



schoolpost

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Business Council of Australia

Inside



The Term That Was



**Case Study:
Local Governance in
New Zealand**



**Asia Studies
Key To The Future**

The Evolution Continues...

In term three, we brought you the story of the **Rudd Education Revolution** – specifically, we analysed the manifesto; ‘**Quality Education: The case for an education revolution in our Schools.**’ The document gave the broad brushstrokes of what was needed to lift the standard of education in our country; raising the standard of teaching. Other than not once mentioning class size as being a factor, in any way, there weren’t too many surprises.

There isn’t a lot of detail in the document as to how we are going to achieve the grand vision – there is, however, one reference to another document as a possible source for a model to reward teacher performance; ‘**Teaching Talent: The Best Teachers For Australia’s Classrooms**’ – published by the Business Council of Australia.

Two things are immediately clear:

1. they are remarkably similar in focus and
2. whoever comes up with the titles for these documents gets paid by the word.

Background

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) paper repeatedly iterates that we have several problems in education:

1. Many young children fall behind in their learning in early years, become disengaged and never catch up. As a result, they achieve only minimal results.
2. Australia’s secondary school completion rates are lower than countries we compare ourselves with.
3. There is a serious shortage of young people with the knowledge and skills required for many areas of demand in the Australian workforce.

According to the paper, the OECD estimates that 13 per cent of Australian 15 year olds are performing below the OECD ‘baseline’ and are at risk of not having the basics required for work. This ‘at risk’ level is much higher for some segments of the Australian population:

- 40 per cent of Indigenous students
- 27 per cent of students living in remote locations
- 23 per cent of students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile.

According to the BCA, at the core of these problems, is teacher quality. ‘Research has consistently shown that improving the quality of teaching is the most effective way to

achieve better educational outcomes for individual students. Excellent teaching is the key to increased student engagement and higher levels of achievement, regardless of student background’.

Some key findings on teacher performance:

- Students achieve more with teachers who perform well on tests of literacy ... positive relationships have also been found between teachers’ academic qualifications and student achievement.
- The top 25 performing OECD countries recruited their teachers from the top third of graduates from their respective school systems. Conversely, many poorly performing school systems selected teachers from the bottom third of high school students.
- Top-performing systems also developed specific mechanisms, such as targeted testing, to ensure the quality of those entering teacher education programs: ‘They recognise that a bad selection decision can result in up to 40 years of bad teaching’.
- What matters also is the level of schooling these prospective teachers have had in key subjects that they will expect to teach, such as mathematics and science. A year 12 pass in these subjects is not a requirement for entry into most teacher education courses.

So, how do we raise the standard of teaching?

The BCA lists five basic changes needed:

- Recruiting the most talented, capable and committed people into the teaching profession.
- A new national certification system that recognises excellent teachers and provides the basis for a new career path for the profession.
- A new remuneration structure that rewards excellent teachers and demonstrates that, as a society, Australia values the teaching profession.
- A comprehensive strategy that supports teachers to continue to learn and improve their teaching throughout their careers.
- The introduction of a national assessment and accreditation system for teacher education courses.

A key issue with all five reforms is that the Business Council of Australia believes they should be conducted (at least in part) on a national level, rather than individually through state education departments.

The Business Council of Australia paper states that in Australia, education is still highly bureaucratised and posits whether, 'it is time to question whether bureaucratic management of schools by state education departments is sufficient to deliver the kinds of leadership that influences teachers' practices significantly or improves student learning outcomes'.

While the idea of simply abolishing state education departments may seem drastic at first, it is not without precedent. As you can read in our special report on the New Zealand education system on page 17, schools can actually thrive when unburdened by government bureaucracy. In New Zealand, with true local governance and management, they do not have a 'service delivery' education department.

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The BCA draws a direct link between effective leadership and governance and the ability of schools to address these problems. While the paper states that the BCA is still to carry out 'specific work on governance structures' – their attitude toward the problem seems clear:

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There seems little doubt as to the BCA's attitude toward the effectiveness, need and cost of the state education departments. This is hardly a new idea in Australia. The three-tiered government system in a country with our comparatively small population has been questioned for years – and it is generally the need for the state level that is most derided; except, of course, by the state governments.

A similar argument is legitimate for state education departments; we have a little over 3 million students in Australia spread amongst seven or eight state and territory based education departments. Each department essentially performs the same roles, while employing tens of thousands of people at a cost that must run into the billions of dollars category.

As you can see in the 'Where does the money go' article on page 6, almost 20 per cent of SA's education budget goes to fund DECS Administration and services. Replicate this around the country and the numbers become staggering. Add to this, the commonwealth education departments and there is a huge workforce, consuming massive resources ... which essentially all repeat the same tasks.

Instead, they have a small Ministry of Education, which handles curriculum and assessment etc. – the same things that the Rudd Government is clearly looking to federalise into a nationally consistent system.

Local governance and management or 'Self Governing Schools' are a 'Global Phenomenon', according to education experts, and account for dozens of countries, which have made dramatic improvements to the quality of their education in the last decade; the same decade in which Australian education has stagnated and declined. A true local management and governance system, which enables principals and the local school community to tailor their school to meet the needs of their students, under a nationally consistent umbrella of curriculum and reporting, benefitting from potentially billions of dollars re-directed into schools, could bring about a dramatic improvement in education in our country.

Some key points explored in the paper are:

Entry To The Profession

In Australia, we have 'weak' mechanisms to ensure quality entrants. In some tertiary institutions, entry scores are set so low that they would be equivalent to a failure in other states; as low as 56. We need to set high standards for teacher training:

- Entry scores should not be below the 75th percentile
- All primary teachers must have studied English, mathematics and science to year 12. >

Professional Preparation

The BCA believes that the key quality assurance mechanism is accreditation by an external professional body. It cites a recent ACER study as revealing that there is currently 'considerable variation' in courses around Australia. Of the almost 200 courses available, apparently little is known as to their effectiveness. Again, the BCA proposes a nationally consistent set of standards for teacher training.

It suggests linking graduate entry standards to the process of teacher registration – a system the BCA is particularly critical of:

'State teacher registration bodies responsible for the quality of entrants to the profession have little power to implement rigorous, independent procedures for accrediting teacher education courses. Teacher registration is a key quality assurance mechanism, but it is merely a rubber stamp operation in most states and territories.'

Ongoing Professional Learning

The BCA paper cites continual professional learning as being vital for the teaching profession. They propose a 'profession-wide' system, linked to salary.

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National Certification

Central to the BCA strategy to reform teacher performance is a national certification system for teachers.

The BCA boldly states, 'the time has come for the teaching profession to take up the challenge of developing a system for defining high-quality teaching standards, promoting development toward those standards and identifying those who can reach them – a national certification system.'

The BCA also believes that the certification agency must be independent of all stakeholders and teacher unions. This certification would be voluntary and linked to salary increments for teachers – a cost they estimate will amount to an extra \$4 billion.

The BCA is blunt that pay scales must be based on 'evidence of high performance standards'. It proposes four broad teacher levels:

- Graduate Teacher – the standard on entry having completed a nationally accredited teacher training program and resulting in being 'provisionally registered'.
- Registered Teacher – meeting performance standards within three years of entering profession. 1.25 times salary of a Graduate Teacher
- Accomplished Teacher – The standard and knowledge one would expect of a teacher with 10 years experience. 2 times salary of a Graduate Teacher.
- Leading Teacher – Based on a track record of leading and managing colleagues to improve student learning and welfare. 2.5 times salary of a Graduate Teacher and be a prerequisite for school leadership positions.

The BCA believes that neither state departments, nor registration bodies are appropriate to manage a teacher certification system. They instead propose that one national body is developed to provide one function; 'to provide a rigorous, voluntary certification system for all teachers who wish to demonstrate that they have attained advanced levels of professional performance. This agency should see its main role as providing a credible certification service to all employers and the public, not only the profession. The

agency should live and die depending on the validity and credibility of its assessment processes'.

Such a system is similar to Certified Practising Accountants, Chartered Engineers or Fellows as in the case of doctors. The standards encapsulated in such a system would also aid in changing public perception of teaching.

Like the Rudd Education Revolution Manifesto, the Business Council of Australia reports an education system in decline; one which fails those who need the most from it. The remedy is singular; better teachers. The plan is to recruit better talent, set higher standards, continually enhance teacher knowledge and pay according to demonstrated ability, rather than time served.

A difference, however, is that where the Rudd Government has hinted, the Business Council is clear; the reform of Australian education must be a nation-wide, federal strategy ... and bluntly asks the question of whether state education departments can deliver the results we need in the 21st century.... ■