



**Australian Council of
Deans of Education Inc.**

**SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS**

Prepared and presented on behalf of ACDE by

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Australian Council of Deans of Education response

1. Does the preamble to the Standards give a clear picture of the context for the reason, use and purpose of the Standards?

The preamble gives a brief picture of the use and purpose of the standards. More explicit positioning of the draft Standards and their use and purpose would be useful. For example, the usual main purpose for establishing and using a set of professional standards is public accountability, specifically 'professional accountability', and the related status of the profession. Drawing on Linda Darling-Hammond's work in this area, the argument for this usually goes something like this:

Professional accountability involves three principles:

- Knowledge is the basis for permission to practice and for decisions that are made with respect to the unique needs of clients.
- The practitioner pledges his first concern to the welfare of the client.
- The profession assumes collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal, and enforcement of professional standards of practice and ethics. (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p.67)

A self-regulated teaching profession takes collective responsibility for ensuring that all those permitted to teach are well prepared, that they have and use all available knowledge to inform professional practice, and that they maintain a primary commitment to clients (that is, students and the public). A professional accountability model comprising these dimensions, represents a "policy bargain" that the profession makes with society whereby greater (self-) regulation of teachers is guaranteed in exchange for deregulation of teaching:

For occupations that require discretion, knowledge, and judgment in meeting the unique needs of clients, the profession guarantees the competence of members in exchange for the privilege of professional control over work structure and standards of practice. (Darling-Hammond 1989, 67).

Central to any professional accountability model for the teaching profession are clear statements of what it is that teachers know and are able to do. As Robert Yinger and his colleagues state:

The key to successful professionalization of any practice is to convince clients and the public that a professional, as a result of education and practical experience, possesses unique knowledge and skills that can be employed to solve the particular problems of practice and thus serve client needs. Research and knowledge-based standards can

convey the professional qualifications of teachers by creating a shared and public language of practice that not only describes how knowledge is used in practice but also becomes a vehicle for testing and elaborating the components of professional activity. (Yinger & Hendricks-Lee, 2000, p.94)

In this way, professional standards contribute to the professionalization of teaching and raise the status of the profession. Standards outline for a public that has a lot of ‘insider knowledge’ of teachers and teaching (because they have experienced 10-12 years of ‘apprenticeship of observation’ in schools as students themselves) what it is that effective teachers know and can do. Without this, many assume, because of their familiarity with schools and teachers, that there is nothing much to know about being a teacher; and, in any case, good teachers often make teaching look uncomplicated and easily enacted.

In addition to professional accountability and ensuring that only those well qualified are able to teach (by demonstrating particular levels of professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement), professional standards explicitly acknowledge a developmental view of teaching, of lifelong learning to teach, and enable teachers to plan professional learning goals and also provide a framework by which they can judge the success of their learning. Linked to this, a standards framework should align with various career transition points enabling teachers to plan for and develop their career trajectories. Little comment is made about these uses which in the final analysis need some alignment and reciprocity if teachers are to see them as credible and useful.

Claims are made in the preamble that need references to relevant supporting research. For example, the very first sentence claims without evidence, ‘The most important school-based factor in improving outcomes for students is the quality of their teachers.’ While many educators would agree with this (indeed it’s become something of a mantra), what research is being used to support this statement in this context? Likewise, the preamble says that the development process drew on ‘extensive research’ but no research is referenced, so the reader/ ultimate user does not have any way to judge the validity of the research that was used to inform the development of the standards and therefore the standards themselves. This is especially important in the context of the statement in the preamble that says that the standards ‘make explicit, for those within and outside the profession, the knowledge, skills and dispositions required of teachers at all levels’. Without valid and reliable empirical research that supports the delineation of the knowledge, skills and dispositions, the danger is that a kind of essentialism is invoked, particularly in relation to ‘dispositions’. In this way, the old adage ‘teachers are born with innate attitudes and dispositions’ is drawn into the conversation and foregrounds attitudes and dispositions and related ‘motherhood statements’ about teaching, all of which works assiduously to undermine the status of the profession.

Moreover, it is important to note that there is some slippage in terminology throughout the document with respect to the research-informed knowledge base on professional standards for teaching.

Sometimes Linda Darling Hammond's generally accepted definition that standards describe 'what teachers know and can do' is used and sometimes 'knowledge, skills and dispositions' is used. These are important differences.

We urge the developers to consider and explain why the terminology of standards for 'teachers' as opposed to standards for 'teaching' is being used.

Finally, reference is made to an expert working group as having done the development work so far, but the members are not listed so no judgement can be made about their knowledge, experience and representative capability to do this work.

- 2. Do the draft Standards describe a realistic and developmental teacher professional standards continuum?**
- 3. Do the draft Standards reflect what you would expect teachers to know and be able to do for each of the four levels (graduate/proficient/highly accomplished and lead teachers)?**
- 4. Are there other descriptors the draft Standards should include?**

Any set of professional standards needs to explicitly acknowledge the complexity of teaching. Challenging curriculum expectations and more diverse learners mean that teachers have to be more sophisticated in their understanding of the effects of context and learner variability on teaching and learning. Instead of implementing set routines, teachers need to become ever more skilful in their ability to evaluate teaching situations and develop teaching responses that can be effective under different circumstances. Therefore, it's important to acknowledge that no single approach to professional practice will be effective for all teachers in all settings, and consequently that although professional standards can articulate a common vision of quality teaching, they need to be able to capture the different ways in which teachers in a variety of settings can demonstrate their teaching effectiveness. It is especially important that effective teaching in schools that serve high-needs communities is able to be captured in any set of standards. Again, this will be ensured by research-informed and supported standards statements.

We stress the importance of providing clarity in relation to the processes by which the standards statements have been constructed. Sometimes standards are constructed by reviewing the research on effective teaching and effective teachers (what it is they know and do), sometimes they are constructed by teachers themselves reflecting on and recording what it is they know and do in their job, and often times it is some combination of this without any specific and overt acknowledgement of this. It's usually accepted that standards need to draw on a clearly articulated knowledge base for teaching informed by practitioner knowledge and well as researcher knowledge (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). This is not clear in the document and therefore it is difficult to comment on the validity of the standards statements without examining the validity of the research and process which informed them.

Likewise, there is no evidence for the proposed four levels of professional capability. There is relevant research and with the work currently done in the profession and the registration authorities across Australia, an argument could be presented to support framing of professional standards for teaching at three levels: i) entry to the profession as a beginning teacher, ii) as a fully qualified teacher after some period of supported and managed induction, and iii) as a highly accomplished teacher. However, the document does not present a convincing argument for 'Highly Accomplished Teachers' as well as 'Lead Teachers'.

The proposed three domains of teaching seem appropriate and can easily be supported by the relevant research literature (though it is not referenced in the document), and we endorse the emphasis on the three domains being interconnected, interdependent and overlapping.

In the area of Professional Knowledge, it is important that strong emphasis is given to pedagogical content knowledge - that specific way of knowing content in order to be able to teach it well. Research supports the need to have content knowledge as well as pedagogical knowledge, but it also highlights the centrality of pedagogical content knowledge as distinct from content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge is increasingly been seen as probably the most important form of teacher knowledge for informed judgment and decision making that is a necessary part of highly effective professional practice. There is a large and growing body of research examining teacher professional learning and professional practice in relation to the development, use and measurement of pedagogical content knowledge that could be examined (just one example: Ball, Thames, & Phelos, 2008).

In Professional Knowledge, we also urge stronger consideration of the socio-cultural understandings of the ways in which teachers, schools and systems operate and interrelate. If we are to think about quality teaching as intellectual work with teachers making all sorts of professional judgements as they carry out their work, then they need an extensive knowledge base to inform their decisions including ways of understanding what is happening.

Moreover, if we consider that quality teaching is intellectual work that involves professional judgment which draws on a professional knowledge base, consideration needs to be given to a developmental dimension of sets of standards which seek to build and hone professional judgment.

- 5. Remembering that there will be substantial support materials, will it be possible for educators to use the standards to evaluate teacher practice?**
- 6. Any additional comments?**

Since professional standards do not stand in isolation of how they will be used, much more needs to be made in the document about how the standards will be used to judge professional proficiency and to evaluate teacher practice (not necessarily the same thing). It is especially important to consider how all ‘stakeholders’ – teachers, registration authorities, employers etc - will make judgements about capability and proficiency in relation to the standards. It is also especially important that any assessment of teacher professional practice against these standards does not disadvantage those teachers in schools serving communities with high levels of poverty, diverse cultural backgrounds etc, whether it be for career transition or professional recognition.

The document says that standards will form the basis for accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses and initial teacher registration. It is important that the difference between ‘accreditation’ and ‘registration’ is clear. In the relevant literature, courses are ‘accredited’ and teachers are ‘registered’. The idea of ‘professional accreditation of teachers’ as stated in the document, is an anomaly. Moreover, since professional standards refer to what teachers know and can do, standards cannot be used to accredit teacher education courses. Rather they can be used to determine whether the graduates from an accredited teacher education course is eligible for teacher registration. The only way they could be used at the moment in relation to accrediting teacher education programs is individuals and/or groups making a subjective judgement about whether a course/ program will prepare a teacher who demonstrates the standards at an appropriate level. If the relevant research were included to support the standards statements, then this judgement could have more validity. Program or course standards are needed to make judgements relating to the accreditation of teacher education programs, and while these program standards can and should be linked to the professional standards for teachers, they are not one and the same thing.

There is much debate in the academic community about the value of subject specific standards as opposed to generic standards. The document is silent on this issue.

We believe it is important to acknowledge the professional standards work done to date in Australia. Various subject associations have created subject specific standards for accomplished practice in English language and literacy, mathematics and science (see Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, 2006; Australian Science Teachers Association, 2002; Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA), 2002) and more recently in geography. In addition, there was the early work on a national standards framework (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2003), and more recently Teaching Australia’s work on standards for school leadership and advanced teaching (Teaching Australia, 2008). One of the

problems we currently have in the profession in Australia is that there is a plethora of professional standards being developed and used and often there is no alignment or linking – they are developed and used in total isolation of each other. This set of national professional standards should go some way to bringing all the work together, or at the very least, providing an overarching framework with which various constituencies could align their work.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond and for the development work done so far. We look forward to ongoing involvement in the development of the standards as well as the procedures and processes by which they will be used.

References

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Comment: I am surprised to see no reference, one way or another, to the Senate Report (1997) *A Class Act*, which concerned the status of teachers and the professionalisation of teaching.