

Australian National Summit on Teaching Out-of-field: Synthesis and Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research

Actions and Recommendations

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THEME 1 – Data needed to inform policy

Action 1.1 Defining out-of-field Teaching	Action 1.2. Longitudinal data through strategic partnerships	Action 1.3. Systematic workforce data
<p>Currently, relevant policy and action at state and national levels are complicated by the lack of definitions of out-of-field teaching that acknowledge the complexity of the issues. A definition of out-of-field teaching needs to be aligned with current policies relating to teacher specialisation guidelines, either for entry to teacher education or for accreditation/ registration when entering the profession. The definition should recognise pathways available for teachers to re-specialise and become in-field. States and territories need to use definitions of out-of-field teaching that recognise this complexity when generating data relating to incidence and effects of out-of-field teaching and when determining the requirements for re-specialisation. A definition across all states and territories is needed and should be agreed upon by all jurisdictions (states, territories, school sectors) and key stakeholders (universities, accreditation and registration bodies, curriculum authorities, AITSL, subject/teacher/principal associations, teacher unions and PL providers) that can be translated across different contexts.</p>	<p>Longitudinal data generates an awareness of the factors that influence teacher enactment of curriculum in the context of teaching out-of-field, its impact on the quality of teaching and student learning, and the effects of incidence and concentration of teaching out-of-field for individual teachers, their colleagues and their school communities generally. This data should be generated, shared, and utilised by policy makers and government departments of education in association with researchers and other stakeholders to inform policies and practices that meet the needs of schools and teachers. For example, funding for professional learning aligned with the needs of teachers and efforts of schools to manage the out-of-field phenomenon. Empirical data and evidence will support partnerships toward social democratic school reform strategies, educational leaders' accountability, open forum discussions and the awareness of needs within specific subject and school contexts.</p>	<p>Informed policy decisions relating to out-of-field teaching over the short and longer-term requires comprehensive information about the teacher workforce. There is a lack of systematic and system-wide data collection that monitors the profile of teachers in the system, such as teacher specialisations and career trajectories. Also, data relating to broader structural issues, for example, casualisation, short contracts and part-time positions can be used to review existing policies at the system and local levels to ensure a close alignment between policy settings, workforce needs and the out-of-field phenomenon. Evidence-informed policy discussions at the system level will benefit from engaging with school and learning settings from various sectors, regions and contexts and from researchers actively engaged in the realities of the out-of-field phenomenon. Systematic workforce data that is made available for analysis by researchers and for public distribution ensures accountability and collaborative decision making in managing ongoing workforce needs.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 1.1.1</p> <p>Develop a national definition of out-of-field teaching that can be adapted to state specialisation requirements, and which facilitates teacher engagement with professional learning.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 1.2.1</p> <p>Education departments, researchers and other stakeholders develop and implement a program of research that generates deep dive data on school and school system management, teachers' lived experiences, the students' learning experiences, and ongoing factors and effects relating to out-of-field teaching.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 1.3.1</p> <p>Departments of education and accreditation/registration authorities generate systematic and system-wide data that monitors the profile of teachers in the system.</p>
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 1.2.2</p> <p>Use longitudinal data to inform policies that target support and guidance for schools and teachers assigned to out-of-field teaching positions.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 1.3.2</p> <p>Policymakers engage with existing data, evidence and research and enter into in-depth discussions with researchers and other stakeholders to develop fit-for-purpose policies.</p>

THEME 2 — School management & leadership

Action 2.1: School leader awareness	Action 2.2: Building relationships	Action 2.3: System-level support for school leaders	Action 2.4: Developing middle leaders	Action 2.5: Teacher support in schools
When school leaders are connected to teachers' needs and aware of 'incidences' of out-of-field teaching, they are more likely to successfully manage risks to students, staff and the school community. Incidence can refer to the number of teachers, the proportion of classes, and the proportion of teachers' loads taught out-of-field.	Building relationships between school leadership and staff is important for ensuring teachers can express their needs and career aspirations. Discipline leaders are not always given the roles and status needed to properly manage the teaching and learning conditions for their subjects. Therefore, discipline leaders need to be supported and enabled to be aware of who is teaching out-of-field in their discipline and provide opportunities for mentoring, team planning, and other activities that develop collegial relationships that will invite participation and contribution to disciplinary conversations and innovation.	School leaders need system-level support, especially in schools with high staff turnover rates to effectively manage the out-of-field teaching phenomenon. Such support might be made available from principal associations, professional teachers associations, state departments of education, and providers of professional learning or further study (such as Graduate Certificates of Educational Leadership and research through higher degrees).	Middle leaders' (discipline leaders) proficiencies play an important role in mentoring and supporting the professional learning of out-of-field teachers, although this can be time-consuming in some situations. Middle leaders need to be upskilled to effectively implement a range of support mechanisms known to be effective, including, for example: co-planning/co-teaching/co-reflection; providing demonstration lessons and observing expert teachers; and collaborative planning.	Teachers of all levels of experience are asked to teach out-of-field. Early career teachers and often those in regional and rural settings face the greatest risk when required to teach out-of-field. We need to challenge the idea that a good teacher can teach anything and recognise that even experienced teachers can experience a re-novicing, especially when their expertise is misunderstood and support is based on assumed capability. Teacher well-being and role fulfilment are part of risk management and career planning when determining teacher load, support needs, and leadership opportunities.
RECOMMENDATION 2.1.1	RECOMMENDATION 2.2.1	RECOMMENDATION 2.3.1	RECOMMENDATION 2.4.1	RECOMMENDATION 2.5.1
School leaders need to include incidences of out-of-field teaching in their school improvement planning and reporting documents to plan for school improvement, manage the incidences of out-of-field teaching in their schools, and to plan to support their out-of-field teachers' through mentoring and professional learning.	School leaders need to get to know their out-of-field teachers, including their professional development needs, career planning and well-being, and to acknowledge and celebrate the skills and connections that out-of-field teachers bring to their teaching.	Education systems need to provide programs to attract, support and retain teachers, especially for teachers assigned to out-of-field teaching positions or in schools with high teacher turnover.	Education systems need to provide targeted professional learning on effective school-based mentoring and professional learning for discipline leaders and other middle leaders responsible for supporting out-of-field teachers.	Graduate and early career teachers should not be required to teach out-of-field. If they are, then additional time for preparation and subject-specific mentoring or other similar support should be provided.
RECOMMENDATION 2.1.2	RECOMMENDATION 2.2.2	RECOMMENDATION 2.3.2	RECOMMENDATION 2.4.2	RECOMMENDATION 2.5.2
School leaders need to recognise and consider the implications of allocating staff to teach out-of-field so that these allocations are in the best interests of students and the out-of-field teacher.	Out-of-field teachers need to be well supported by in-field teachers, including middle leaders, to develop their experience, confidence, and expertise in an ongoing basis through collaborative planning, mentoring, co-reflection and other such approaches.	Education systems need to ensure scaffolded, evidence-informed support for school leaders by experts in the field of out-of-field teaching, including examples of best practice for supporting and fostering the learning of out-of-field teachers.	Systems need to provide additional funding to schools with high incidences of out-of-field teaching to provide a time allocation for discipline leaders to mentor out-of-field teachers.	Risk assessment and a needs analysis should be conducted for all teachers when teaching out-of-field, which allows for a career trajectory of teacher learning.
RECOMMENDATION 2.1.3	RECOMMENDATION 2.2.3			RECOMMENDATION 2.5.3
Education systems need to provide additional funding to schools to provide out-of-field teachers with more time for teaching preparation and professional learning, specifically out-of-field subjects.	Education systems need to provide targeted professional development for school leaders and discipline leaders about caring for, and supporting, out-of-field teachers and managing the risks to the school community.			Additional support may be required for rural and regional teachers who experience greater professional isolation and to provide access to mentors, professional learning and other activities that support their development and professional connection.

THEME 3 — Initial teacher education

Action 3.1 Research about pre-service teachers and early career teachers lived experiences of out-of-field	Action 3.2 Exposure to the out-of-field phenomenon during initial teacher education	Action 3.3 Formalised support structures for networking and resource creation	Action 3.4 Achieving ‘Proficient’ status of early career teachers
<p>Further research is needed to capture the lived experiences of pre-service and early-career teachers who are teaching out-of-field. This research focus should address subject and stage of schooling, context, justification, and strategies for managing and responding to the risks associated with the out-of-field teaching phenomenon. A depth and breadth of understanding about pre-service teacher experience of out-of-field teaching during placement and as they transition into the profession in casual, temporary, or permanent roles will enable an improved framing of initial teacher education programs to occur. Research should also attend to the experience of early-career teachers. Universities and initial teacher education providers have an obligation to prepare pre-service teachers for the profession, which includes the realities of teaching out-of-field.</p>	<p>Early career teachers are likely to be asked or required to teach out-of-field. Initial teacher education providers need to ensure they provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop awareness about teaching out-of-field and offer formalised support to assist pre-service teachers in developing strategies for managing, responding, and adapting to this situation. Pre-service teachers can learn from the lived experience of those who are teaching out-of-field. Such learning can occur through placement, mentoring programs and ongoing interactions with teachers and school communities.</p>	<p>Explicitly working across boundaries of initial teacher education, schools, and professional associations is important for building teacher capacity in high-risk educational settings, including regional and remote communities. A formalised cross-boundary mentoring structure that focuses on developing networks and resources will help build resilience and actively support pre-service teachers and early career teachers who are teaching out-of-field, especially when targeted to particular subjects in a secondary education context. Such mentoring programs may also include the introduction of Teaching Fellows who can coach the early career teachers within a school context and provide advice to the relevant university about the realities of preparing pre-service teachers for teaching out-of-field.</p>	<p>Graduate teachers are expected to gain ‘Proficient’ status within their first three to five years of employment regardless of their in-field or out-of-field teaching load. However, early career teachers are more likely to be asked and required to teach out-of-field. Early career teachers should be able to master their craft and demonstrate their capacity within their specialist teaching domain as a priority. The implications for teacher practice associated with teaching out-of-field adds difficulty to an already challenging and complex accreditation process, and likely increase teacher loss from the sector in the early career stages. Allowing graduate teachers to gain Proficient teacher status within their specialist area provides the fairest and most effective opportunity for them to show how they are meeting the standards and offers them a stronger base from which to consider teaching out-of-field and remain in the profession.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.1.1.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.2.1.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.3.1</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.4.1</p>
<p>Generate data about the transition from professional experience in initial teacher education to the early-career years of teaching, and the incidence and impact of out-of-field teaching on early-career teachers and their students.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities during professional experience for pre-service teachers to shadow teachers who are teaching out-of-field or experience teaching out-of-field subjects they are likely to teach.</p>	<p>Form alliances between schools, professional associations and universities to develop an integrated and coordinated program of support and mentoring for teachers as they transition into teaching.</p>	<p>Remove the expectation that early career teachers teach out-of-field, or that it is at least a minimal part of a teaching load, whilst an early-career teacher is transitioning into the profession and completing accreditation/registration requirements.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.1.2.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.2.2.</p>		<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.4.1</p>
<p>Generate data about strategies that can be integrated into initial teacher education programs that build teacher awareness about teaching out-of-field and explore the role of teacher identity and capabilities for managing the experience of teaching out-of-field.</p>	<p>Embed opportunities within initial teacher education program coursework units for pre-service teachers to become aware of the realities of teaching out-of-field and to develop strategies for adapting to this situation.</p>		<p>Make accreditation or registration as ‘proficient’ status for early career teachers conditional upon meeting professional standards from a largely in-field teaching load (no less than 80% in-field).</p>
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 3.2.3.</p>		
	<p>Adopt explicit theory-practice reflection models within initial teacher education programs to be conducted prior to, during and after professional experience to capture transformational understanding and growth about the realities of teaching, which includes teaching out-of-field.</p>		

THEME 4 — Teacher registration/accreditation

Action 4.1 Teacher registration and pathways	Action 4.2 Research effects of accreditation and registration	Action 4.3 Legislative function of relevant bodies	Action 4.4 Systemic data collection and teacher registration and registration processes
<p>There is a need for a cultural and systemic change in how qualifications are regarded as determining the suitability of teachers to teach a subject or year level. A system that recognises teacher qualifications and provides pathways and mechanisms for recognising effort to upgrade and improve can act as an incentive to formalise teacher development, that is, seek formal professional learning or upgrade when funded opportunities are available. Such recognition will require a cultural shift that balances maintaining the flexibility of teaching as it currently stands and having mechanisms that formalise teacher expertise. Such a system would enable better targeting of funding and initiatives.</p>	<p>Research is needed to inform policies relating to teacher accreditation/registration for graduate and in-service teachers (including recognition and documentation), and their relationship to the pattern of uptake in professional learning programs and additional qualifications. This is important to ensure that reform initiatives, such as funded professional learning or university courses, respond to teacher demand and willingness to upskill.</p>	<p>Review and expand the legislative function of relevant bodies to include actions that lead to a greater understanding of the extent of out-of-field teaching, and provide recognised and accredited teacher education/endorsed pathways for teachers to expand their specialisations, for example through university programs (e.g., Graduate certificates and Masters), professional learning programs that articulate into credits for prior learning in university programs, micro-credentialling etc.</p>	<p>Policies and initiatives should be informed by teacher workforce data that reflects the current profile of qualified teachers and their specifications. To do this, there need to be systemic processes in documenting specialisation of teachers entering the system, as well as re-specialisation of in-service teachers.</p>
RECOMMENDATION 4.1.1	RECOMMENDATION 4.2.1	RECOMMENDATION 4.3.1	RECOMMENDATION 4.4.1
<p>Develop and promote pathways, and associated guidelines, for in-service teachers to become 'qualified' in out-of-field subjects through both formal qualifications and concentration of professional development.</p>	<p>Conduct research into the effects of different approaches to teacher accreditation/registration and professional development accreditation in terms of teachers choosing to undertake additional study or intensive professional learning in new out-of-field subjects.</p>	<p>Expand the legislative function of teacher registration/accreditation bodies to endorse continuing education programs, including micro-credentials, professional learning programmes, and university programs.</p>	<p>States and Territories record and generate databases of teacher subject specialisations during the registration and accreditation processes.</p>
RECOMMENDATION 4.1.2			RECOMMENDATION 4.4.2
<p>State teacher registration or curriculum authorities develop a culture and process for endorsing postgraduate courses for upgrading teacher qualifications in teaching specialisations.</p>			<p>Ensure re-registration processes include evidence of additional specialist qualifications to update teacher specialisation details.</p>

THEME 5 — Teacher professional learning

Action 5.1 Researching the professional learning needs of out-of-field teachers	Action 5.2 National Priority for mentoring and support	Action 5.3 Jurisdiction support for a coordinated approach	Action 5.4 School focused support for teacher professional learning	Action 5.5 The Role of professional associations	Action 5.6 Range of professional learning opportunities
<p>While it is tempting to introduce initiatives designed to build the expertise of teachers teaching out-of-field, there is a danger that such initiatives will not attract teachers due to a lack of incentives, cost and pressure on schools to maximise the use of the teachers they have. Teachers also tend to prefer undertaking professional learning in subjects where they are specialists and motivated, especially when budgets are limited, and choices must be made. In these cases, out-of-field professional learning becomes a lower priority. It is important to determine teacher motivations, challenges and cultural attitudes towards professional learning and further studies that 'upskill' teachers to no be longer 'out-of-field'. Uptake is potentially linked to state-based policy settings relating to how qualifications and teacher professional learning is recognised and accredited as these set the expectation around alignment between teacher qualifications and allocation in schools.</p>	<p>Mentoring that is subject-specific and provided based on the changing professional learning needs of teachers over time is most effective for out-of-field teachers. Raising the bar for well trained and subject-specific mentors of out-of-field places additional demands on mentors, and therefore requires appropriate time release and can therefore be costly for schools. For mentoring to be effective and cost-effective, research-informed models are needed that deal specifically with the needs of out-of-field teachers. Other professions that utilise supervisor/mentor training (e.g., medicine and nursing) and school-based teacher professional learning models based on communities of practice can be investigated to inform out-of-field teacher mentoring models.</p>	<p>A co-ordinated approach to professional learning of teachers is needed for quality assurance, collation and distribution of accredited PL opportunities and resources suitable for in-field and out-of-field teachers, and promotion of a series of interconnected communities of practice through the dissemination of research (e.g., journal publication) relating to professional learning.</p>	<p>School-based proactive approaches to attending to out-of-field teaching can include school-based professional learning opportunities for teachers, for example, mentoring, professional learning communities, whole-of-school professional development days, and more informal collegial sharing of resources. Education systems should provision schools with the resources to enable teachers teaching out-of-field to have a reduced teaching load with extra weekly periods in the timetable for planning, mentoring (especially for graduate or regional/rural teachers), and a higher budget for professional learning for out-of-field teachers.</p>	<p>Professional associations need to be adequately and sustainably funded to support not only in-field teachers but also those who are teaching out-of-field, as part of their core business. Diverse sources of funding need to be identified to ensure this can take place, including self-funding through professional learning programs run by associations, but also government funding, given the extent of the out-of-field phenomenon and the importance of funding professional associations to support out-of-field teachers. This work also needs to be unified and coordinated, for example through subject association representation on a body dedicated to out-of-field teaching, or an organisation like the Council of Professional Teaching Associations of Victoria (CPTAV).</p>	<p>Middle leaders' (discipline leaders) proficiencies play an important role in mentoring and supporting the professional learning of out-of-field teachers, although this can be time-consuming in some situations. Middle leaders need to be upskilled to effectively implement a range of support mechanisms known to be effective, including, for example: co-planning/co-teaching/co-reflection; providing demonstration lessons and observing expert teachers; and collaborative planning.</p>
RECOMMENDATION 5.1.1	RECOMMENDATION 5.2.1	RECOMMENDATION 5.3.1	RECOMMENDATION 5.4.1	RECOMMENDATION 5.5.1	RECOMMENDATION 5.6.1
<p>Generate data from out-of-field teachers (and their students) about their professional learning needs.</p>	<p>Professional associations and universities research and develop models for exemplary out-of-field professional learning, mentoring and support, including ongoing relationships between universities and alumni teachers in schools.</p>	<p>Establish a national body to support professional learning for all teachers, with the remit to also support out-of-field teachers. For example, the National Association for Teacher Education and Professional Learning (NATEPL).</p>	<p>Mandate school leaders to provide out-of-field teachers with professional learning calibrated to the needs of the teacher so that they can effectively teach the out-of-field subject, especially if they are likely to be teaching the subject long-term.</p>	<p>State and/or national associations liaise and run a joint conference to share how they are addressing out-of-field teaching and what might be done in the future to better address it.</p>	<p>Short courses and other learning opportunities (such as micro-credentialling and short professional learning programs) should be offered by curriculum authorities, professional associations, universities, and other professional learning providers specifically tailored to the needs of out-of-field teachers.</p>
RECOMMENDATION 5.1.2	RECOMMENDATION 5.2.2	RECOMMENDATION 5.3.2	RECOMMENDATION 5.4.2	RECOMMENDATION 5.5.2	RECOMMENDATION 5.6.2
<p>School leaders need to recognise and consider the implications of allocating staff to teach out-of-field so that these allocations are in the best interests of students and the out-of-field teacher.</p>	<p>Out-of-field teachers need to be well supported by in-field teachers, including middle leaders, to develop their experience, confidence, and expertise in an ongoing basis through collaborative planning, mentoring, co-reflection and other such approaches.</p>	<p>Education systems need to ensure scaffolded, evidence-informed support for school leaders by experts in the field of out-of-field teaching, including examples of best practice for supporting and fostering the learning of out-of-field teachers.</p>	<p>Systems need to provide additional funding to schools with high incidences of out-of-field teaching to provide a time allocation for discipline leaders to mentor out-of-field teachers.</p>	<p>Risk assessment and a needs analysis should be conducted for all teachers when teaching out-of-field, which allows for a career trajectory of teacher learning.</p>	<p>Systems need to provide additional funding to schools with high incidences of out-of-field teaching to provide a time allocation for discipline leaders to mentor out-of-field teachers.</p>
			RECOMMENDATION 5.4.3	RECOMMENDATION 5.5.3	
			<p>School leaders prioritise subject-specific professional learning opportunities targeted at the individual teacher needs in addition to whole of school generic professional learning.</p>	<p>Professional associations should consider working in partnership with each other, government, authorities, and universities to maximise impact at state and national levels.</p>	