



Teacher Standards Submission



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School
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Overview

As the parent body for South Australia's public schools, SAASSO notes with disappointment the lack of genuine consultation for these 'standards'. Two obvious issues exist:

1. While the document is dated February 12, 2010, SAASSO did not receive a copy from the Teachers Registration Board until the third week of March, five weeks later. This left us with perhaps 6 weeks to confer with our board and state council (volunteers all), then disseminate to Governing Councils, for them to consider at their next scheduled meeting, before they then consult with their local parent community, collate the information gleaned, and provide feedback to SAASSO so that we could commence our submission - it is quite simply ridiculous to believe that this was ever going to be possible in such a short period.
2. SAASSO is unaware why consultation at the state level (at least in South Australia) was done via the Teachers Registration Board - whatever the reason, the outcome of this process is that South Australians are unaware that the proposed Standards even exist, let alone that they are out for consultation - so other than those who had the opportunity to provide input via SAASSO's submission, it is highly unlikely that much meaningful feedback will be received from parents or the greater SA community.

We suggest that in future, you communicate directly with a broader spectrum of the education community than just the teacher registration boards and set consultation periods which offer a realistic opportunity for the community to consider and provide feedback, if you genuinely seek opinions outside the insular education fraternities.

On the following pages we list some of the flaws in the various sections of the National Standards document. These objections, should not be considered exhaustive. Additionally on the following page, is a short list of specific questions not asked or answered in the Standards; also not exhaustive.

Fundamentally, these draft standards are disappointing and waste a unique opportunity to have a real impact on the quality of education we deliver to our children. Instead of the explicit definitions this document promises, we are delivered a jumbled, vague and at times meaningless collection of 'buzz words and adjectives'.

The Standards also fail spectacularly in supporting its arguments with any objective research. There are volumes of national and international data on teacher quality - from OECD data, to credible submissions from the Business Council of Australia (BCA), to a variety of studies on teacher quality and development and independent surveys of Australian teachers - all of which has apparently been ignored in preparing this document.

As an inevitable consequence, perhaps the most vital aspect of teacher quality - expert knowledge of the subjects that a teacher teaches is conspicuously absent from much of the standards. The Rudd Government's own Education Revolution Manifest emphasises how crucial a teacher's own basic literacy and numeracy skills are - but in the Standards we are confronted instead with the almost cliché concepts of pedagogies as being the be all of teaching.

While Teach First for Australia seeks to fast-track subject experts into classrooms, AEU and university surveys reveal that up to 40% of teachers have no qualification in the subjects they are teaching and our Federal Education Minister laments PE teachers teaching math, the Standards derive distinction between '*modelling to colleagues*' and '*assisting colleagues to critically evaluate*'.

A last, but not final, omission in these Standards is the practical issue of how they will be applied to the tens of thousands of teachers currently in schools - a number of whom may currently occupy a senior or leadership position in a school, because of seniority, but who would not meet new standards ... will their position be reassessed, or ignored?

Sadly, as with current teacher standards, these have a linear 'feel' to them - as if simply by the passage of time, teachers will inevitably move along the continuum to the highest levels of pay.

Introduction & Purpose

Introduction

The 'Introduction' states that the Standards 'make explicit, for those within and outside the profession, the knowledge, skills and dispositions required of teachers at each level'.

The 'Standards' employ language so vague as to say nothing - certainly nothing is explicit in the 'Standards' that would give anyone outside of the profession a clear definition of what knowledge and skills they could expect of their child's teacher. The language used makes nothing explicit or even clear; at times it borders on circular logic.

The Standards were developed through mapping and analysis of standards for teachers and school leaders in use by teacher registration and accreditation authorities, employers and professional associations in Australia.

This implies that the new Standards were developed simply by establishing what current standards exist - lacking the aspiration needed to raise the standard of teaching in Australia.

This statement also reveals there was no consultation outside the education fraternity, rather the process was limited to 'extensive consultation with the profession and all jurisdictions'. One suspects if consultation with the public was conducted before the Standards were written, a dramatically different document would exist.

Purpose

It is claimed that the document is 'grounded in research and knowledge of successful practice' - though there is no mention of whether this is academic research or just the surveyed opinions of those in the profession, as stated in the *Introduction*.

It is claimed the Standards 'encourage teachers to identify and engage in professional activities throughout their career...' - however, it is not clear how this document encourages teachers to any action, or even examples of the types of activities that are professional and appropriate.

What's missing

Much of this document seems almost intentionally vague, but the true disappointment is what is missing - what should have been in a national framework for teacher standards:

- There is no mention of who will measure the capacity of teachers against these standards - will it be left to the Teacher Boards, already derided as mere rubber stamps?
- There is no mention of how these Standards will be measured. The BCA calls for a body, independent of teacher groups and unions to assess teacher performance, while this document appears to endorse a more insular approach.
- Are these Standards to be mandated? How long can a teacher stay at Graduate level and what happens if they do not progress to Proficient? Or will all teachers eventually progress, no matter their standard?
- The Standards read as a linear progression; almost as if simply by serving enough time, a teacher will become a higher level teacher - but what if a teacher actually went backwards? With some standards involving 'current' knowledge, it is probable that teachers could slip backwards. Will this be addressed or can you only move one way along the continuum?
- These Standards could have set the national level of knowledge and skills required of teachers, but instead they seem an intentionally broad 'capture-all' that all existing state standards can fit into - leaving parents asking; 'what is the point?'
- The Standards paint an idealised view of education - such as all Graduates leaving university with the requisite knowledge and skills - which experts agree simply is not the case; and these Standards suggest nothing to address this most fundamental problem.
- The Standards do nothing to address the key issue of attracting the best people into teaching.

'Standards related to the level of expertise articulate what the profession believes its members attain.'

This sentence belongs in a Joseph Heller novel, not the national Teacher Standards Document - if standards are merely what people believe they are, can you really call them standards?

Levels of Professional Capacity

The four levels, seem less like distinct standards of teacher quality, and more like four distinct pay grades for teachers - very similar to the four-tiered performance pay structure proposed by the BCA in their 'Teaching Talent' document.

SAASSO endorses a knowledge-based performance pay model, but these Standards should be much more than just a new pay structure for teachers. As one parent commented, 'It's like they came up with the four pay levels and then just padded it with 'industry-speak' until they could call it a framework'.

Rather than define clear and ambitious knowledge and skill development, these Standards merely map a teacher's career over time.

Graduate Teacher

The clear feedback from parents is that they would not want a Graduate Teacher, as defined in these Standards, teaching their children.

Graduate Teacher is not a standard of teaching excellence, but rather a minimum qualification for someone seeking a position as a teacher. The implication that merely by progressing through a university teaching course, that someone is equipped to teach, is spurious. It is well established that:

- Australia's entrance requirements for teaching qualifications is too low - in some institutions, 59% is a satisfactory entry score.
- Australia recruits too many of its teachers from the bottom quartile of university graduates.
- There is no subject specific requirements for students entering teaching courses.
- The basic literacy and numeracy skills of those entering teaching has dropped to alarmingly low levels in the last two decades.

The Standards state that 'Graduate Teachers have approved qualifications and have met all requirements for employment as professionally registered teachers'. In reality, meeting the requirements of teacher registration boards is little more than passing a police check and paying your fee.

The Business Council of Australia states that, 'Teacher registration is a key quality assurance mechanism, but is merely a rubber stamp operation in most states and territories', with no assessment of skill or subject knowledge.

In most professions, university graduation is not sufficient to qualify an individual to independently practice their craft - further industry-based qualification or a provisional or probationary period is required before being declared. Nobody would permit a doctor fresh out of medical school with no peer review to operate on their child. Why then should parents be satisfied with a graduate with no experience and no independently assessed skills or knowledge teaching their children?

Proficient Teacher

'They meet the fundamental professional standards of the profession'.

Rather than explicit, this sentence is so without clear intent that it is meaningless in practical terms.

Given the clear deficiencies of the Graduate Teacher category (which the BCA would term a probationary teacher), the Proficient Teacher should be the entry level for teachers to be independently responsible for student learning.

Highly Accomplished Teacher

This category heads toward a definition with some clarity of expectation, without actually arriving.

The glaring - and repeated - issue here is the lack of objective measurement; instead of a measurable, explicit definition, a Highly Accomplished Teacher is apparently just 'recognised by others as accomplished'.

Lead Teacher

It seems clear to a reasonable person that this implies leadership teacher.

As with Graduate Teacher, Lead has clear connotations of a leadership position. Again, this is a job title or function, not a level of teaching performance or capacity.

It is ironic, therefore, that it is only at this final stage - as a teacher is about to leave the classroom - that they are required to have current knowledge of content ... While at previous levels it is apparently acceptable to have outdated knowledge.

Standards

Finally, the Standards are a set of boxes of different categories that often struggles to present any discernable differences.

These standards lack any defined examples of what a teacher at a particular level should be capable of.

With 42 separate Standards, there is no mention of what occurs when a teacher is Proficient in some and only at Graduate level in others.

It is disappointing that there is no mention of teachers being specifically qualified in the subjects they teach.

While SAASSO believes the Standards on the whole are vacuous, listed below are just some of the observations made:

Standard 1.6

'Graduate Teachers are aware of and can address the learning needs of all students, including the needs of gifted and talented students and those with disabilities or who are disadvantaged.'

Academics in South Australia state that, in fact, educating students with these particular needs is the area they feel least prepared for - but according to this document, all teachers graduate with these skills.

Standard 2.1

A Graduate *'knows and understands content, processes, skills, subject specific literacy and language and key issues in curriculum areas they will teach.'*

Meanwhile, a Proficient *'knows and understands content, processes, skills, pedagogy, subject specific literacy and language and key issues in curriculum areas they teach.'*

Evidently the only difference between a graduate and proficient teacher is the word *pedagogy* - belying the claim that these Standards are 'explicit'.

Standard 2.4

A Graduate, *'Knows and understands how to communicate effectively with students to engage them with the content being taught.'*

A Proficient, *'Knows and understands how to communicate with their students to promote understanding of the content being taught.'*

Again, the definitions are far from explicit and do nothing to establish a common language for educators and parents. Additionally, parents are rightly bewildered by the notion that some teachers promote an understanding of content in their children, while others are only able to engage - apparently lacking the ability to help their children actually understand the subject matter.

Standard 3.5

Graduate: *'Plan the use of strategies to assess student learning in relation to learning goals'.*

Proficient: *'Select strategies to assess progressively student learning in relation to learning goals'.*

Highly Accomplished: *'Select highly effective strategies to assess progressively individual student learning in relation to learning goals'.*

Evidently the difference between a graduate and proficient teacher is the word *progressively* and you are a highly accomplished teacher when the adjective *highly* is used to describe you.

One parent also asked why only Highly Accomplished teachers treat children as individuals and whether there would be a system for parents to request a Highly Accomplished teacher if they would rather their children weren't treated as a pack?

Standard 6.1

A Graduate, *'Uses professional teaching standards to evaluate regularly their professional knowledge, practice and engagement to guide their professional learning.'*

It is condescending to all involved that the authors believe that merely by using the word *professional* three times in one sentence, that they are going to convey an impression of professionalism - rather it implies that the author simply could not think of any other skills possessed by graduates.