

Teacher Registration in the ACT

ISSUES PAPER No 2 - Professional Standards

Introduction

This paper is one of a series that has been prepared to inform and encourage consultation and discussion on the need for and the possible elements of a teacher registration system for teachers in all education systems in the ACT.

The key document in the consultation process is *Teacher Registration in the ACT: Community Consultation Paper*, released on 14 May 2007. That paper sets out the background to the ACT Government's decision to investigate the issue of teacher registration, describes the purposes of a teacher registration system, canvasses the possible role and function of such a system in the ACT and sets out a process for consultation with stakeholders.

This paper addresses the specific issue of **professional standards** for teachers. Its purpose is to provide information and to encourage discussion around the issue of whether an ACT teacher registration body should have any role in setting and managing professional teaching standards and what that role might entail. It does not necessarily represent the views of the ACT Department of Education and Training (DET) or of any other stakeholder involved in the consultation process. The Teacher Registration Project Reference Group has approved the circulation of this paper on that basis.

Background

As the Consultation Paper points out, the purpose of professional standards is to ensure that there is a coherent framework that outlines the skills and attributes of effective teaching, taking account of the views and interests of the community, employers, educators and teacher professionals. Professional standards cover entry-level attributes and provide the basis for professional development, advancement, support and performance management. As the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs publication *A National Framework for Professional Standards for Teachers* points out:

Standards make explicit the intuitive understandings and knowledge that characterise good teaching and enable it to be widely shared within the profession.

Professional standards, where they currently exist, are set and maintained by the jurisdiction's teacher registration body. This, it can be argued, ensures that the standards are objective and are not unnecessarily weighted in favour of the interests of particular stakeholders. Independence and objectivity are, of course, two of the general arguments in support the establishment of an independent registration body.

It is important to note that there have been significant developments recently at a national



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level on professional standards for teachers. This issue is explored in the Issues Paper No.9, *National Registration*.

The Present Situation

The ACT Government system already has or is putting in place systems to establish and maintain professional standards for teachers at various levels of their professional and career progress. These include:

- teacher entry selection criteria that emphasise academic competence, an ability to understand and manage an inclusive learning environment, an understanding of student monitoring, assessment and reporting processes and a capacity to contribute to the broader life of the school;
- a capability framework for principals that emphasises educational and organisational leadership, effective school management; strategic thinking and the development of effective relationships within and outside the school;
- Professional Pathways, a performance management and development scheme for each teacher that links individual professional and career goals with the overall goals of the school and the service; and
- the development of a code of professional practice for teachers that covers the professional and behavioural expectations of teachers and links it to the broader ethical responsibilities of all ACT public servants.

As described in Issues Paper No 4, *Professional Conduct*, the Catholic education system in the ACT has its own codes covering the professional and behavioural standards of its teachers.

The Catholic system also has a performance management and professional development scheme for each teacher that focuses in particular on professional direction setting and mentoring for teachers in the early stages of their careers.

Independent schools have their own systems in place to maintain and support professional standards. These vary from school to school, but tend to focus on nurturing professional standards through individual guidance and mentoring rather

than through system wide benchmarks. Strategies include:

- the use of the probationary period to establish and explain the required levels of professionalism in a school;
- new teachers are given individual support and guidance in their first years by their senior and more experienced colleagues; and
- the use of senior staff dedicated on a full time or part time basis to developing strategies to encourage and support professional standards in a school, including through professional learning.

Models of Professional Standards Systems

A National Framework for Professional Standards for Teachers

A starting point for any consideration of professional standards is the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) paper: *A National Framework for Professional Standards for Teachers*, issued in November 2003. The Framework has been developed in response to what MCEETYA sees as “the challenges of producing, educating and training a truly “Australian” teacher”. It aims to identify the basic knowledge, understanding, skills and values that all Australian teachers should hold, ensuring a consistent quality of education in all Australian jurisdictions and responding to the increasing cross jurisdiction mobility of teachers, students and parents.

The Framework consists of two inter related dimensions:

- four professional elements, which set out specific aspects of a teachers work: professional knowledge; professional practice; professional values; professional relationships; and
- four career dimensions – graduate, competence, accomplishment and leadership - which recognise that the development and nurturing of these will need to reflect different aspects of professional capacity and achievement over a teacher’s career.

The Framework has been endorsed in principle by all jurisdictions and, as a first step in its implementation, will be used to nationally align

teacher recruitment standards. The application of standards to graduate teachers is discussed in more detail in Issues Paper No 1, *Teacher Education*.

There will be an expectation, therefore, that the development of any broader professional standards in the ACT will reflect the framework. On the other hand, such a Framework clearly provides individual jurisdictions with a degree of flexibility in how they will implement it in detail. The Framework itself states:

The nature and content of standards developed and implemented at the local level will vary according to the purpose for which they are being developed and the context in which they are being utilised.

More recently, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, known as Teaching Australia, has released a statement indicating that it intends to undertake a process for developing national professional standards.

Different Jurisdictional Approaches to Professional Standards

In all other Australian jurisdictions, the legislation that establishes the teacher registration body specifies a degree of responsibility for the development of professional standards. These range from the very general, where Tasmania identifies “to develop and improve professional teaching standards”, to the very specific – where Queensland’s body is required by legislation to have standards in place specifically to help the body decide whether an applicant for registration or renewal of registration meets professional practice requirements.

Most jurisdictions are operating under new or recent legislation and are at various stages in developing their professional standards. All jurisdictions are committed in principle to aligning their teacher selection and professional development standards to the MCEETYA Framework, with the primary focus on standards for teacher recruitment. Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia already have all developed various forms of standards for the purpose of registering new teachers, and Queensland’s

standard is discussed in more detail in the paper on teacher education.

The Queensland Department of Education has separately developed a broader and very detailed set of professional standards, although these do not appear to have been aligned with the MCEETYA Framework.

New South Wales and the Northern Territory

New South Wales Institute of Teachers’ *Professional Teaching Standards* is an example of highly detailed professional standards that cover all aspects of a teaching career and “describe what teachers need to know, understand and be able to do as well as providing direction and structure to support the development of teachers”. The standards “provide a language that can be used by teachers to communicate with the community about their profession and in doing so advance the status and standing of the profession”.

The New South Wales standards set similar career dimensions to the MCEETYA Framework – graduate teacher; professional competence; professional accomplishment and professional leadership. These align with only three teaching domains – professional knowledge, professional practice and professional commitment. Under these domains are seven elements, each of which has several “aspects” which should manifest themselves in a particular teacher capability at a particular career stage. To take an example, element 2 of “Professional Knowledge” is “teachers know their students and how they learn”.

One aspect of this element is *knowledge of and respect for the diverse social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of students, and the effects of these factors on learning.*

This aspect is then mapped to a career stage so that, under the standards, a teacher who is professionally competent can:

Apply knowledge of the impact of social, ethnic, cultural and religious background factors to meet the learning needs of all students.

The Northern Territory has recently developed a similar set of career wide professional standards,.

The Northern Territory standards are intended to provide:

- a clear public statement regarding the standards of the profession;
- a basis for self-regulation;
- a seamless guide to professional development from pre-service teacher education through induction and probation to established professional practice; and
- a focus for teachers to evaluate and analyse their practice and plan for professional development.

The draft standards use a similar set of professional criteria to those of NSW – professional engagement, professional knowledge and professional practice – but use a slightly different methodology in that it has different sub elements of each standard, mapped to a set of specific behaviors, for each career dimension. To take a similar approach to that outlined in the discussion of the NSW standards, NT will require under the standard of “Professional Knowledge”, that competent teachers “know their students” and demonstrate this by being, “...responsive to the social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds of the students they teach, and value their diversity”.

Both sets of standards include some coverage of professional ethics. The Northern Territory standards has a stand-alone Ethics Statement emphasizing duty of care to students, respecting the rights of parents and students and behaving in ways that promote the profession. The New South Wales standards have some broader ethical issues embedded in them, for example, a professionally competent teacher must “demonstrate ethical behavior by respecting the privacy of students and the confidentiality of student information” and “present a professional image in all communication and interactions with parents, caregivers, colleagues, industry and the local community”.

The issue of the relationship between professional standards and teacher ethics is discussed in more detail in Issues Paper No 4, *Professional Conduct*.

Neither jurisdiction explicitly addresses the use of the standards in managing poor performance or misconduct.

Issues

Core issues for the ACT in any decision to empower a body to develop professional standards for teachers include:

- the extent to which a formal set of professional standards would add value to the teaching profession in the ACT and to public confidence in it. Arguably the ACT government education system, at least, already has a practical system that sets and manages professional standards for its teachers, through the teacher selection criteria, leadership capabilities, performance management systems and ethical frameworks. How would a formal set of professional standards enhance this?
- the particular nature of the ACT as an educational jurisdiction: small, compact and with an already established working relationship between schools, teacher educators, professional associations and the community. How formal and how detailed need professional standards be in such a jurisdiction?
- the importance, in any development of professional standards, to recognise the particular educational interests of the ACT community but at the same time ensure that they are broad enough to encompass recruits from other jurisdictions and from overseas when necessary; and
- the extent to which any standards should be aligned with national frameworks.