

Teacher Registration in the ACT

ISSUES PAPER No 3 - Professional Learning

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 learning** 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 encouraging, setting frameworks for and managing professional learning for teachers. The paper 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

A core element in the effectiveness of any profession is the ability of its members to keep up

with new developments in theory and practice. As the Consultation Paper points out, teachers are expected to take responsibility for their professional learning and for contributing to the knowledge of the profession, within the context of their employer expectations and industrial agreements.

As noted in Issues Paper No 2, *Professional Standards*, ongoing professional learning is also a key element in the professional standards for teachers that have been developed by the teacher registration bodies in some jurisdictions. The key elements of the NSW Professional Teaching Standards include:

Teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice.

A key issue in considering the role of an independent teacher registration body for the ACT is whether it should have any role in the professional learning for teachers, including the delivery of professional training.

The Present Situation

In the ACT at present, professional learning is the responsibility of teachers and their employers. In the ACT government school system this is managed through the Professional Pathways program: a performance management and development agreement between teachers and employers that "reflects a partnership between DET and the Australian Education Union on behalf of its members". The agreement, links individual performance with school and system priorities to develop a professional learning plan for each teacher that is reviewed on an ongoing basis.



Education and Training



Professional learning and development in the government system is coordinated and in most cases is delivered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, whose mission is:

“to promote, support and deliver career-long professional learning that will enable classroom teaching and learning that equips students for the knowledge-based society”.

The ACT Government system has established under its Certified Agreement processes two learning funds: the Teacher Professional Learning Fund which will continue to be allocated monies annually to professional learning for teachers other than principals; and the Principal Professional Learning Fund which will continue to be allocated funds equivalent to 1% per annum of total principal salary costs. These two funds are maintained separately.

The Catholic system has its own professional learning program linked to its teacher performance management and professional development scheme. Learning is delivered through both internal and external providers. A particular feature is the establishment by the employer of dedicated funds for principals, which can be allocated for specific professional and personal development needs of individual principals. Funding support is available from the Catholic Education Office for specific professional development initiatives.

Independent schools have their own individual professional learning systems and strategies that take into account their particular educational philosophies. Individual teachers will have time specifically set aside for professional development with individual and school-wide strategies being generally developed and managed by dedicated senior staff on a full-time or part-time basis.

It is interesting to note here that there is an emerging informal network of cooperation in professional learning between the three ACT education sectors, currently based on the mutual identification of needs in specific areas rather than a jurisdiction wide strategy.

Education unions also offer professional training to members, and while there is some focus on legal, industrial and individual career planning issues, there is also a strong emphasis on discussion and exchange of professional ideas and experiences. The ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union runs forums and workshops in areas such as occupational health and safety and

classroom management. It also has a professional support network for new educators. The NSW/ACT Independent Education Union has a focus on conferences on specific professional issues, including teacher/support staff partnerships, women in education and special needs teaching.

The Role of Registration Bodies in Professional Learning

Teacher registration bodies in other jurisdictions all emphasize in various ways the importance of ongoing professional development to the maintenance of effective teaching, and several jurisdictions require that teachers seeking renewal of registration demonstrate “” section 29 of new Act subsection 2 part D (Queensland), although the definition and measurement of “acceptable continuing professional learning” is still under development by most bodies, including by Queensland itself. South Australia has implemented and Victoria has drafted standards for renewal of registration that require experienced teachers seeking renewal to demonstrate:

modeling commitment / supporting others to reflect on current and future professional learning needs, identify knowledge gaps and use a range of effective professional learning strategies (South Australia)

Beyond, this, specific responsibilities for professional learning vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Some jurisdictional bodies are assigned specific roles in their legislation. The Western Australia registration body has broad responsibilities:

- *to promote and encourage the continuing education of teachers in the practice of teaching; and*
- *increased levels of skill, knowledge and competence in the practice of teaching.*

The Northern Territory body has been given a strategic role:

- *to liaise with the Agency administering the Education Act in relation to strategic priorities for professional development of teachers in the Territory.*

Responsibilities in Victoria are more specific:

- *develop and maintain a Professional Learning Framework to support and promote the continuing education and professional development of teachers; and*

- *undertake professional development programs and activities in relation to the functions of the Institute.*

The NSW accreditation body has the responsibility to seek:

- *the approval by the Minister of persons or bodies who may provide professional development in accordance with the requirements of the professional teaching standards.*

These examples indicate at least three possible roles for an ACT teacher registration body in relation to professional learning:

- the identification and establishment of overall professional learning priorities, strategies or frameworks for teachers in the jurisdiction;
- the certification of teacher professional learning offered by employers and/or outside training providers; and
- actually coordinating and/or facilitation of professional learning courses.

Setting Professional Learning Priorities and Frameworks

The rationale for teacher registration bodies that take on establishing and managing professional development frameworks, appears to be based in part, on the perception that teachers are not always provided access to structured, consistent, professional development opportunities. Victoria refers to a 1999 Commonwealth report into teacher professional development that identified: *that around 20% of teachers had participated in only one day or less of professional development in 1999 and about 4% of schools did not have a professional development program. Of those schools with a program, up to 20 % were unplanned and operated on an ad hoc basis.*

The argument for a professional learning framework is that it can provide a structured, jurisdiction-wide approach to the professional learning options and strategies that help teachers to maintain the currency of their registration. It would also provide broader guidance to employers in the development and implementation of more rigorous and consistent internal learning and development strategies and programs.

It appears, however, that no teacher registration body has yet produced a working professional learning framework for teachers. Queensland, for example, is committed in principle to a framework

but has yet to develop one. Victoria, which is required by legislation to put in place a framework, has established a **Standards and Professional Learning Committee whose functions include** “to make recommendations to the Council on the development and maintenance of a Professional Learning Framework to support and promote the continuing education and professional development of teachers”. It has also identified the aims of a professional learning framework:

- *help teachers reflect on their professional practice;*
- *guide ongoing professional development and growth;*
- *promote continuing competence in content knowledge and professional practice as curriculum, pedagogy and school management approaches undergo change;*
- *enable targeted professional development planning to meet personal and collective professional learning priorities; and*
- *describe a range of opportunities for teachers to gain appropriate recognition for the professional learning they have undertaken.*

(Report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for the Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2000)

As noted, the Northern Territory (NT) is required to advise on strategic priorities for professional learning for teachers. As a first step, NT has established a committee, including representatives of teacher educators and employers, to identify teacher development priorities to meet the needs of the Territory.

Certification of Professional Learning Courses

New South Wales appears to be unique in that its teacher accreditation body has the power to approve teacher professional training courses. In essence, this covers all providers offering continuing professional learning courses or programs, including school systems; professional teaching associations; independent statutory authorities such as the NSW Board of Studies, universities, co-operatives, government departments, not-for-profit organisations (such as professional teaching associations), private providers and individuals.

Courses and programs are assessed on the basis of their ability to support teachers in achieving and maintaining the competencies set out in New South Wales's Professional Teaching Standards

which are described in more detail in Issues Paper No 2, *Professional Standards*. The approval process focuses specifically on courses that support teachers in maintaining accreditation at the level of Professional Competence, one of the four key professional stages set out in the Standards. The approval process is managed by the Professional Learning Endorsement and Advisory Committee comprising representatives from the NSW accreditation body, representatives of the three NSW school sectors with experience in course development and delivery and “experts in the development and delivery of high quality continuing professional development”.

These arrangements are part of a system that is arguably a de facto professional learning framework, with approved courses mapped back to the jurisdiction’s Professional Standards and supported by advice from the accreditation body to teachers that identifies development needs, provides advice on the quality, availability and appropriateness of courses and programs and seeks feedback on the quality and relevance of learning and development. NSW argues that this system, apart from ensuring high quality training development and delivery, ensures that professional development is relevant to the maintenance of teacher accreditation, ensures consistency across the jurisdiction, increases teacher participation in professional development and enables teachers to take a more informed responsibility for their own continuing professional development.

Running Professional Learning Courses

Teacher registration bodies in other jurisdictions tend not to run professional learning courses and programs preferring to provide strategic guidance and frameworks and leave the scheduling, coordination and/or facilitation of courses to employers and other providers. Victoria runs a number of courses across the jurisdictions, but these tend to focus on encouraging teacher and principal support for new educators through the development of specific leadership and mentoring skills.

The Western Australian body facilitates periodic symposiums and workshops on professional ethics for its members.

Issues

Once again, the issue here is the extent to which involvement in professional learning of teachers by an ACT registration body would add value to the quality of teaching in the ACT and enhance public confidence in the teaching profession.

As we have seen, the main focus for those teacher registration bodies that actively involve themselves in professional learning issues is on principles and frameworks that help ensure that their members have appropriate access to courses and training that will enable them to maintain their accreditation against the body’s own standards. There is little involvement in training delivery itself.

Arguments in support of this approach include:

- it could provide an independent element of quality control over the professional learning for teachers while avoiding perceptions of conflict of interest that could arise if the body was directly involved in course delivery;
- it could help ensure that teacher learning and development is focused on the broader skills requirements of the profession as well as the immediate needs of the employer; and
- done in an effective partnership with employers and other stakeholders, it could help ensure consistency in the quality of and access to teacher professional learning across the jurisdiction.

On the other hand, the experience of other jurisdictions might suggest that the development and maintenance of effective quality control frameworks is a complex and resource intensive issue. There may be less of an argument for it in a smaller and more compact jurisdiction like the ACT where there appears to be less of a problem in terms of inconsistencies between schools, specifically with access to and quality of professional learning and where, in the government system at least, there is already in place a framework (Professional Pathways) – aimed at linking the development of all teachers to professional and system wide requirements.