

# Change without the churn

The national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment Tool and AERO's *Insights into Implementation* research

Teachers are, and always have been, incredible change agents in their schools, writes Assistant Federal Secretary Veronica Yewdall.



The Covid pandemic provided a stunning demonstration of the capacity of teachers to pivot and adapt to meet the needs of their students. However, widespread and relentless churning of initiatives, and ill-considered or unhelpful implementation processes, significantly intensify teacher workloads and often produce results that fall short of the intended outcomes.

The IEU has consistently asserted that initiative implementation processes that fail to consult meaningfully with teachers, consider existing or potential implementation workloads, or monitor impacts throughout the process, are driving the excessive and unsustainable expectations that lead to burnout and exacerbate the teacher shortage.

Rushed implementation, followed by hasty jettisoning of an unsuccessful program, and the rapid adoption of another initiative, form an unsustainable cycle that adversely affects student outcomes and saps teachers' energy.

#### The national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool

In July 2023, the IEU and other members of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) Working Group were approached by the Australian Government Department of Education to provide feedback on the draft Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool. Several IEU recommendations were incorporated into the tool.

The finalised Teacher Workload Impact Assessment (TWIA) was agreed by Education Ministers in December 2023. Consistent with Action 20 of the NTWAP, the TWIA will be used on National Policy Initiatives in the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and be considered by Education Ministers during negotiations.

However, the IEU has always strongly supported the need for far broader application of the TWIA and asserted its value as a logical and consultative framework that is likely to reduce workload intensification for teachers and improve the continuity and maturity of initiatives, thereby supporting more consistent student outcomes.

The TWIA is an interactive tool, providing the capacity for agencies to fill in responses to a series of questions and requiring further exploration of any identified workload implication. While the TWIA was developed for the assessment of national initiatives, the IEU believes it is a sequential framework that genuinely seeks to address the teacher workload impact of initiatives and could be usefully implemented at school and system level.

The union has been provided with the final version of the national Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool, but it is not available digitally at this time.

#### Definitions in the Teacher Workload Impact Assessment tool

**Core teaching duties:** Includes but is not limited to classroom instruction, preparing whole class instruction, assessing work, providing feedback, providing individual assistance or support to students, tailoring lessons, meetings, assemblies, yard/bus duty, administration, parent engagement and counselling students.

**Teachers:** References to teachers also refer to associated administrative and support staff due to the potential downstream impact on teacher workload.

#### The TWIA framework as it might be used in a school or system context

There are nine steps in the TWIA process. The IEU has removed references to national policy initiatives in the tool to show how it could have broader application for schools and systems.

##### 1. Initial assessment

Will the proposed initiative require, or could it require, changes to the systems of work in schools, teacher roles and responsibilities or compliance obligations which would influence the existing duties of teachers and school leaders?

##### 2. A description of the problem

Is the issue supported by evidence and data?

##### 3. The rationale for policy change

An explanation is required to justify why intervention is necessary to address the problem.

##### 4. The objectives for the proposed policy change

What are the objectives for the policy change?

##### 5. A summary of the proposed initiative and other options considered

A detailed summary of the proposed initiative, who is responsible for implementing the initiative and timeframes for delivery is required:

- How will the proposed initiative achieve the stated objectives?
- How will success be measured?
- What is the expected interaction with schooling systems and the teacher workforce?
- Outline alternative options and why these alternatives are not preferred.
- Why existing initiatives or policies could not be leveraged, re-purposed or altered to achieve the same outcome?
  - Have these initiatives reached the stage of independent implementation by teachers?
  - Are teachers still engaged with professional development and feedback on implementation?
  - Has the timing of the introduction of the initiative been sufficiently considered, in consultation with teachers?

##### 6. An assessment of the potential workload impact on teachers and school leaders

- How does the initiative impact jurisdictions differently?
- How does the initiative impact individual sectors differently?
- Does the initiative impact disadvantaged schools, complex settings including regional, rural and remote?
  - What is the impact on teachers in these settings?
  - Identify how the proposed initiative will impact teachers, school leaders, students and resources in diverse school settings.



- Does it have a disproportionate impact on different teachers (First Nations, subject specialists, early career, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers)?
  - Assess the impact on these teachers where the impact is not uniform.
- Identify potential unintended impacts on teachers, school leaders, students and resources in diverse school settings.
  - Do additional teachers, support staff or resources need to be obtained? Are there additional costs associated with recruitment, on-boarding, release time and training?
  - Does the initiative require teachers and students to pivot to different content or pedagogy? Is such change likely to disrupt the continuity of learning?

##### 7. An assessment of the potential impact (positive or negative) on core duties

- How will the initiative impact teachers in performing their role? This section should focus on the impact on core teaching duties. Identify the core teaching duties this initiative will impact including adjustments to existing work practices and workload. This assessment should not just reflect a simple time-cost but should also take account of any workload intensification such as increased emotional labour or cultural load.
- Is the impact different on school leaders? This section should identify the core leadership and administration duties this initiative will impact, including adjustments to existing work practices and workload.

##### 8. Assessment of the potential time impacts

Assess the time and resources needed to undertake or provide any additional support and/or training requirements for teachers and school leaders and if time is required for ongoing maintenance of these skills. If significant impacts are identified at Question 7, the response to this question should identify commensurate levels of support.

##### 9. Any additional regulatory or reporting requirements related to the initiative

Undertake due diligence to ensure there are no existing initiatives in place that can be leveraged, re-purposed or altered to achieve the same outcome. Ensure that the initiative does not lead to the duplication of existing tasks or administrative duties. Identify the reporting requirements (both one-off and ongoing) and provide an assessment of the time needed to complete them and if they can be undertaken by support staff.

# More support for appropriate implementation processes

## AERO's *Insights into implementation* research

**During 2024, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) produced a series of explainers to support strong and manageable change processes in schools.**

The government agency charged with providing evidence-based research to the education sector, AERO, also produced a discussion paper, *Insights into Implementation*, to support sustainable initiative implementation.

AERO's Explainers provide important support for school leaders and teachers who would like to start a conversation at their school about proposed initiatives, and how to manage them without workload intensification. Some of the key findings relate to issues the IEU has consistently raised, including:

- the proposed initiatives should be a response to a specific school-based challenge
- the readiness for use of the proposed initiative should be evaluated
- barriers (such as competing new programs) must be addressed (not just acknowledged)
- competing initiatives should be pruned
- there is great value in discussion with all staff involved and regular debriefing of experience/progress
- avoidance of burdensome documentation is recommended

All excerpts from AERO's explainer documents are used with permission

### From AERO's Explainer: Monitoring implementation outcomes

- Schools should focus on monitoring those outcomes that are most relevant and realistic for their context.
- Collecting data to assist with monitoring implementation outcomes should leverage what a school is already doing. It doesn't need to be time-consuming or burdensome.
- Feasibility (Considerations)

To what degree does our school have the time and resources to dedicate to implementing this evidence-based practice?

What might need to change to ensure teachers are supported by systems and structures during this period of change (ie timetabling, release time, resource availability, access to coaching, etc)?

How will we check what staff think may need to change?

**AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan:** "One of the things that we recommend is to do a diagnosis of the area of need. You can examine the learning and teaching model to find what the solution is, but that diagnosis of where you begin, needs to come first.

"Implementation is absolutely context specific, because where every school is up to, the background of the teachers, the specific areas of learning achievement that the students might be demonstrating... all of those things will be different from one school to the next."

### Excerpts from AERO's Explainer: Taking an evidence-informed approach to implementation

- When selecting an evidence-based practice, schools need to consider how implementable it may be. In other words, schools need to consider how ready for use the practice is, or the effort required to operationalise it into implementation strategies, such as professional learning materials, so it can be consistently applied by teachers.
- Address enablers and barriers: Every implementation effort will experience enablers and barriers that can help or hinder the process. Understanding exactly what's acting as an enabler or barrier within a school context is useful, but being prepared to respond to this information is key to effective implementation.

**AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan:** "School leaders need to know in the first instance, what is it that teachers are doing, what's informing their practice, what experience and expertise do they have that will ready them for adopting a new or different or changed practice? What needs to be provided to them?"

"Care needs to be taken with how an initiative is presented, so that it isn't just 'Well, here's the thing that you should be doing, because the evidence says so.' You need to consider the story, 'we know that this works, but let's explain why it works. Let's drill into this new idea and understand what sits behind it, in terms of cognitive science or the empirical data', for example, to help people feel reassured about the change of direction."

### From AERO's Explainer: Addressing enablers and barriers to implementation

- There's great value in all teachers and staff who are involved in implementation discussing and suggesting actions to address current barriers and strengthen enablers.
- When enablers and barriers have been identified and prioritised, and staff have had the opportunity to suggest how they might be addressed, leaders can consider the strategy (eg coaching and modelling) they might use to reduce or remove a barrier.

**AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan:** "It's absolutely more about the putting it (the initiative) into practice than it is about the endless meetings to talk about it or requiring unnecessary documentation or other busy work.

"... Instead, at each of the stages, you've got a tollgate where you stop and reflect, 'how's this going, are we taking everyone with us, who still needs some convincing, where do we need to cycle back into a bit more explanation?' The idea of staging is to help chunk out the task of implementation and give you the opportunity to reflect on where you're up to and where you want to be and what might need some more attention along the way. It needs to be a conscious and deliberate approach that you take, otherwise you're really just crossing your fingers and hoping for the best."



### Conclusion

The IEU proactively engages with federal and state agencies to find meaningful solutions to address unsustainable workloads, including through collaboration on official guidelines such as the NCCD Evidence Fact Sheet, the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework Fact Sheet and NESA's Curriculum Programming and Record-Keeping Fact Sheets, or through highlighting helpful frameworks provided by federal agencies.

*Invite non-members at your school to join the IEU and help support this critical work.*