastructure to be reliable at the level of the individual teacher. The key to providing robust estimates of teacher impact are regular and reliable standardised testing results. NAPLAN and HSC examinations are helpful but insufficient, on their own, to enable a robust individual teacher value-added model. Not all teachers teach Years 3,5,7,9, or 12 meaning, more assessments are required in other year groups to accurately track student – and hence teacher – outcomes.

In the *White Paper* (Recommendation 2.4), the Commission recommended the NSW Government formulate a blueprint for measuring individual teacher value added in NSW schools from 2023, including key milestones, timings. The Commission recognises that implementing a value-added

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<sup>2</sup> <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/scout/scout-overview/apps-and-reports/naplan---doe/value-added>. See also the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's report on school-level measures of value-added: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/cese/publications/research-reports/value-added-measures-to-identify-school-contributions-to-student>.

model will take significant time and will not be ready when *Rewarding Excellence* roles are introduced in 2023. With that in mind, the implementation of a teacher value-added model should be explored for future iterations of the *Rewarding Excellence* project.

Teacher value-added measurement can make another major incidental contribution to promoting excellence: it allows more robust education research. Education researchers can use value-added measurement systems to experimentally test how new teaching techniques and interventions affect student outcomes. Much of the most rigorous and influential global education research comes from jurisdictions that measure value added. Value-added measurement would support world-class educational research in NSW.

#### **4. Robust performance measurement would make selection less burdensome**

The *Options Paper* notes (p. 21) that "any additional work required to become eligible or to apply should be kept as streamlined and low-cost as possible, when balanced against the need to effectively identify the right candidates." The Commission's *White Paper* highlighted that more robust performance measurement reduces the administrative burden of identifying excellence:

*To reduce the administrative burden, we should aim for higher levels of accreditation to automatically apply to the most effective teachers. Effectiveness should be based on robust performance measures. Those measures should be embedded and applied to all teachers across the 81-school system during appraisal and evaluation processes, rather than by a separate bureaucratic process. If that could be done, the uptake of highly proficient and lead teacher qualifications would be higher and more valued by teachers. Implementing a suite of more robust performance measures (Recommendation 2.4) is the first step.*

If robust performance measurement is in place, teachers will incidentally accrue a body of objective evidence to support their progression not only to HALT status, but to *Rewarding Excellence* roles.

#### **5. Selection could combine local knowledge, central oversight, objective measures**

The *Options Paper* raises the question of how *Rewarding Excellence* selection panels should be composed. The Commission supports the principle of balancing the principal's local knowledge of the school's needs and local candidates, with independent central oversight to reduce the possibility of bias and/or favouritism. *Rewarding Excellence* roles will only incentivise excellence if teachers are confident that roles are allocated based on merit.

While the composition of selection panels is important, however, the pool of candidates and quality of evidence available to the panel is also crucial. Data on teacher value added, 360-degree feedback, and classroom observation data would help identify the teachers who are most powerfully driving students' learning growth. *Rewarding Excellence* roles also have a particular focus on supporting fellow teachers and ITE students. 360-degree feedback from colleagues and ITE students would be particularly helpful both in the initial selection and performance evaluation of *Rewarding Excellence* roles.

#### **6. Mobility opportunities can help to both reward and spread excellence**

The *Options Paper* raises the question of whether *Rewarding Excellence* roles should be awarded through internal promotion or open recruitment (p. 10).

The Commission agrees that "any recruitment approach needs to strike the right balance between movement in the system that creates fresh perspectives and a wider range of opportunities for teachers; and movement that could adversely affect student outcomes and staffing in high demand schools" (*Options Paper*, p.20).

Open recruitment can increase chance of retaining excellent teachers in the system by making a wider pool of opportunities available to them.



Open selection can support merit-based appointment by making it more likely that the panel has a strong field of candidates to choose from. It mitigates against the risk of biased decisions or favouritism.

Hybrid options may also be considered, for example, the ability to open up selection if the panel is not able to identify a suitable number of internal candidates in the first instance.

While it has advantages, open comparative selection is not a guarantee of merit-based appointment unless there is robust objective data available on which to base decisions. This is why universal robust performance measurement is needed.

Opportunities for mobility can help with targeting excellent teachers to where they are needed most, across the system. For example, one school may have a limited or no supply of teachers in a specialist field, whereas another school may have several outstanding specialist teachers. Mobility would enable candidates to move to where they can have the greatest impact across the system. Opening up selection can further assist with matching by enabling suitable candidates to make themselves known to the selection panel, rather than limiting selection to candidates already known.

## 7. Spreading excellence requires an institutional architecture

The Commission agrees with the *Options Paper's* (p. 12) proposition that there 'should be a strong central function to support teachers in these roles and to ensure all our public schools and students can achieve maximum benefit from their work'. The Productivity Commission's *White Paper* (pp. 78-79) describes the need for a 'Centre for Teaching Excellence' and its potential functions.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2.5: CREATE A CENTRE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE**

Establish a public-facing Centre for Teaching Excellence within the NSW Department of Education by 2021, to be led by a Commissioner for Teaching Excellence and staffed with high-performing teachers, to:

- Be publicly accountable for leading improved teaching quality across the system.
- Champion, train and support schools and individual teachers with resources to implement best-practice teaching methods, measures of teacher effectiveness, and systems of continuous improvement, including classroom observations (as outlined in Recommendations 2.3–2.4).
- Hold schools accountable for their progress implementing best-practice teaching and administering their reporting requirements (as outlined in Recommendations 2.3–2.4).
- Provide an institutional hub for a new instructional lead teacher pathway (as outlined in Recommendation 2.6)

There are more than 2,200 NSW public schools. Even where schools have systems in place to spread best practice internally, there is currently no system-wide architecture for spreading excellence across schools. Initiatives like the Ambassador schools and Best in Class initiatives are welcome, and provide prototypes we can learn from. The Commission considers that a system-wide coordinating function is needed to facilitate *Rewarding Excellence* teachers to share their expertise and skills across schools and help build the teaching profession up from within.

As regional or remote schools can be more isolated from others, a central function could be particularly useful in supporting these schools to stay connected. Technology can also help here.

Through a Centre for Teaching Excellence (or similar institution), outstanding teachers could be given a role directly improving the system as a whole, translating data, practical experience, and research into actionable resources for other teachers to use. Showcasing and championing examples of teaching excellence across the school system would also raise the status of the NSW teaching profession.

The Commission has proposed that a Centre for Teaching Excellence be public-facing. Such an institution would be clearly accountable for spreading best-practice teaching across the school system. The body could act as a one-stop-shop for teachers to obtain practical support, coaching,

and resources that would drive higher performance, particularly for teachers without access to peers with a particular expertise.

In the Commission's view, a strong central function of the kind described is key to the success of the *Rewarding Excellence* initiative, and the lack of such a function has been a factor that has prevented HALTs from playing a greater systemic role to date.

## **8. Integration with HALT accreditation is a medium-term aspiration**

Ideally, HALT teachers would be identified with minimal administrative burden as a result of a robust and universal teacher performance measurement system. HALT teachers would then form a sufficient pool from which *Rewarding Excellence* roles could be appointed.

However, as the Commission's *White Paper* noted, there is currently low uptake of HALT and there are ongoing efforts to improve the HALT process:

*...few teachers successfully attain[ed] these higher levels — only 102 in New South Wales in 2018. The Audit Office has noted the low uptake was due to lengthy, complex, and onerous accreditation processes.*

*The lack of sufficient reward for highly accomplished and lead teachers also likely discourage[d] uptake. The difference in salary between a highly accomplished teacher and a long-serving proficient teacher is minimal when compared to principals and other school leaders.*

*Stakeholders have also raised the lack of a defined role or additional responsibilities for those with highly accomplished or lead accreditations.*

The Options Paper (p. 11) notes NESAs are looking at streamlined and alternative pathways which could lead to teachers achieving HALT accreditation more quickly.

The challenge for HALT reform, in the Commission's view, is the need for a more robust performance measurement system that could support the evidence-based progression to HALT status with minimal administrative burden.

Given the present circumstances, the Commission agrees that full integration of HALT need to be a medium-term goal.

## **9. A piloting approach is desirable, with robust evaluation**

The Commission supports the proposed Phase 1 opt-in piloting approach (*Options Paper*, p. 4). Pilots could cover a diversity of settings including urban, regional, low- and high-SES, to help identify the challenges in different settings.

The Commission supports a robust evaluation after the introductory 4-year Strategic Improvement Plan pilot for each participating school. The NSW Government would have a juncture to choose to scale the pilot up or wind it up, based on the evaluation's results.

A piloting approach is particularly important given that the program is progressing rapidly, with implementation as early as 2023.

Whether or not a piloting approach is pursued, the program should still be evaluated at reasonable intervals after it is introduced (for example, four years). This would allow the program's impact to be understood, any lessons to be learned, and would provide opportunities to make continuous refinements to ensure the program's longer-term success.

The evaluation should identify the benefits and costs of the roles against the aims of the *Rewarding Excellence* reform. To support this, the program should be implemented with a built-in evaluation plan. The right data needs to be collected to support a robust evaluation.

## **10. Tenure should be limited, especially in the piloting phase**

The Commission supports fixed-term appointments to the proposed *Rewarding Excellence* roles. As the *Options Paper* (p. 18) notes, fixed-term appointments allow the periodic updating of role

descriptions to meet local needs. Fixed-term appointments would not preclude the same teacher being re-appointed to a role but would give others the opportunity to apply too.

The Commission notes that fixed-term appointments:

- Increase the incentive for teachers to strive for excellence by ensuring a larger and more regular stream of opportunities across the school system.
- Give teachers an incentive to continue and build on their excellence to obtain appointment or reappointment, including by keeping up to date with best practice.
- Enable 'second chances' for teachers who join a school shortly after a role has been allocated, or who were on parental or other leave during a recruitment process.
- Build capacity and capabilities by enabling the rotation of eligible teachers in a school and across the school system.

The Commission considers that fixed-term appointments are particularly important to ensure the program can be properly piloted and evaluated. Fixed term appointments during the pilot would provide the NSW Government with a juncture where, following evaluation, the program could either be scaled-up, restructured, or wound-up.

Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 5469  
Sydney NSW 2001

W: [treasury.nsw.gov.au](http://treasury.nsw.gov.au)

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