

Commentary on the NSW Department of Education Draft Strategic Plan

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The NSW Department of Education draft plan provides a welcome and much-needed strategic roadmap for rebuilding an outstanding and equitable public education system.

We believe the commitment and priorities of the plan are precisely what is needed to meet the current challenges and future needs of schooling in NSW. The following commentary is provided as part of the public consultation on the draft plan. Rather than comment directly on the plan itself, we provide recommendations on how the Department's Quality Teaching (QT) Model and the associated research conducted by the University of Newcastle's Teachers and Teaching Research Centre (TTRC) can inform and support successful delivery of the Department's intended outcomes.

Overview

The QT Model has been the Department's framework for high quality pedagogy since it was developed and launched in 2003. It clearly articulates teaching that makes a difference for students. It comprehensively attends to matters of curriculum, student engagement, and equity through classroom and assessment practice.

The Model centres on three key dimensions of good teaching practice:

- **Intellectual Quality:** Developing deep understanding of important knowledge
- **Quality Learning Environment:** Ensuring positive classrooms that boost student learning
- **Significance:** Connecting learning to students' lives and the wider world

Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) is a research-backed approach to professional development that supports teachers to use and embed the QT Model in their classroom practice.

Research shows participation in QTR improves student literacy and numeracy achievement, teaching quality, teacher morale and efficacy. QTR builds trust and collegiality among teachers and enhances school culture. By treating teaching as intellectual work and honouring its complexity, QTR provides genuine support for teachers and raises the status of the profession.

Together, these effects of QTR restore trust and pride in the profession, improve wellbeing of teachers, build capacity for quality teaching and deliver classroom and learning experiences where all students from all backgrounds learn, grow, belong and achieve their potential.

Deliver equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences

Randomised controlled trial evidence demonstrates that participation in QTR improves student achievement growth in literacy and numeracy by an additional two-to-three months compared to a control group, in just one school year. In a 2019 trial, where data were analysed by school ICSEA, these effects were stronger in more disadvantaged schools, signalling the potential for QTR to be a key mechanism in narrowing equity gaps. This finding is critical in the context of the recently released 2023 NAPLAN data which highlights the urgent need to support students from key equity cohorts to meet and exceed minimum proficiency standards. Importantly, wide-scale implementation of QTR could lift results for all students, including those in the upper NAPLAN bands.

QTR involves just four days of in-school teacher-led professional development and is applicable across grades and subject areas and for teachers in small, rural, and remote schools and teachers at all stages of their careers. It has also been used in diverse settings such as distance education, hospital schools, Schools for Specific Purposes, and environmental education centres with positive results for students and teachers. A study involving 32 casual teachers from 8 NSW public schools participating in QTR also demonstrated how this approach can support this often neglected, but integral, part of the teaching workforce.

Grounding teaching practice and curriculum materials in the QT Model and providing time and opportunity for teachers to participate in QTR can help the government to achieve its objectives in delivering more equitable outcomes for both teachers and students.

Give children the best start in learning

The QT Model is applicable to all forms of pedagogy. It has been used by teachers from across the schooling age range, including in K-2 settings, to enhance learning experiences. While currently untested in other early childhood settings, the implementation of this plan offers an exciting opportunity to explore how grounding early childhood teaching in the QT Model might support transitions into primary school.

Deliver outstanding teaching and learning

Research conducted over the past two decades in partnership with the Department shows that the QT Model, when embedded in practice through QTR, results in higher quality teaching and improved student learning. QTR is already included in policy documents such as “What works best” and CESE’s “Guide to evidence-based models of collaborative inquiry” as high impact professional learning that supports teachers to deliver outstanding teaching and learning experiences.

The following actions would support the Department to achieve widescale improvement in the delivery of effective pedagogy and student achievement:

- Provide opportunities for teachers to work with the QT Model and participate in QTR to enhance teaching and learning. The QTR process is a proven mechanism for teachers to collect qualitative and quantitative data to inform and refine their teaching practice, individually and collectively.
- Support teachers to use the QT Model in the development of curriculum resources and to enhance their program design.
- Support teachers to engage with the QT Model to enhance the development and delivery of both formative and summative assessment tasks. The QT Assessment Practice Guide elaborates elements of the QT Model that are applicable to high quality assessment practice.

Schools typically begin engagement with QTR through the high-quality professional development provided by the University's nonprofit social enterprise, the QT Academy. Recognising that in a resource-constrained environment there may be limited capacity to attend professional development, we have outlined a range of strategies for working with the QT Model outside the QTR professional development approach, as documented in [this guide](#). Department teachers can also access all QT Academy resources, including the Classroom and Assessment Practice Guides, video explainers and regular webinars, at no cost as part of our longstanding partnership. The Academy also offers free school evaluation tools for schools and teachers, irrespective of whether they are participating in QTR.

Improve student wellbeing and development

Qualitative evidence suggests that embedding the QT Model in classroom practice through QTR leads to highly engaged classrooms brimming with positive learning experiences. The dimensions and elements of the QT Model attend to all aspects of teaching and learning, creating classrooms where students and teachers work productively. Such pedagogy sets high expectations and develops positive relationships among teachers and students.

Embedding the QT Model in classroom practice widely across NSW will ensure safe and productive classrooms that are focused on learning and will provide consistency in the transition between primary and high school.

Provide meaningful post-school pathways

The Aspirations Longitudinal Study (2012–2018) was the largest study of its kind investigating the educational and occupational aspirations of Australian school students. The study generated more than 12,000 survey responses and 700 interviews with NSW school students in Years 3–12, as well as surveys and interviews with their teachers, parents, carers, and career advisers. Since 2018, several related studies have followed up to investigate the impact of recent national events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and mental health pandemic, on students' aspirations for teaching and other careers.

Major insights from this work include:

- The vast majority of students of all ages and from all backgrounds aspire to higher education and to careers that require university qualifications. However, students from equity groups remain significantly less likely to enrol in university than their more advantaged peers.
- Teaching is the second most popular career aspiration among students in Years 3–12, and NAPLAN results are not a significant predictor of interest in teaching. A higher proportion of girls than boys and a higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students are interested in teaching careers during their school years.

Based on this research, and funded by the Australian Department of Education, the TTRC developed a free 10-hour accredited online professional development course. *Supporting Student Aspirations* offers an inexpensive, research-based understanding of how and when students begin imagining their futures and the impact of interactions with teachers, career advisers, and the wider community. The course provides strategies for teachers, career advisers, and school leaders to nurture meaningful post-school aspirations in their students.

Almost all teachers (93.9%) involved in an evaluation of the course reported that the content was useful in understanding students' aspirations, and most participants (87.8%) told us they gained strategies to apply in their own school to nurture and support student aspirations.

A similar free online course was developed with a focus on how community members outside of schools can help nurture the aspirations of young people.

Both courses would support the Department in developing better career advice and promoting post-school pathways. The courses can be accessed for free through the [University of Newcastle](https://www.newcastle.edu.au).

Rebuild trust and pride in the teaching profession

QTR is designed to empower teachers to empower each other. It is almost universally loved by teachers who participate, because it honours the complexity of teaching and privileges teachers' time and their intellectual capacity for analysing and refining their core business: teaching.

Numerous research studies show that QTR builds trust among teachers, enhances collaborative practice, and creates a strong school culture focused on teaching and learning that delivers multiple benefits in broad educational contexts. In particular, evidence shows that participation in QTR:

- Improves student literacy and numeracy achievement
- Improves the quality of teaching
- Improves teacher morale and efficacy
- Enhances school culture
- Builds collaborative practice
- Builds strong professional relationships
- Builds beginning teacher confidence
- Reinvigorates experienced teachers
- Supports middle leaders in providing instructional leadership
- Support leaders in driving school improvement

- Produces powerful insights that stay with teachers even if they move to new schools
- Is sustainable and scalable with minimal external input
- Returns between \$40 and \$150 in gross state product for every dollar invested in program costs (Deloitte cost benefit analysis).

We recommend the NSW Department of Education develops a comprehensive strategy for teacher and school leader career development that covers the entire teaching career lifecycle from ITE to leadership. Such a strategy could underpin the Department's strategic plan and would support its urgent agenda to:

- Raise the status of the profession;
- Strengthen initial teacher education;
- Improve retention in the teaching workforce;
- Support teacher and student wellbeing; and
- Lift student achievement and deliver equitable outcomes.

If combined with wide-scale and consistent implementation of QTR, the strategy would impact teachers across the entire career lifecycle in the following ways:

Career phase*	Strategy for teacher and school leader development	Consistent implementation of QTR
Attract	Develop a consistent approach to teacher recruitment	Presents teaching as intellectually challenging and rewarding work
Prepare	Strengthen mechanisms for ensuring ITE program quality	Strengthens ITE program quality and coherence
Place	Strengthen mechanisms for placement across schools	Builds graduate confidence and preparedness for diverse teaching contexts
Induct	Guarantee induction supports and conditions	Supports high quality teaching practice in collaborative professional cultures
Develop	Build capacity in teaching and leadership	Improves student achievement, teaching quality, teacher morale, and school culture
Recognise	Develop consistent system for recognising teachers, including clear leadership pathways	Supports teacher accreditation and promotion
Retain	Strengthen the approach to retaining teachers and school leaders	Increases job satisfaction and wellbeing

Note. * based on a model adopted by AITSL.

Supporting evidence

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