

Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism: *Towards a Nationally Agreed Framework*

A Statement by the Australian College of Education
December 2001

PURPOSES

This document is designed to fulfil three purposes. First, to communicate the outcomes of a two-year process of national collaboration and consultation coordinated by the Australian College of Education (ACE).

Second, to advocate the development of a Nationally Agreed Framework on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism that will inform the current and future work of key stakeholders.

Third, to outline a collaborative plan of action that will align professional and political forces in the pursuit of a common and unifying agenda to promote quality teaching and the advancement of the teaching profession.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade or so, extensive research and development has been conducted on standards for the teaching profession in Australia and elsewhere. Targets for this work have included beginning and accomplished teachers, as well as educational leaders and teacher education.

Considerable expertise, energy and resources have been devoted to develop standards for accomplished teaching, with a number of national professional associations and other stakeholders producing sets of generic, developmental and subject specific standards (e.g. in science, mathematics, English/literacy, information and communication technology, and personal development, health and physical education).

Within a variety of national contexts, ACE has undertaken a brokering role in 2000-2001, promoting a collaborative approach to the development of teacher standards, quality and professionalism. Outcomes of this approach have included a national discussion paper containing a rationale for the development of professional teaching standards¹; national forums from which working documents have been developed²; and national mapping exercises in the form of an audit and document register³.

PRINCIPLES

As a result of extensive work conducted by a range of stakeholders over time, together with the consensus reached at a National Professional Summit⁴, it is argued that current and future work on teacher standards, quality and professionalism needs to:

- be owned and driven by the teaching profession in partnership with key stakeholders;
- be in the interests of the teaching profession as well as the public interest;
- be firmly grounded in an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the nature of teachers' work;

- affirm the status and integrity of teacher qualifications;
- be transparent and accessible to the profession and the wider community;
- be implemented with a view to strengthening the public perception of and regard for teachers and their work;
- promote teaching as a desirable career thus contributing to recruitment;
- focus on high-level competencies and be described in terms of professional knowledge, understanding, skills and values; and
- reflect a continuum of teacher development from pre-service education through to educational leadership, allowing for different points of entry and re-entry.

DEVELOPMENTS

There is a window of opportunity for building and extending this work in a spirit of cooperation, given the coalescence of circumstances and national interest surrounding current and projected work on teacher standards, quality and professionalism. Indeed, participants at the National Summit identified ‘a new sense of urgency’ in relation to the following developments:

- Ministerial reviews and consultation processes concerned with teaching and teacher education;
- establishment/further development of teacher registration bodies and institutes of teachers/teaching;
- establishment of a MCEETYA Taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership;
- research and development on professional teaching standards;
- demonstrated leadership by the teaching profession on teacher standards, quality and professionalism;
- support for the profession from education systems, sectors and other groups;
- an expanding range of resources on quality/accomplished/innovative teaching;
- emerging teacher shortages, an ageing teaching population and the implications for the recruitment, retention and career-path development of teachers; and
- international developments on teacher standards, quality and professionalism.

FRAMEWORK

Given the work of many stakeholders, changing contexts and the brokering role undertaken by ACE, it is proposed that the profession and other key players should now support the development of a Nationally Agreed Framework on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism.

The term ‘nationally agreed’ has been chosen deliberately. Although responsibility for education lies with the States and Territories, and the Commonwealth has particular responsibilities, a reasonably consistent set of standards may emerge around Australia through cooperation and collaboration among these jurisdictions which will further assist and inform work within them. The Framework needs to reflect the following purposes:

Purposes

- establish common and agreed language, terminology and definitions on standards of professional practice for teachers in Australia;
- facilitate greater consistency and cohesion with regard to the purposes, development and use of standards; and
- build capacity for the articulation and implementation of standards and processes of professional recognition within State and Territory jurisdictions.

Objectives

To achieve its purposes, the development of the framework will need to:

- acknowledge that teachers are central to the quality of education in general and the achievement of student learning outcomes in particular;
- acknowledge that there are multiple opportunities for professional growth and career paths in teaching;
- connect with state, territory and Commonwealth policies and programs;
- acknowledge recent and current projects and activities at state, national and international levels;
- help to generate political will, commitment and connections;
- be the basis upon which issues requiring further investigation regarding generic, subject/curriculum specific, or developmental level standards could be developed;
- draw upon the full range of available research, scholarship and consultation processes;
- connect with teacher education (e.g. pre-service and professional learning);
- identify expertise and advocacy from both within and beyond the profession; and
- ensure that available resources are used to maximum effectiveness.

ACTION

As a result of the brokerage undertaken by ACE, three areas for action have emerged to support the development of the proposed Framework.

1. Engage the profession

The profession needs to play a central role in the development of professional teaching standards, their implementation and monitoring and in advocating their use. Integral to success is ensuring that the whole profession, across all sectors, systems and jurisdictions understands and is engaged in the process of continuous development with regard to quality teaching and learning.

2. Generate national commitment and support

In collaboration with key stakeholders, the profession needs to draft a 'National Declaration on the Quality of Teaching' that builds on the quality of student learning enunciated in the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, and acts as a benchmark for professionalism and professional teaching standards nation-wide. Once endorsed by the profession, the declaration should then be presented to MCEETYA for adoption.

3. Pursue a common and unifying approach

In partnership with MCEETYA, the profession needs to prepare a strategic plan outlining the means by which the Framework and the Declaration can be developed collaboratively with the resources required to guarantee genuine participation by educators in all sectors, levels and settings. A group representative of the profession should be appointed to assume a leadership role with a view to ensuring that both the Framework and the Declaration are all completed and endorsed by key stakeholders within an agreed timeframe (e.g. three years).



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Endnotes

¹ Brock, P (2000) *Standards of Professional Practice for Accomplished Teaching in Australian Classrooms: A national discussion paper*. Australian College of Education, Australian Curriculum Studies Association and Australian Association for Research in Education
<http://www.austcolled.com.au/Dispaper.pdf>

² A National Professional Summit on teacher standards, quality and professionalism, 5-6 April 2001, Australian College of Education, Canberra.
<http://www.austcolled.com.au/pts/WorkingDocumentFinal.pdf>

³ A National audit in the form of a summary of current developments on standards, quality and professionalism; and a Document Register containing online resources identified as being highly relevant to a professional dialogue on these issues.
<http://www.austcolled.com.au/pts/NationalAudit.pdf>
<http://www.austcolled.com.au/pts/DocumentRegister.pdf>

⁴ A National Professional Summit (April 2001) involved senior policy makers, researchers and practising teachers from a range of organisations including:

- Association of Independent Schools, ACT
- Australian Association for Research in Education
- Australian Association for the Teaching of English
- Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers
- Australian College of Education
- Australian Council for Computers in Education
- Australian Council for Educational Research
- Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation
- Australian Curriculum Studies Association
- Australian Education Union
- Australian Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations
- Australian Literacy Educators Association
- Australian Science Teachers Association
- Board of Teacher Registration, Qld
- Catholic Education Office, ACT
- Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
- Department of Education and Community Services, ACT
- Department of Education and Training, NSW
- Department of Education, NT
- Department of Education, Qld
- Department of Education, Tasmania

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- Department of Education, Training and Employment, SA
 - Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria
 - Edith Cowan University
 - Education Department of Western Australia
 - Independent Education Union
 - Ministerial Advisory Committee, Victorian Institute of Teaching
 - Review of Teacher Education, NSW
 - Teachers Registration Board, SA
 - University of Canberra
 - University of Queensland