

NATIONAL STATEMENT from the Teaching Profession on

TEACHER STANDARDS, Quality & Professionalism

MAY, 2003

Overview

This National Statement represents the culmination of over three years' collaborative work by the profession on teacher standards, quality and professionalism. Key groups involved in its development include professional associations, unions and other bodies established to support teachers. The purpose of this Statement is to identify common and agreed understandings about professional teaching standards and their relationship to teacher quality and teacher professionalism. Please note that throughout this document the term 'standards' refers to professional teaching standards and that the focus is on identifying major issues, with a view to constructing a firm foundation for ongoing development. A major objective of this Statement is to demonstrate the profession's collective capacity to inform and contribute to national policy and program development on these three interconnected and interdependent areas in a way that complements the work of governments, systems and sector authorities. To that end, it is important to emphasise that the Statement reflects 'work in progress', and that a genuine spirit of cooperation will need to be maintained if the identified issues are to be addressed effectively.

Introduction

What teachers know, do, expect and value has a significant influence on the nature, extent and rate of student learning. The powerful phrase 'teachers make the difference' captures the key role that professional educators play in shaping the lives and futures of their students. Recognition of the critical relationship between teachers and learners highlights the need to better define and communicate what constitutes good teaching.

Professional teaching standards provide a powerful mechanism for achieving these objectives. Teaching is not a standards-free endeavour and most teachers have always understood the essential elements of high-quality professional practice. However, teaching standards do help to make the knowledge and capabilities *explicit*—not only to professional colleagues but also to students, parents and the wider community. They also provide a means through which good teaching can be identified, celebrated and rewarded. Provided the profession can maintain its role as the driver of the standards agenda, these measures of teaching quality can be used in ways that will support teachers individually and collectively.

Many professional associations, unions, employers, registration authorities and other groups have invested considerable time and resources in establishing a rationale for teaching standards, and in working with

classroom practitioners to design and trial various models and approaches. There has also been recognition of advanced status in a number of industrial agreements (for example Level 3 Teachers in Western Australia). Underpinning all of this work is the premise that teachers have a fundamental commitment to the effective learning, care and achievement of their students, along with a collective and strategic focus on other professional areas such as research, and curriculum and policy development. The need for greater convergence and the development of a common approach to teacher standards, quality and professionalism have been identified at a number of national forums.

A common theme spanning much of the published work of teacher organisations is the strong connection between professional teaching standards and professional learning. Many envisage standards being used as a framework for continuous professional learning and development which is teacher-directed and controlled. In other words, the process is done *by* and *with* teachers, not *to* or *for* them. Building on this concept, many also see standards being used to support the development of career pathways, with teachers using standards as a means of determining their current position on a learning continuum and charting their own course for higher order learning and professional recognition. Effective professional learning is a long-term personal quest to attain high professional standards.

Standards in the context of quality and professionalism

Membership of the teaching profession involves working towards the following objectives:

- to be knowledgeable about and skilled in subject matter and pedagogy
- to be effective in the care and development of all learners
- to adhere to professional and ethical standards set by and for the profession
- to act as a strong advocate for the profession and the public interest
- to contribute to the development of the knowledge base of the profession
- to reflect a strong ethical orientation across all areas of learning and teaching.

Teachers' professional learning involves the opportunity to engage with research and practice, and the capacity to generate new knowledge and critique the knowledge claimed by others. Teachers achieve high professional

teaching standards through various forms of professional learning. Select examples include pre-service training, structured professional development programs, school-based curriculum development, continuous inquiry and action research, supervision of student or beginning teachers, engagement with learning networks and post-graduate study. These activities also provide teachers with opportunities to strengthen the profession by leading, facilitating and supporting others committed to improving the quality of teaching. Other factors influencing the quality of teaching and learning include high-quality supportive leadership in schools and good collegial relations.

Any consideration of what constitutes quality teaching needs to take into account the diversity of context and conditions in which teachers work. The quality of teachers' work is affected by the conditions of student learning. Conditions such as reasonable class sizes, time release, administrative support, well-resourced education settings and access to high-quality ongoing professional development encourage a culture that promotes creativity and innovation. Supportive partnerships with parents and university–school collaboration are also conducive to quality teaching.

Professional teaching standards provide an important mechanism for improving the effectiveness of professional development; informing the means for improving career path opportunities; providing incentives for continuous professional learning; and building capacity for leadership, accountability and quality assurance.

Principles for guiding standards

Professional teaching standards are informed by practice, theory and research, and articulate what the profession believes teachers should know, do and value. Teachers have demonstrated that they can develop publicly credible and professionally challenging standards for professional practice.

In discussions so far, national teacher organisations and stakeholders have reached consensus on a set of principles to guide the development and application of standards. Professional standards for teaching should:

- be the responsibility of, and be owned by, the teaching profession in collaboration with key stakeholders
- be applied in the interests of learners, the profession and the public
- be firmly grounded in an accurate and comprehensive understanding of teachers' work

- provide a framework for teacher qualifications and registration
- recognise the value of both generic and subject-specific standards*
- be clear to the profession and the wider community
- enhance the public perception of and esteem for teachers and their work
- promote teaching as a desirable career, thus contributing to recruitment
- focus on high-level capabilities and be described in terms of professional knowledge, understanding, skills and values
- promote engagement in professional learning throughout a teacher's career, allowing for different points of entry and re-entry to the profession
- acknowledge that context and resourcing will have an impact on implementation and sustainability
- acknowledge the responsibility of employers and the profession to establish conditions conducive to developing and maintaining profession-defined standards.

* Generic standards identify broad capabilities and teacher attributes that apply across a range of subject areas. Specific standards identify the knowledge, skills and values required to teach in particular curriculum areas, levels of schooling and/or other areas of specialisation.

How will standards be used?

Standards could be used to provide a framework for:

- pre-service education, teacher registration and induction
- continuous professional learning
- reflection on and assessment of professional teaching practice
- recognition and certification of teachers who attain standards for highly accomplished professional practice.

In other words, standards are tools for action—tools with which the profession can exercise greater responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Use of standards must be primarily about professional learning. It would be contrary to the spirit of professionalism if they were to be used for punitive or non-developmental purposes. Teachers should use them to create and monitor their own professional learning programs, either individually or as members of learning communities.

National collaboration and the involvement of professional organisations are essential to ensure maximum consistency in the use of both beginning and advanced teaching standards in all states and territories.

There should be flexibility in the use and forms of assessment against standards across different fields to recognise the complexity of teachers' work, the range of contexts in which they work and the different ways in which teachers can meet standards.

Evidence of ability to meet relevant profession-defined standards should be a requirement for entry to the profession and could be a basis for advancement within the profession and for raising the status of the profession among peers and within the community.

Assessment and certification of advanced standards

Professional certification is an endorsement by an authorised professional body that a member of that profession has attained standards for highly accomplished professional practice. In the school sector, certification might be implemented across a number of fields of teaching and learning. Given the work of national professional associations, state/territory statutory bodies for teachers and the inclusion in some industrial agreements of advanced status payments, a nationally coordinated and consistent approach to professional certification could be further developed. It is important to acknowledge an emerging consensus that any process for the formal assessment of performance for professional certification of advanced standards should:

- be voluntary
- be authentic
- be based on and measured against professional teaching standards
- have peer involvement in its development and execution
- reflect the core business of teaching
- be positively oriented
- use a range of methods and evidence
- incorporate appeal processes.

The processes for assessing the demonstration of standards should be consistent across all fields of teaching and learning and be fair for all applicants. Peer and self-assessment through reflective practice and professional learning communities is in keeping with ownership by the profession.

Where assessor panels are established, they should be composed predominantly of school-based practitioners who are adequately trained in the assessment processes. In these processes it is important that judgments are made against the standards themselves.

Recognition and reward

A nationally coordinated, rigorous and consistent system should be established to provide recognition to teachers who demonstrate advanced standards. There should be no quota on the number of teachers who are able to receive recognition for certification, and the system must be credible to the public as well as the profession. Reward is an important part of the recognition process and reflects the desire of the profession and the community to acknowledge high-level accomplishment in tangible ways, such as increased remuneration, professional leave or other incentives.

The enterprise bargaining process between employers and unions will be an important mechanism for providing substantive recognition for professional certification. All employing authorities should be encouraged to provide recognition and support for professional certification as the process comes to demonstrate its credibility and its effects on professional learning.

Advancing the agenda

The profession's capacity to develop the common and agreed National Statement on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism is significant. It demonstrates genuine collaboration, the results of which are already contributing to policy and program development at various levels. A major strength of the Statement is the provision of a solid platform for ongoing work. However, it is important not to overstate the case—many questions and issues remain to be addressed.

One of the most valuable outcomes of the extensive consultation process associated with the development of the Statement was the quality of the feedback. Teachers, their organisations and other stakeholders identified the need for ongoing debate and action on a number of issues including:

- What are the distinctive contributions that employers, unions, governments, parents and other stakeholders can make in relation to teacher standards, quality and professionalism?
- How can the profession and other stakeholders work towards further common understanding of these concepts, purposes, processes and intended outcomes?
- How can professional teaching standards be used to create new knowledge and diversity in professional practice (that is, standards not standardisation)?
- What is the interface between professional teaching standards, performance review and assessment, and other industrially based workplace practices?

- What processes should be initiated for the ongoing review of teacher standards, quality and professionalism?
- What is the best way to achieve national coordination and consistency with regard to the implementation of professional teaching standards and professional certification for highly accomplished teachers?

There are many ways in which such issues might be explored in greater depth. Examples include the development of discussion papers, professional dialogue, e-learning initiatives, commissioned research and taskforces. The processes associated with the development of this Statement suggest that genuine collaboration and cooperation will be fundamental to the success of further initiatives. Similarly, all stakeholders will need to assume a proactive role in advancing the agenda in ways that reflect an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the value of pursuing a common and agreed approach to teacher standards, quality and professionalism in Australia.

Organisations represented on the Reference Group that produced this National Statement included:

AAMT	Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers
AARE	Australian Association for Research in Education
AATE	Australian Association for the Teaching of English
ACCE	Australian Council for Computers in Education
ACDE	Australian Council of Deans of Education
ACE	Australian College of Educators
ACEL	Australian Council for Educational Leaders
ACSA	Australian Curriculum Studies Association
AEU	Australian Education Union
ALEA	Australian Literacy Educators Association
APAPDC	Australian Principals Association's Professional Development Committee
ASTA	Australian Science Teachers Association
BTR	Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland
IEUA	Independent Education Union of Australia
NEF	National Education Forum

It should be noted that collaboration and cooperation with the work of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs' (MCEETYA) Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce (TQELT) was maintained during the course of this project. The purpose of this interaction was to promote the exchange of information on processes of development for the National Statement from the Profession and the National Framework for Standards for Teaching. The support of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training is gratefully acknowledged.

Produced by the Australian College of Educators for and on behalf of all organisations represented on the National Reference Group on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism.