

Supporting career-long, on-going professional learning

Introduction

- 7.1 On-going professional learning is a vital part of the teacher education continuum. Teachers need to stay up to date with developments in the knowledge base in their discipline areas as well as with developments in corresponding pedagogical approaches. As they progress through their careers, teachers will be challenged by situations or student needs that warrant new learning on their part. In undertaking professional learning, and incorporating that learning into their practice, teachers are also generating new knowledge. There is a dynamic relationship between teaching, learning and research. The vigour of this relationship is in some respects an indicator of the quality and health of teaching at any point in time.
- 7.2 On-going professional learning is a shared responsibility. Employing authorities and schools clearly have primary responsibility for ensuring that teachers have access to quality on-going professional learning. Much of the on-going professional learning that is driven by employing authorities relates to curriculum developments or other specific priorities. Schools and principals also have responsibility for ensuring that teachers have access to on-going professional learning and for working with teachers to identify appropriate on-going professional learning programs. As professionals, teachers have particular responsibility to ensure that they stay up to date with developments in their field and to continue to invest time and effort in learning. Through sharing their learning with

others, either through participating in research or through informal collegiate support mechanisms, teachers are able to build a culture of learning that should be the hallmark of the teaching profession.

- 7.3 The Australian Government makes a significant contribution to on-going professional learning. The principle vehicle for its contribution is the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program (AGQTP) which aims to update and improve teachers' skills and understanding in priority areas and to enhance the status of teaching. The Australian Government's investment in the program for the period 1999-2009 amounts to almost \$300 million. Since the program began, more than 240,000 professional development opportunities have been taken up by teachers.¹ A recent evaluation highlighted its effectiveness and noted "that there is a continuing imperative for a single national program that focuses explicitly on teacher and school leader professional learning needs to address contemporary and emerging challenges in Australian schooling."² The committee commends the Australian Government's support of the professional learning of teachers and school leaders. It encourages the Australian Government to continue this level of support over the long term including its support of Teaching Australia which is funded under the AGQTP.

Issues concerning on-going professional learning

- 7.4 A number of issues concerning on-going professional learning were raised in this inquiry. These include:
- a decline in the number of teachers interested in postgraduate study which has been attributed to: the introduction of fees for postgraduate study; the increase in teachers' workloads; the ageing of the teaching workforce³; the lack of financial reward for gaining post graduate qualifications⁴; and the perception that further study was not linked to career advancement⁵;

1 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission No. 59*, p. 10.

2 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission No. 59*, p. 10.

3 See, for example: University of South Australia, *Submission No. 40*, pp. 7-8.

4 See, for example: Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission No. 143*, p. 11; Flinders University, *Submission No. 126*, p. 13.

5 See, for example: Mr Barry Kissane, School of Education, Murdoch University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 25 October 2005, p. 17; Ms Susanne Owens, Teacher Registration Board of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2005, p. 13.

- a decline in the amount of professional development undertaken⁶;
- the ad-hoc nature of the provision of on-going professional learning⁷;
- the need for a more coordinated approach to developing and providing on-going professional learning so that it is better matched to the needs of particular schools and districts⁸;
- the need for universities to be more involved in providing on-going professional learning⁹;
- the need to recognise the role of professional associations as providers of on-going professional learning¹⁰; and
- the difficulties in accessing on-going professional learning for teachers in rural and remote areas¹¹.

7.5 Developing stronger partnerships between employing authorities, universities and schools is potentially a key mechanism for addressing many of these issues and there are many examples of collaborative ventures in this area. The establishment of the National Teacher Education Partnership Fund recommended in Chapter 5 would encourage many initiatives to develop, provide and deliver effective on-going professional learning.

7.6 As professionals, teachers should be committed to on-going professional learning and this expectation should be formalised as a requirement for the renewal of registration. (The committee notes that some jurisdictions have introduced such a requirement and others are moving towards it.) Moreover, the expectation that teachers participate in on-going professional development should be coupled with systemic recognition of the value of on-going professional learning. In particular, participation in substantial on-going learning should be recognised as one of the ways of achieving higher levels of registration. Ways should also be found to recognise the private efforts of teachers to develop their expertise and

6 See, for example: University of South Australia, *Submission No. 40*, pp. 7-8; Flinders University, *Submission No. 126*, p. 13; Mr John Sarev, Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 August 2005, p. 25. Ms Glynys O'Brien, South Australian Primary Principals Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 September 2005, p. 77; Ms Susanne Owens, Teachers Registration Board of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 September 2005, p. 13.

7 See, for example: *Fostering in Health & Education Partnerships*, *Submission No. 11*, p. 6.

8 See, for example: Association of Independent Schools of SA, *Submission No. 122*, p. 19.

9 See, for example: Teachers Registration Board of South Australia, *Submission No. 38*, p. 5; Flinders University *Submission No. 126*, p. 13.

10 See, for example: Flinders University, *Submission No. 126*, p. 13.

11 See, for example: *Fostering in Health & Education Partnerships*, *Submission No. 11*, p. 6.

salary advancement or loadings attached to higher levels of registration should be considered.

- 7.7 Many submissions highlighted the potential of the national professional standards for teaching to provide a means of linking on-going professional learning to career progression. This is evidence of the readiness of the profession to adopt a standards-based approach to teacher registration and to career-long teacher professional learning.

Continued registration should no longer be on the basis of an initial qualification but should reflect a model of lifelong learning and demonstrated competence. All teachers, throughout their careers, should be engaged in systematic learning of a more substantial and rigorous kind than present 'in-service' days provide for. Notwithstanding the complexities of fair assessment, we believe teaching performance should be evaluated throughout the teaching career and that graduated steps are needed to make teaching a career based on quality of performance, with appropriate incentives and rewards, including rewards for completion of advanced university studies.¹²

Ideally, professional learning should have a coherent purpose and long-term direction. There should be an identified path of a teacher's learning journey; and this should be aligned with an individual teacher's professional competency measured against standards.¹³

At present there are too few inducements – salary increments and promotion opportunities – for teachers whether in the early years or later to undertake advanced study. Yet teaching should be presenting itself as a scholarly, learning profession. The development of professional standards and (continuing) registration requirements provides scope for addressing this issue with more attention to the structure and content of advanced degrees/diplomas and access to them.¹⁴

The requirements for continued registration proposed by the Queensland College of Teachers is seen as a positive means of ensuring the development of a structured framework across Queensland to replace the current ad hoc arrangements.¹⁵

12 Connell Skilbeck International Education Research and Consultancy, *Submission No. 24*, pp. 9-10.

13 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission No. 59*, p. 20.

14 Hobart Forum on Teacher Education, *Submission No. 171*, p. 6.

15 University of Southern Queensland, *Submission No. 146*, p. 4.

The Professional Standards of Teachers aligned against the National Framework offer the opportunity to clearly define and describe quality teaching and post-graduate and on-site professional learning requirements.¹⁶

In relation to the ongoing professional learning and development of teachers, we look forward to the findings of the report and the possibilities for the Government to enhance its investment in programs that lead to professional competency, professional accomplishment and professional leadership – those terms coming from successful completion or evaluation against standards – so that we see that there is an opportunity in the outcomes of this inquiry for teachers who are already in the game, so to speak, to have their professional career paths certified and valued in a way that has not been possible to this point. That would be done through the right combination of faculty, school and system professional association and government partnerships.¹⁷

The other thing that is going to drive professional learning to a large degree in New South Wales is the Institute of Teachers because it has four levels of accreditation: it has the basic graduate, beginning teacher level, but there is a professional accomplishment and professional leadership level, and those levels for ongoing accreditation are going to require documentation of professional learning. And, as part of that, there will be the approval of higher degree courses by the institute for teachers so they can actually do approved courses.¹⁸

16 South Australian Government, *Submission No. 157*, pp. 22-23.

17 Dr Michael Gaffney, Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 March 2006, p. 1.

18 Prof. Stephen Dinham, University of Wollongong, *Transcript of Evidence*, , 4 April 2006, p. 52.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- works through MCEETYA to encourage all registration authorities to require participation in on-going professional learning as a condition for the renewal of registration;
- encourages education authorities to work with registration authorities and teacher education providers to develop processes for recognising the value of on-going professional learning linked to higher levels of registration and provides some funding to assist in developing these processes; and
- works through MCEETYA to encourage employing authorities to recognise higher levels of registration in salary structures.

Building an evidence-based approach to pedagogy

7.8 The location of initial teacher education in universities should promote a strong relationship between research into teaching and learning and practice. Many universities and other stakeholders described ventures in which universities are conducting research in partnership with education authorities. In some cases they are also developing and offering related on-going professional learning. The committee encourages these developments and notes again the potential for the National Teacher Education Partnership Fund that it has recommended in Chapter 5 to deliver benefits in this area.

7.9 Despite some instances of universities collaborating with other stakeholders in areas of research and on-going professional learning, the committee remains concerned that much of the educational research that is being done in Australia does not find its way into teaching practice. Teaching Australia confirmed the committee's impression and outlined its intention to develop a mechanism for making relevant research more accessible.

One of the many features of a profession is that the work of its members is informed and validated by relevant, current, accessible and trustworthy evidence. Educational research that is relevant to classroom and school practice is too often inaccessible to teachers and school leaders. Teaching Australia is committed to making this research accessible to practitioners both through the form of its presentation and through its location.

Teaching Australia intends to examine the feasibility of establishing a National Clearing House for Educational Research. The challenge will be to identify and extract evidence-based information about quality teaching and school leadership and make it available in a 'user-friendly' format... Current databases are often difficult to use, inaccessible to teachers and insufficiently targeted to the needs of the teaching profession and other potential users. In addition, few resources are available that specifically organise educational research relevant to Australian schooling contexts.¹⁹

- 7.10 The committee strongly supports Teaching Australia's expressed intention in this area. Improving access to current relevant research would enrich the formal and informal on-going professional learning opportunities available to teachers. A National Clearing House for Educational Research would be of considerable benefit to all teachers but has the potential to be particularly so for teachers in rural and remote locations. There is also potential to link research available through the proposed National Clearing House for Educational Research to the development of specific on-line professional learning modules.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the Australian Government supports Teaching Australia's proposal to conduct a feasibility study into the establishment of a National Clearing House for Education Research. Should the study find that a National Clearing House for Educational Research would be of substantial value, then the Australian Government should fund its establishment. The value of the National Clearing House for Educational Research would depend on a number of factors including how aware teachers are of it. The level of funding should be sufficient to allow for input from stakeholders into its development as well as for the promotion of its use in informal and formal on-going professional learning.

Conclusion

- 7.11 The committee was fortunate enough in the course of this inquiry to meet with a number of teacher education students and recent graduates. Some of these students and graduates had entered teacher education straight from school. Others had entered teacher education from different careers or from family caring responsibilities. Without exception, the students

¹⁹ Teaching Australia, *Submission No. 168*, p. 12.

impressed the committee with their commitment, their professionalism and the value that they placed on teaching.

- 7.12 Ultimately the effectiveness of the initiatives to improve research and on-going learning, and the relationship between them, will depend on how fully teachers embrace a commitment to on-going professional learning as part of their professional identity. The following observation from the University of Wollongong confirms the impression that the committee gained through its own meetings with students and beginning teachers, and augurs well for the future.

What this all is leading to is a much greater coalition in the provision of teachers' professional learning. It will not just be department in-service or university formal courses. What we will see is courses put together by providers such as employers, professional associations and universities to meet the needs of these people, which will be driven by accreditation. But it also be driven by other things – people are actually wanting to learn and it will be a new generation with a different attitude.²⁰

20 Prof. Stephen Dinham, University of Wollongong, *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 April 2006, p. 52.