

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO THE NATIONAL DISCUSSION PAPER ON STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

February 2001

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to analyse the responses to the national discussion paper *Standards of Professional Practice for Accomplished Teaching in Australian Classrooms* published by the Australian College of Education (ACE), the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) and the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) in September 2000.

Six 'discussion pointers' identified in the paper provide the framework for recording comments from a number of respondents. In general, their original wording has been retained with a view to capturing the tone and thrust of feedback received. While the main audience for this report is the consortium who facilitated the development of the paper, it is hoped that the contents will also be of interest to other stakeholders and the profession in general.

2. BACKGROUND

The discussion paper was developed by a Strategic Working Group, established following a national issues forum on professional teaching standards held in February 2000. This Group included practising teachers from a number of associations who have been working on standards for some time including the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT), the Australian Science Teachers Association (ASTA), the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) and the Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA). The principal author was Dr Paul Brock from the NSW Department of Education and Training.

In October 2000, ACE wrote to 25-30 organisations requesting that they upload the paper to their website with a view to reaching a broad range of teachers over a three-month period. Those approached included professional associations, unions, education systems, teacher registration boards, research groups and parent groups. In addition, 250 hard copies were also circulated to key players and interest groups, inviting them to raise awareness of the paper within their constituencies through newsletters, conferences and related activities. Respondents were invited to submit their suggestions online using a feedback sheet, or to fax or send responses to ACE by 15 December 2000.

3. RESPONDENTS

ACE received a total of 25 responses to the discussion paper. Some of these were brief (e.g. they provided in-principle support), while others addressed the issues raised in considerable detail. Summary details of the respondents can be found as Appendix 1, however, they can be broadly grouped together as follows:

- university academics/researchers/education faculties (7)
- professional associations – (5) [*4 national and 1 state*]
- schools (3)
- education unions (3) [*2 national and 1 state*]
- teachers (2)

- education systems (2) [1 state and 1 territory government department]
- teacher registration boards (2)
- SA Commission for Catholic Schools

4. SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSES

4.1 What are the most significant issues in this Discussion Paper for you as a member of the teaching profession, or as one with an interest in and/or commitment to the quality of teaching and learning in Australian schools, and how might these be advanced in the most effective ways?

- The acceptance of teaching as a profession and attempting to provide a rationale for the development of professional teaching standards in Australia.
- The support of a majority of all teachers for the development of standards of professional practice is needed.
- An appropriate composite body of stakeholders and interested parties should be formed to develop proposals and oversee their development, implementation, assessment and funding.
- A mechanism for identifying, acknowledging and rewarding (with salary benefits) accomplished/excellent teachers is needed. This is important but there also needs to be an overall career path or structure for teachers nationally.
- Standards must be linked to valid, reliable and fair assessments with relevant outcome measures and equal access.
- It is useful to articulate standards but they require a significant infrastructure underpinning them.
- Teacher commitment needs to be valued more highly and consistently.
- Are teaching standards a useful way to deal with the needs of the profession?
- Would standards lead to increased status and recognition of teachers' work, or to an increase in the quality of teaching by experienced teachers?
- Observable demonstrations of good practice may serve to constrain and straitjacket good teaching and create professional skills based on similarity.
- In developing professional teaching standards, teacher knowledge must be given primacy.
- The development of standards must be firmly grounded in the experience of the practicing classroom teacher (the 'practising professional') who has a major role to play in articulating the standards of his/her profession.
- The development of standards cannot be hurried, nor can it be hijacked by systems as employing authorities.
- No one association can speak for all associations in this important debate.
- All associations need to be conscious of developing strategies to encourage grass roots teachers to become engaged in the discussion, given that their future as teachers and the future of their profession are integral.

4.2 *What are your views about the descriptors of accomplished teaching suggested in Section 9? How might they apply to teaching within and across all of the diverse range of school teaching and learning contexts including pre-school, primary, middle schooling/junior secondary, senior secondary/college and the combination of post-compulsory education and training pathways?*

4.2.1 *Positive*

- Several respondents supported the NBPTS model, indicating that these common qualities and principles are basic to accomplished teaching.
- The descriptors are comprehensive and relevant to any stage or form of teaching. However, assessment of the performance of teachers in relation to these descriptors is an enormous challenge.
- These are excellent descriptors — articulated as Standards of Professional Practice and based on the broader concept of professional practice.
- The need for registration documents to include a *practising certificate* that details the accomplishments of the *practising* teacher is supported.

4.2.2 *Negative*

- The criteria for *accomplished teachers* are highly questionable and the term should be changed. They should identify to whom *accomplished* refers and on what terms.

4.2.3 *Comments*

- Standards should be generic, simple, comprehensible, attainable and capture the essence of teaching.
- A checklist is not appropriate as it can lead to a focus on behaviourism. A key aspect that is needed in terms of clarity is *how much is enough?*
- The descriptors need to be developed by a consortium and published, e.g. USA National Board's booklet *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do*.
- There is a need for further elaboration and exemplification of the descriptors to provide consistency for different readers.
- A number of the descriptors would seem to be difficult to make assessments against.
- Peers should make judgments of the quality of professional practice.
- Terms such as '*sound results*', '*authentic research*' are open to definition.
- The Advanced Skills Teacher model is a relevant one.

4.2.3 *Proposals*

- The descriptors could be expanded to acknowledge changing social needs and the need for reflective practice, critical thinking, creativity and innovation.
- Elements of an accomplished teacher should include:
 - The ability to make improvisation appear sure, smooth and elegant.
 - Length of experience.
 - Positive classroom management.
 - Outreach, particularly through involvement in and contribution to the work of professional associations.
 - Work of teachers with parents and their students within the early years and in special education contexts.
- Add the following statement "*having the commitment and capacity to effectively use and apply environmental education principles within their teaching to empower students to become environmentally literate and responsible citizens who make decisions for sustainability and take appropriate actions that meet the needs of people and the environment.*"

4.3 *What are the practical implications of issues raised in this Discussion Paper for strategic/structural issues such as the following -*

Teacher registration and its various forms

- Teacher Registration Boards already exist in a number of states, whilst others are well on the way to establishing them, although their roles and responsibilities may differ considerably. Standards for accomplished teaching could be adapted to entering teachers and applied after a probationary period to license them to practice independently. They could also form the basis of continuing registration and provide a way to recognise new areas of knowledge/specialisation.
- Professional Teaching Standards are linked with teacher registration and proper entry standards, the accreditation of pre-service education, and requirements for essential knowledge and skills.
- Should registration include specific areas of teaching for which teachers may be employed?
- The timing may not be appropriate in the light of current proposals.
- Standards for employers to ensure equity of access should be considered.
- State and Commonwealth departments and teachers need to be convinced that this is worthwhile and non-threatening and teachers should continue to be involved.
- There are significant industrial and political implications.

Certification of teacher education providers or programs

- Existing voluntary standards developed for teacher education programs could be incorporated into a framework for a formal accreditation program for teacher education.
- Accreditation for schools and supervising teachers would ensure excellence in all aspects of the professional education of new teachers.
- How will certification be coordinated and assessed against the standards?
- How long would certification last, how would it be renewed, and what are the costs?
- There may be in-school issues, such as parents' preference, or unreal expectations that influence the perception of 'accomplished' in that particular context.
- Teacher certification needs to be made an issue in the national and state political agendas.
- Many professional associations are closely monitoring the development of teaching standards as it plays out in the work being done by systems, particularly in relation to Registration Boards and Institutes. The roles, responsibilities and authority held by these groups vary considerably.

Financial and non-financial incentives for teachers who manifest accomplished standards

- Demonstration of agreed Standards for Professional Practice should be rewarded financially and tied to a career path for teachers. There is currently no professional incentive or recognition for classroom teachers.
- Incentives such as extra study leave, involvement in research and study tours should be considered.
- Implications for financial and non-financial incentives must be recognised and political parties should take a position. Funding must be in place or efforts are futile.
- Research is required.

Processes of assessing teacher performance against standards

- Research into the most appropriate methods of assessment and who is responsible for assessing is required. How are practitioners provided with expertise as assessors?
- A range of models should be explored collaboratively by employers, teachers and the learning community. Visits to the USA to study the National Board's system would be helpful.
- Use research material to start listing the elements of effective teaching, categorising and prioritising them.
- Assessments must make realistic and manageable demands on teachers and not divert them from their classrooms.
- Teachers need to accept responsibility to articulate what they do and why they do it and provide evidence to demonstrate their professional expertise.
- Accomplished teaching arrangements need to be within a framework where appraisal is welcome, formative and related to working with their peers.
- A process to coach and support teachers is required; i.e. a standards driven professional development system.

The role of standards of accomplishment in promotion and career paths of teachers

- Standards of Professional Practice that the profession has endorsed should be used to:
 - Clarify expectations of teachers.
 - Provide a framework for career and professional development.
 - Enable teachers to have recognition of specialised knowledge and skills.
 - Negotiate an appropriate range of responsibilities in teachers' work with suitable recognition and rewards for their professional expertise.
- Standards need to enhance learning outcomes for all children. Their purpose and the tools to measure them need to be clearly articulated.
- Accomplished teaching concepts need to apply to principals as well.
- What happens to those who are not successful (practically, emotionally)?

Other issues

- There should be a strong focus on teaching standards, accountability and rewarding practitioners who are deemed excellent/accomplished by their peers, their students and the families of the students.
- It is contradictory to refer to teaching as a profession and then discuss standards of professional practice with a group outside the system. This debate should be led by teachers trying to meet the needs of tomorrow's learners, rather than education responding to emergent issues and public prejudice. A more productive approach might be for teachers to contribute to the debate about the kinds of changes that are needed in schools to address the needs of students.
- If a standards-setting exercise is to succeed, teachers must be convinced of the benefits of defining standards and must own them. This paper could be restructured to begin positively with "*Accomplished teachers make a difference.*" and go on to ask what makes an accomplished teacher.
- How will teacher registration or certification change teachers in large systems? Will it do any more than target clearly incompetent teachers when the real problem is the large number of adequate teachers who need to adapt to changing needs?
- Pedagogical content knowledge is an important aspect of good teaching but other dimensions need to be the starting point.
- Personal qualities are vital and it may be important to interview candidates for the teaching profession in relation to these.

- The complex relationship between the Commonwealth and the States with regard to education and the nature of agreements between teachers and their employing authorities provides opportunities for the profession to clearly articulate what it means to be an accomplished teaching professional.

5. WHERE TO FROM HERE

5.1 What practical strategies involving teachers, parents, students, employers, government agencies, and all relevant professional and other stakeholder bodies, need to be put in place — and by whom — to ensure an effective and coordinated approach to moving forward on professional teaching standards from this point?

- Nationally consistent standards for the teaching profession are needed and should be incorporated into a comprehensive system of national registration for the profession. This would address issues, such as professionally established entry standards, questions of professional ethics, and requirements for teacher training courses, ongoing professional development and the capacity for de-registration.
- This paper provides a valuable step forward in working towards standards for the profession and will broaden the dialogue. All teacher organisations need to join forces to convince employers that accomplished teaching, validly assessed, must be honoured and rewarded. Funding has to be found for the assessment mechanisms and the salary increases. Should the Federal Government do this?
- Is there enough commitment in this country to promulgating professional standards for teachers?
- A national professional body with state branches is needed to develop a consultative structure that could be used to determine relationships between professional development standards, recognition of levels of professional ability and possible means of material or financial reward for this.
- The voluntary or mandatory nature of the standards needs to be further explored.
- The draft paper should include possible paths towards taking the process forward and the questions to be considered should be the next steps in the development process, rather than what an accomplished teacher is.
- A working group should develop a proposal to establish an *Australian College of Teachers*. The proposal could be put to Government and other potential sponsors for financial support over an initial development phase. Political support is needed for implementation.
- The discussion should be opened up to include parents, the community, business, universities and other professions.
- The AAMT/Monash project has potential to inform thinking and work in this area.
- Teacher registration boards in most states would provide a framework for recognition of standards.
- Funding is needed to launch a national project.
- Unions must accept that professional issues, such as evaluation of teachers, are part of their ambit.

5.2 *In particular, what needs to be done to encourage individual teachers and members of the profession as a whole to participate in, and exercise ownership of, the processes of identifying, and monitoring standards of professional practice for accomplished teaching?*

- A procedure by which the influence of very able and successful teachers can be felt by their colleagues must be put in place.
- Schools should set up routine review and evaluation procedures that include minimum professional development requirements.
- There should be fair supportive systems of due process to cater for under-performing teachers. An intractable record of low performance should lead to dismissal.
- A national writing competition for teachers to produce a collection of narratives to be used as a data source for accessing and including the perspectives of teachers.
- Liaise with other national subject associations on common generic standards for accomplished teaching at various career stages. Assessments should be developed that link specifically with these standards and accommodate subject pedagogies.
- Seek the views of all teachers. A referendum could provide powerful endorsement for the development of standards.
- Give teachers a reason for taking up the issue of professional teaching standards, accreditation and registration by including status and remuneration.
- ACE to facilitate rolling seminars for teachers to raise awareness and employers could provide incentives for attendance.
- Investment in ongoing professional development by education systems.
- Support excellent teachers in ways other than the development of standards.
- Work towards more creative processes for re-accreditation.
- Critical self-appraisal that would allow standards to emerge.
- Publicise and facilitate discussion. The voluntary nature of professional associations involves problems of time, energy and resources.
- Access to the discussion paper has not been sufficiently broad, nor has it encouraged the type and depth of discussion that is warranted.

5.3 *What specific suggestions do you have regarding the conduct of a second national forum in 2001 on professional teaching standards? (eg outcomes, processes, dates, program, location, participants, presenters, pre-forum activities)*

- Academics and subject associations have driven the agenda and more teachers should be involved, together with representatives from all the sectors.
- A forum in mid-2001 as responses to the national discussion paper would be available to form a focus for the agenda.
- ACE should play an important role in shaping the directions of the national discussion by identifying commonalities and differences emerging across the three case studies and their relationship to the contents of the National Discussion Paper.
- Developments in teacher registration must be considered.
- Ministers and Shadow Ministers of Education, (Federal and State), and their officials should be included. Financial support is an issue.
- Include leaders of P&F organisations and the expectations of school children.
- The NSW Department of Education & Training will include senior officers and teachers who have explored systems in Australia and USA.
- The progress being made through the ARC-SPIRT funded project should be shared prior to or at the second national forum.

- A second forum might be organised on a state basis to attract as many teachers as possible. Developments could be shared, issues discussed and support (through an independent professional body such as an *Australian College of Teaching*) canvassed.
- Teachers from subject areas should work together.
- Deliberations need to be honest with a generic/specific debate based on current research.
- Time should be taken to describe legitimate visions that can describe teaching and demonstrate how perceptions of education and the work of teachers have been shaped by various stakeholders and the particular methodology used to describe teaching.
- A suggested second forum should be conducted, but only after focus sessions, conducted in each state/territory, have provided opportunities for practicing teachers to become actively involved in the debate. It appears to the classroom practitioner that the debate in its current form is being taken away from them rather than being brought to them.

5.4 *Any other comments on future directions?*

- The paper has stimulated much discussion and the initiative is strongly supported.
- The stage has now been reached for a clear articulation of possible models of standards frameworks that can be presented for professional scrutiny.
- Academics who are supporting this national momentum should receive funding.
- ACE's contribution to facilitating this national discussion is acknowledged.

6. CONCLUSION

The majority of respondents supported the paper and highlighted the importance of involving as many teachers as possible, along with key stakeholders, in continued debate and action. While there was general support for the descriptors, reservations were expressed about the means by which they might be used in assessment processes.

Respondents raised a number of practical implications including:

- national initiatives in this area tend to be problematic because of state/territory differences, as well as significant industrial and political issues;
- agreement is needed on the practical implementation of professional certification;
- further research and development are needed to identify ways in which professional teaching standards can be assessed most effectively and efficiently;
- teachers need to be active players in the professional certification process, however, there is little practical support available at present to support this;
- incentives are needed for teachers to gain professional standards that are linked to career paths; and
- financial support from governments is needed to advance professional certification.

Most respondents felt that the discussion paper makes a valuable contribution to broadening an overdue dialogue on professional teaching standards. However, the issues need to be explored further by expanding that dialogue; engaging the profession in more practical ways; and lobbying those with the capacity to support the profession in this important work.

APPENDIX 1

A National Discussion Paper — Standards of Professional Practice for Accomplished Teaching in Australian Classrooms

List of Respondents as at 9 February 2001

Dr Lori BECKETT	University of Technology, Sydney
Prof Alan BISHOP, Ms Barbara CLARKE & Ms Sue BENNETT	Faculty of Education, Monash University, Vic
Mr Christopher BOYLE	The Friends' School, Hobart
Dr Ken BOSTON	NSW Department of Education and Training
Prof Marie BRENNAN	School of Teacher Education, University of Canberra
Ms Anne CARRINGTON & Mr Cris ZOLLO	De Lissa Institute of Early Childhood & Family Studies, University of SA
Mr David de CARVALHO	for SA Commission for Catholic Schools
Dr Simon CLARKE	Edith Cowan University / Christ Church Grammar School, WA
Mr David CORNELIUS	
Mr Denis FITZGERALD	Australian Education Union
Ms Wendy HASTINGS	Teachers Registration Board of SA
Dr Marie JANSEN	Office of the Board of Teacher Registration, Qld
Dr Anne JASMAN	Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne
Mr Martin KEOGH	St Joseph's School, Orbst, Vic
Ms Dianne KERR	Australian College of Education (ACE) – Coordinator of the ACE Fellows Network
Ms Josephine LANG	Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE)
Ms Julie LUNDBERG	Association of Non-Government Education Employees (ANGEE)
Mr Greg MORLING	TAFE
Mr Will MORONEY	Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT)
Ms Christine OWEN	Australian Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations (AJCPTA)
Mr Peter PLUMMER	Northern Territory Department of Education
Ms Lynne ROLLEY	Independent Education Union of Australia
Dr Catherine SCOTT	University of Western Sydney, NSW
Dr Barry SCHWARZER	Samuel Gilbert Public School, Castle Hill, NSW
Ms Rita VAN HAREN & Mr John GEASLEY	ACT Association for the Teaching of English