

Professional Teaching Standards in Australia: A Case Study

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Executive Summary

In this paper, Tom Alegounarias and Maurie Mulheron provide a case study from Australia of the development of national Teaching Standards and resultant accreditation processes established over the last decade that have been generally supported by the teaching profession.

In recent years, Australian teachers have become increasingly concerned that the status of the profession is under constant challenge. Of course, these concerns are shared with teachers elsewhere. While teachers themselves have strong and resilient beliefs in the complexity and importance of the work they do, there are others, generally external to the profession and in positions of influence, with a deficit view.

In the absence of objective benchmarks that reflect authentic professional practice, solutions have been offered in many jurisdictions that are antagonistic towards teachers as well as being unsuccessful. These include performance pay schemes, the employment of people without teaching qualifications, the spread of the Teach for America franchise, and punitive accountability regimes that are, more often than not, based on testing data.

In essence, from initial teacher education, to the granting of a teaching qualification, to induction into the profession through to ongoing professional learning, the trend was for teaching to become increasingly deregulated, and subject to market forces, at times based on supply and demand.

The paper outlines how in Australia a consensus was finally reached among education policy makers, who generally had a teaching background, supportive political forces, academics working in this field and the teaching profession itself represented by teaching unions. The consensus concerned the need for teachers to engage in the issue of defining what constitutes good professional practice.

But the first question that needed to be answered was: what makes teaching a profession? The answer to that question needed to reflect the authentic practice of teachers and those understandings shared across the profession. In short, a common language needed to be created

that could articulate the complexities of the daily practices of a qualified, competent teacher, from those beginning their career through to those that hold educational leadership positions in schools.

These Standards were eventually developed in a collegial manner across the profession. Eventually there was agreement around the use of the term 'Teaching Standards'. But, the Standards came to be some criteria or a set of principles that could reflect, explain but also guide authentic professional practice.

For the Teaching Standards to gain currency they had to be developed, accepted and regulated by the teaching profession itself and this has largely been achieved.



Finally, the paper outlines the uses to which the Teaching Standards are applied from assessing initial teacher education courses, to induction processes for beginning teachers, to regulating the quality of the professional learning offered to teachers throughout their career, through to articulating the more complex skills and experiences required for aspiring school leaders.

Introduction and Overview

Australia has implemented a system of formal recognition against professional teaching standards nationally since 2011ⁱ. The system was adopted largely from one that had been implemented in the state of New South Wales (NSW) from 2005. Teacher unions including the largest national body, the Australian Education Union (AEU)ⁱⁱ, have been key participants in the development of Standards and related policies – arguably the most significant educational reform in Australia for decades.

The adoption of the Standards has come with increased policy influence and some significant industrial and financial victories for the AEU. While the causal relationship is not always direct, there is no doubt that the increased ability of the union to exercise leverage has at least been bolstered by the strategic decision to work pro-actively in this policy area. Since 2005 the system of professional recognition against Standards and the application of related policies in schools in NSW, have provided a platform for unions to negotiate improvements in industrial conditions of teachers and financial support to schools, improvements broadly appreciated by teachers.

The particular approach to Professional Teaching Standards adopted in Australia is multidimensional, in that it can be applied at a number of stages in a teacher's career. The Standards can be adopted as a statement of commitment to defending and promoting the quality of teaching, without particular implications for practice, or as a specific process for allocating formal accreditation status to teachers, as well as a basis for evaluating services provided to teachers. Any aspect of this framework might be adapted or adopted in different ways in different contexts. Indeed, the Australian approach itself is implemented variably through the nation and was originally developed on the basis of ideas developed in non-Australian jurisdictions including in particular Scotland and the United States.

This paper will describe the way in which the integrated framework has been implemented to support the professional standing of teachers in Australia, in NSW in particular, and the impacts so far. Teacher participation in the development of the Standards, and the centrality of teacher judgment in their implementation, are crucial aspects of their credibility and policy power.

In the specific New South Wales and Australian context, it is arguable that at the time the real and imminent threat of a neo-liberal reform agenda provoked the AEU into adopting an approach to regulating teaching that it would otherwise have been reticent to engage. Teacher Unions had long argued for Standards and registration, and had long viewed the development of Standards as a potential firewall against de-professionalisation caused by downgrading qualification



requirements, and that they could also be used to negate calls from conservative politicians to introduce performance pay based on test scores.

The Australian political context since the 1990's has been not dissimilar to that which exists in many jurisdictions around the world, and the experience if not the benefits of Professional Standards in this case study, may resonate in many jurisdictions at this time of challenge to the profession's standing around the world.

The Australian Political Context, Briefly

Australia is constituted as a Federation of eight jurisdictions, varying widely in geographic expanse and population size, as well as socio-economic and cultural mix. There are two main political parties and most jurisdictions have a bicameral legislature with a variety of smaller political entities more often than not holding the balance of power in the secondary house, or Senate, of each jurisdiction. There are three main school sectors – Independent schooling which is diverse but mostly religious provision, Catholic systems which charge fees but generally operate at about the resourcing levels of public schools, and majority Government or public schooling which carries the costs and responsibilities of universal access, and is a constitutional responsibility of the states.

Unsurprisingly, achieving common national policy prescriptions is mostly tortuous, and often fanciful. The most likely way forward is that one state takes a reforming path as an experiment, and then the Federal government, and then other jurisdictions, follow - unless political opponents can see any benefit in exploiting any disenchantment generated by the reform, which of course they usually can, and thus scuttle it at any point on the reform path. In summary, educational reforms that make it through to national standing need to be well founded in principle and in practice, and have survived severe partisan interrogation.

Arguably since the late 1970s progressive reforms have been constrained still further by the dominance of conservative political thinking. Australian teachers would not claim to be unique in this regard, but Australia's general political culture since the 1980s has played the role of coalmine canary for global conservative trends. Australia can claim surely, if not proudly, to have heralded monetarism before Ronald Reagan and before Margaret Thatcher, to have pre-empted Blairite 'third way' neo-liberalism in the early 1980s and moved to lock borders to political and needy economic refugees, well before the recent ruptures in Europe and the United States. And in education, politicians on both ends of Australia's narrow continuum have looked toward increased liberalisation of school administration accompanied by test based public accountabilities, characteristic of conservative trends in many Anglo speaking jurisdictions and more broadly over recent years.

In this environment the state of NSW is the most conservative and cautious of the nation. Progressive political reforms as well as conservative ones, take longest to arrive to NSW, if they



arrive at all. And this is not usually a source of concern to teachers or to their unions. It's not the sort of culture that feels the need to adopt change for its own sake.

So, by the late 1990's when Professional Teaching Standards reforms began to ruminate, NSW regulation in teaching had been largely unchanged since the war.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Push to Reform Teaching

By the 1980's every state in Australia other than NSW had established a regulatory Teacher Registration process, largely in response to child abuse scandals over the decade.^{iv} Getting Registered as a teacher essentially entailed 3 steps: Graduate from a teaching course of an existing university; get a police-sourced certificate recognising a clear child protection history; pay \$100. Boards with various levels of teacher representation were established in each state, but the capacity for teachers to engage, or to exercise judgment on what teaching practice met a Standard was limited.

When the Teacher Registration process was being established in those other states its big advantage for the profession was argued to be that it created a definitive list of teachers – a Register. At its most adventurous the rhetoric supporting Registration claimed that this created a profession, because the Register was a list of individuals with specifically recognised tertiary qualifications.

This was generally understood as the next step in the continuing post war evolution of educational policy toward universal quality. Priorities had grown from quality academic education for some and vocational education for most others, to a high minimum education for all, to universal school completion for all by the 1980s. The next priority was the quality of that education. And minimum qualifications for teacher Registration was regarded as the next stage of universal quality education.

In NSW, the merits, but also the limitations of teacher registration process, were recognised from the beginning. Limiting access to the title of Teacher to individuals that were registered was a positive step. On the other hand, administrators and some unionists argued that unless there was a reference point for the teachers themselves to recognise the quality of university teaching qualifications, and the basis upon which individuals could enter the profession, teaching would lack real professional status. If teachers aren't involved in judging standards and entry, universities, with interests beyond their education faculties, and employers with obvious vested interests, not to mention politicians with interventionist motivations, would determine the number and composition of the teaching workforce, in other words the status and standing of the profession. On this basis, teacher unions in NSW began careful campaigning for teacher Registration, and associated Standards.^v

In response to this there was a concerted effort in 1998 to pass NSW legislation which would establish a Teaching Board which would then allow for the establishment of Professional Teaching Standards of some sort. The permissive generality of the proposed legislation was its



flaw. This and the fact that it would apply to government teachers alone, meant that it was opposed, reluctantly, by teacher unions and, vigorously, by conservative politicians, failing to get through the legislature by a single vote. So, at this stage of the evolution of Professional Teaching Standards in Australia, teacher unions could see the benefits of Standards, but they could also see the dangers of a formal description of teachers' work, and its potential ill uses if not carefully controlled. At the beginning of the millennium NSW had no policy addressing teacher professional standing, and no regulatory overview.

In the Australian context this vacuum was always going to be filled. The question for the teaching profession was this: who is going to fill it? The nature of Australia's economy meant that it globalised earlier than most. From the early 80s Australia pushed for trade liberalisation and sought to draw international capital to fill the hole created by consistent trade deficits. It was recognised that to attract international capital (beyond investment in primary industries which is subject to price cycles beyond the control of government), Australia would rely on qualifications and preparation of the workforce - the 'quality of the human capital'. At the same time, local and international research was highlighting that teaching was the key variable that public policy could influence in raising educational attainment. For some three decades the Australian polity had been building its awareness of the importance of education and the particular importance of teaching to the economy. The only issue was the nature of the reform.

The major push in Australia was toward the liberal, or neo-liberal, or marketised approach, and was generally bipartisan. At the national level, the social democratic Labour government in 2011 first proposed performance pay for teachers based on student outcome data, though the issue has been part of the conservative discourse for some time. The proposal was part of a feverish discussion on 'how to lift teacher performance' which had already included moves to dilute tenure or permanency, localise teacher appointment processes and free up the 'rigidities' of teacher salary structures.

Charter schools in a variety of forms were also introduced and the school choice agenda dominated the discussion.^{vi} The overarching view in the political class was that a regulatory approach to quality schooling was inadequate to meet the challenges of the new economy and the forces of the market would need to be brought to bear.

The Idea of Professional Teaching Standards

By the late 1990s an early and specific form of teaching Standards was introduced across Australia sponsored by teacher unions in the form of an Advanced Skills Teacher^{vii}. From the perspective of employers this could be used to spread salary differentials or to create quotas for educational promotion positions. The strength of Australian teacher unions managed in most cases to appropriate these initiatives toward new automatic incremental salary progressions. While some semblance of these approaches remained in place for years, by the year 2000 the Advanced Skills Teacher initiative were generally regarded as another semi-honourable failure. The general cynicism toward regulating teaching was compounded by this



experiment which was regarded by policy makers and by teachers as a cynical and counter-productive artifice for controlling teachers and their pay structures.

At the same time, Standards were the only option for countering conservative calls to deregulate teaching. Some positive developments were well underway in the United States, where the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) had been constructively involved in teaching Standards processes. A number of Australian teacher union representatives, including Sharon Burrow and Patrick Lee, had been to the United States and engaged with individuals such as Jim Kelly and had come back impressed by the potential to counter the neoliberal rhetoric with policy approaches that protected the participation and status of teachers. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) approach was seen to be a potentially positive model of corporatist cooperation. Certainly, in the United States certification by the NBPTS was helping to hold out the conservative push for 'multiple-choice' exams for teachers. The perennial state by state battle in the United States to establish minimum 'licensing' requirement was being hotly contested, and the NBPTS processes were being proffered as a potential benchmark to ultimately lift all teachers to a required qualification, as a condition of employment.

In Great Britain, we had the emergence of the General Teaching Councils. These approaches emphasised the importance of teacher participation in policy development and the importance of an independent teaching voice. These included broad participation of unions. The significance of these Councils, most notably the General Teaching Council of Scotland, was in providing a voice for teachers in professional process that were otherwise defined as industrial.

In Canada the Ontario College of Teachers, which was established in 1996, within a couple of years had established Standards, a Teacher Council and a Register of Teachers.

A decade later, the work of a number of Australian academics and professional associations^{viii} who had picked up on the international, largely Anglosphere, trend, began spreading more broadly.

The discussion gained energy because it provided an opportunity to explore issues of concern related to professional practice and interaction without the fraught associations that could be made with industrial conditions. That is, individuals with knowledge and expertise, including teachers and union representatives, could discuss crucial issues that went to the quality of teachers' lives, on a 'without prejudice' basis. Of course, there were fears from both employers and unionists that issues would emerge that might unleash political pressures that were counter to their constituent interests. But a number of factors served to countervail such an effect.

Teachers were of course already continuously discussing teaching practice and the ethical basis of teaching as a profession. Such discussions were (and are) often informal and localised, but also often formal and generalised through non-industrial professional bodies. So, in fact, there was nothing new in the content of discussions just because they were held under the banner of 'professional standards'. It was recognised that the Standards discussion was coming with force from overseas and going to build in any case. Unions were always central to organised discussions. It should be noted that the NSW Teachers Federation had always been regarded as



the industrial and professional voice of its members, many of whom, due to subject expertise, had always been active in issues beyond the industrial such as syllabus writing, professional development and serving on external examination writing committees.

A Multi-Stage, Inclusive Evolution

The discussion was given a focus when in 1999 the NSW government established a formal review of the quality of teaching. The reviewer Dr Gregor Ramsay recognised the importance of engaging teacher unions along with other stakeholders and sought to address the shortcomings of previous processes.

The report that emerged from the review in 2000, *Teaching Matters*^{vi}, did not focus on Professional Teaching Standards as such but on the need to develop a coherent and sustainable professional culture in teaching. The report did not disparage the importance of employment or industrial arrangements, but did argue that the historical evolution of teaching and schooling had left a legacy of reliance on employers for supporting teachers' professional practice. Professional learning opportunities and judgments of quality in teaching, including entry to the profession and professional status were all undertaken under the auspices and therefore the effective control of teacher employers. A coherent, self-sustaining and genuine professional culture that recognised but existed in parallel to employment relations, was in the interests of teachers. And such a culture required a professional infrastructure, an institutional set of arrangements that were not mediated by the employment imperatives of any given time or place. This must include professional teaching Standards. The report did not attempt to define the specific nature or applications of those Standards.

Dr Ramsey dubbed teaching the first profession, the profession of professions. He noted that teaching is the professional practice most necessary for building other professions. All others - doctors, dentists, actuaries, pass through our hands on their way to professional status. And yet, teaching does not have the institutions and the discourses that promote the actual practice of

teaching. Teacher unions could and should be part of such a professional infrastructure, but a profession also requires reference points, practices and institutions that articulate and promote the ethics and actual professional practices of teachers, and it is in the interests of all parties for teaching to achieve this.

The report was well received, including by teacher, but as so many legitimate but precarious interests were involved the government created another intermediate step by, in 2001, established a Working Group for the establishment of an Institute of Teachers, chaired by a very well regarded senior bureaucrat, Dr Jim McMorro. This report set out the architecture of a comprehensive institutional arrangement for supporting the teaching profession.

The reasoning explicitly or by implication, of the McMorro report still holds true today and can apply universally:



- Descriptions of professional practice, (named Standards in NSW, but a rose by any other name), are the foundation of a credible profession
- Policies associated with the Standards must recognise the working realities of teachers and their aspirations for a better professional existence
- Professional Standards can only be credibly developed through participation of teachers through their representative bodies.

On the premise of these understandings McMorrow and his working group described key dimensions of policies and institutional arrangements that could deliver the Professional Teaching Standards ambition. Arguably the most substantial contributions were made by the teacher unions.^x

Having come this far, and in the context of substantial political resistance (described further below), policy makers were still unwilling to risk moving too quickly.^{xi} The next step taken was to establish an Interim Committee for the Establishment of an Institute of Teachers (2002), chaired by a teacher educator Professor Dr Alan Hayes. The Interim Committee produced a report describing a range of policies including a Framework of Professional Teaching Standards (2003)^{xii} and a proposal for legislation (2004).

The NSW and Australian Professional Teaching Standards and Associated Policies

The development of the Standards and associated policies helped elucidate a number of professional controversies that previously emerged only spasmodically. These were not politically motivated (political arguments are set out below). The most crucial issues related to terminology, and the role of professional judgment.

Language

The use of the word Standards itself was debated. Opposition was expressed on the basis that the word implies judgment and potential inadequacy of teachers, or at least some teachers. The fear was that it would be used to describe inadequacies of teaching as a political tool to undermine teaching conditions and/or to apply tighter accountabilities.

The arguments in favour of Standards included that the policy was attempting to describe reasonable and realistic expectations of practice and that this needed to be done by the profession

itself rather than by others. The legitimacy of the Standards would be determined by the content and wording of the Standards. The proactive development of Standards by teachers



themselves would help counter the conservative push for simplistic approaches to student outcomes data^{xiii} to evaluation teachers. The Standards terminology became quickly accepted.

A phrase that was rejected was assessment in the context of making judgments of teachers against the Standards. The NSW Teachers Federation (NSW AEU branch) in particular, but also teachers generally, were unwilling to accept the same language as exists at the core of teaching practice for students, for teachers themselves. Professional judgment gained currency. Another symbolic but significant language adjustment was that the use of the word Teaching Standards rather than Teacher Standards. This highlighted the primary intent of the policy to support and improve the general work of the profession, rather than to monitor in any overbearing and professionally restricting fashion the work of individual teachers.

Professional Judgment

There was a paradoxical concern that Standards would be used to reduce teachers' scope of judgment as to what constitutes effective teaching.

In itself this argument did not survive consultation discussions with teachers, but it was broadly argued that to guard against this possibility, and to fulfil the potential of Professional Teaching Standards, opportunities for teachers to exercise judgment should be maximised in processes to apply the Standards. Processes of 'moderation' in interpreting the Standards in various circumstances would allow teachers to build knowledge and understanding.

The Standards themselves would also be subject to review after a set period of time. The practice of exercising collegial judgment against Standards would allow the evolution of better Standards if that was required, the process itself allowing teachers to share even deeper understanding and protectiveness of their practice.

Such debates were used to engage teachers and their representatives and had the effect of building support. The committee recommended the establishment of a NSW Institute of Teachers as the original Standards Authority,^{xiv} and the following key policies:

Standards at four levels

A key element of the NSW Standards Framework, sustained in the current national Standards, is the description of practice at four levels: Graduate, Competent; Accomplished.

Accreditation at the higher levels of Accomplishment or Leadership is a professional status that exists independently from employment based decisions for management purposes. On the other hand, while accreditation Accomplished, or Leadership is professional recognition, it can be utilised in employment related processes such as promotion to faculty head on a voluntary basis by employers.

Opposition from some teachers to differentiating levels of Standards was on the basis that the approach could undermine the collegial solidarity of teachers. A related argument was that effective teaching is far too interrelated with the practice of colleagues and cannot be legitimately accorded to any individual's work.

The arguments in favour of differentiated levels included, at the most fundamental level, that teachers recognise that some practitioners are outstanding to some degree. A combination of deep knowledge, personality traits, experience and outstanding commitment, leads to some practitioners

standing out and winning the admiration of their colleagues. The collegial context within which teachers achieve outstanding practice is relevant, but the individual's professional standing among their peers still holds. On this basis it was argued that just as every other profession takes it upon itself to celebrate the best practitioners within that profession, recognition of outstanding teachers would be positive.

This would also help stave off the pressure coming from conservative voices to impose performance pay. The conservative argument being made strongly at the time was that, instead of recognising excellence, teachers apply industrial principles of solidarity which have the effect, if not the intention, of protecting the least able or incompetent in their midst and undermining the quest for improvement.

On the basis of a careful policy process, outlined below, all stakeholders including teachers ultimately endorsed a Standard Framework that differentiated practice at four levels.

Policy – processes for 'accreditation' against the Standards

The following is a precis:

Graduate Accreditation is attained by graduating from a tertiary education course that has been approved by an Initial Teacher Education Committee^{xv} of the Standards Authority. The committee is constituted in teachers (practicing teachers accredited at Highly Accomplished or Leadership when they are available); and teacher educators. The approval process considers teaching programs presented by universities for renewal every five years.

Proficient Registration^{xvi} (originally termed Competence Accreditation, the terminology has been adjusted in the move to national Standards) is achieved through a school level judgment undertaken under the auspices of the Standards Authority and in accordance with the legislation. Proficient status is achieved over a period of 1-3 years and the speed and exact nature of the process is determined at school level, within the requirements of the policy which centre on being supportive of new teachers. Registration requires a judgment against the Standards by an experienced teacher, co-signed by the teacher seeking Registration. The policy is supported by a moderation process where patterns of Registration within and across schools are monitored. Schools in which patterns of Registration appear against the intentions of the legislation can have their right to Register teachers removed, and therefore lose their right to hire new teachers. Continued transgressions lead to the school's legal right to exist being threatened. Graduate teachers seeking Registration at Proficient are provided with direct support by the Standards Authority^{xvii}, independent of the school or employer.

Initially this Registration was 'grandparent-ed' in through being mandatory only for teachers that began teaching from 2004. Currently some 60% of active teachers are Registered. From the end of 2017, all remaining teachers will be deemed into Registered status.



Accreditation/Certification at the Accomplishment and Leadership levels are voluntary and achieved through an iterative process between the Standards Authority and the teacher's school, guided by legislation. Patterns of Accreditation at these levels, within and across schools are monitored by a Moderation and Consistency Committee of the Standards Authority, which is constituted in and chaired by teachers.

Policy – Continued Professional Learning

To maintain accreditation teachers are required to achieve 100 hours of professional learning over five years. Teachers Accredited at Accomplished and Leadership can fulfil these obligations through their professional leadership activities such as lecturing, running professional learning activities etc.

Professional learning providers also need to be approved by a committee of practicing teachers. All potential providers - commercial, non-government and public, including schools and systems, need to be approved. This allows teachers to preview and then judge the bona fides of professional learning courses on offer.

Policy – Governance

The Report of the Interim Committee establishing this policy framework recommended that Standards and related policies should be governed by a Quality Teaching Council, chaired by an educator. The Council should be constituted in elected teachers and appointed teachers from all school sectors. There would also be a Board with responsibility for overseeing administrative and financial matters with the same Chair as the Quality Teaching Council.

Initially this was established as a separate agency, The NSW Institute of Teachers, supported by an annual accreditation fee of \$100 AUD for from all accredited teachers to be used only to support the Registration/Accreditation process and related issues. The institutional form of the Standards Authority has changed since its establishment, but it has maintained a teaching advisory body and has maintained legally hypothecated fund monitored by an independent Council and Chair.

The Process for Developing the Standards

The Standards development process is arguably the most significant dimension of this case study.

Step 1: All key school education bodies were asked to nominate currently practicing teachers for each level of schooling, primary and secondary, and representing the range of perspectives and interests^{xviii}.

Step 2: A series of meetings of the nominated teachers were held in focus group style to consider the key elements or organisational points of Standards (the Framework). Groups were



formed and reformed on different criteria to consider drafts of the Framework and then the actual Standards Statements as they were being developed^{xix}.

A comfortable consensus on elements of a draft Framework was achieved. A key aspect of this work and crucial to its success was the trust achieved by the officers or staff of the Authority among the practicing teachers on the panels. This was facilitated by allowing both union and employer representatives to attend any of the meetings at any time.

Step 3: The draft Framework and Standards Statements were shared with two independent experts, Elizabeth Kleihenze and Charlotte Danielson, for advice with regard to their 'on the face of it' validity. That is, did the wording of the draft Framework or draft Standards Statements makes sense, fit with each other, allow for common interpretation? Any changes were returned to representatives groups of teachers for comment and in-principle endorsement.

Step 5: The draft Framework and Standards Statements were subjected to a formal and independent academic validation exercise^{xx}. The independent research engaged practicing teachers in a process where they were asked to order the Standards Statements relative to each other without the guidance of the Framework. That is, teachers were asked to organise the random Standards Statements in groups and in an order, that made sense to them. The underlying question being asked was – did each teacher read each Standard Statement to have the same meaning and applicability in the context of their particular experience? And, did the Framework provide a credible and recognisable way or organising the Standards? The sample of teachers used for this exercise included slightly disproportionately higher numbers of rural and younger teachers and teachers from low socio-economic areas. The process indicated a correlation of teacher judgment at 97%.

Step 6: A Draft Framework of Teacher Standards was published and distributed for broad consultation. All schools and teacher organisations received multiple copies and responses were invited in a variety of forms including survey, submission and short response.

The Political Arguments

The comprehensive process helped dissipate scepticism about the Standards from many teachers and teacher organisations.

The next stage was the consideration of the Standards and associated policies by the NSW Parliament. The proposal was always going to be contested from a number of perspectives:

From the Liberal Conservatives

Conservative arguments from within the Liberal/National Coalition (liberal conservative) and Labour Party (social democrats) were the most dominant of those opposed to Standards. While the arguments overlapped, the following is a summary of the main threads:



Standards would be the basis for unions to campaign for pay increases. There was suspicion that Standards would be used as an artificial barrier to entry, to limit supply and force pay increases for teachers.

There was also an argument that the higher-level Accomplishment and Leadership accreditation, if it were to occur, should be limited by quota. It was seen as a re-run of the Advanced Skills Teacher experiment (see above) which became a basis for soft access to an additional pay step.

The process would simply give control of professional issues to the unions. There was a general resistance to including the teacher unions in key discussions and into 'insider' understandings, that is: Keep the unions out of the employers/governments/system control nexus.

It's just more bureaucracy. A Standards and Registration/Accreditation process would simply add burdensome regulatory requirements to teacher employment processes which should be simple and direct. The relationship between schools/principals and teachers should not be mediated by a bureaucratic process, let alone one which is dominated by the self-interest of unions.

Teaching is not a real profession. This argument was presented earnestly and with a number of variations. It was said that if teaching were a profession it would not rely on regulatory authority to establish status and coherence. From this perspective teaching was either an ethical vocation or a form of public benefaction. There were two powerful and specific perspectives proffered by conservatives in this argument: The first was that the quality of initial teacher education did not warrant teaching being regarded as a profession, individuals emerge from teaching degrees without the uniformity of quality that a true profession would insist on. In professions the relationship between the practice and the theoretical base is tight and individual members of the profession are vigilant to ensure that quality is upheld but this is not the case in teaching, they argued.

The second argument was that teachers resist recognising and celebrating outstanding quality from among their members which a true profession uses to drive both status and improvement.

These characteristic anti-regulatory arguments were the strongest source of opposition and dominated the arguments against Standards within the bureaucratic and political authority environments. They were not, however, the only source of opposition. Within unions and among teacher professional bodies there were also elements of resistance.

From Some Progressives

From the progressive end of the political spectrum, the following overlapping arguments were frequently articulated:



Professional Standards and regulatory processes are outside the correct scope of interest for teacher unions. The Professional Standards debate is a distraction from the core mission of unions, and there is potential for it to undermine unions' commitment to protecting teachers' interests.

Standards are simply a way of imposing strict working conditions on teachers.

Governments, employers and teachers will use Standards to describe increasingly strict and restrictive work practices on teachers. The term Standards implies an existing inadequacy in teaching practices that needs to be addressed.

Professional Standards are a tool for surveillance of teachers. By codifying teachers' professional practice Professional Standards will be available to measure and monitor teacher 'effectiveness' from an employer or state apparatus perspective.

Professional Standards reduce the contingent complexity of teachers' work. The codification of teachers' work implied in the Standards themselves is reductionist and limits the potential for teachers to exercise their professional freedom.

Accreditation of teachers at higher levels will undermine professional solidarity and cooperative practice. Teaching is a cooperative and collegial practice in which outstanding individual practice cannot be authentically separated. Separating individuals' achievements for recognition will be used to undermine the political and industrial solidarity of teachers as a group.

The Counter Arguments in Favour of Professional Standards

The arguments in favour of Standards included those supporting professional Standards as a timely evolution of the profession, appropriate for promoting the interest of teachers to the broader community, and those arguments that saw Standards as a pragmatic response to conservative political pressures.

Professional Standards are a simple and common expression of teachers' work which assists in professional coherence and cooperation. An essential and inescapable aspect of professionalism is a common reference point for discussing professional practice. Standards cannot define, proscribe or prescribe a teacher's actual practice, but they can only allow for a more direct way of discussing practice and effectiveness.

Importantly Standards provide a common reference for specific and technical professional discussions beyond the employer defined boundaries of any school, system or jurisdiction.

A public and transparent expression of what professional practice represents is necessary to protect the integrity of the profession. In the absence of a transparent statement of what professional practice represents, it is left to others to postulate and assert their expectations of teaching and teachers. Clear and transparent public exposition of what effective teaching is, and what the profession therefore expects of itself, is necessary for teachers to assert legitimate control of their professional conditions.



Teaching is a public profession and Standards provide the ethical transparency necessary for public standing. If professional Standards were not necessary to facilitate effectiveness and protect the interests of teachers, they would nonetheless be an important ethical commitment from teaching, describing what the community has a right to expect from any profession that fulfils a public purpose.

Standards are necessary to protect entry into the profession. Any formal requirements for entering the profession (Standards) will mandate high level and recognised tertiary qualifications. This was a particular area for concern in Australia at the time of the development of the Standards as liberal market ideology was beginning to encroach into teacher education policy, as it has subsequently and around the world. The need to ensure that teachers were defined at least by their qualifications requires an articulation of what effective teaching is and therefore why a qualification is necessary.

Indeed, in an era of encroaching marketisation across all public policy, Professional Teaching Standards are necessary to protect the integrity of entry into university teaching courses and the credibility of teaching qualifications. The relationship between teaching qualifications and effective teaching is iterative – strong theoretical and content knowledge is informed by practice. Assuring the integrity of this process necessitates expectations of graduate teachers – Standards.

This argument has if anything grown in significance since the establishment of the Standards in Australia. There is continued discussion in policy forums and media commentary, that there are shortcomings in Initial Teacher Education with some arguing that those shortcomings can only be addressed through employers exercising their choices, or market power.

Standards are necessary for recognising and rewarding outstanding teaching practice. If the premise that there are outstanding practitioners within teaching as there are in all other professions is accepted, then the question of how to recognise such outstanding practitioners arises. In Australia at the time of these debates the threat of using student outcome data, independent of context, to determine outstanding teaching was real and imminent. The Australian Government had formally proposed policies of providing reward payments for outstanding teachers and began a discussion on how to ‘measure’ outstanding teaching on the basis of national test scores.

Accreditation/Certification of outstanding teachers according to Standards and professional judgment was necessary to pre-empt this policy.

Standards and the use of teacher judgments against the Standards can help build career structures that have more authentic regard to practice. Judgments for employment based promotion are generally employer based judgments, sometimes with weak professional moderation. In the absence of Standards developed and defended by the actual profession, the profession’s influence on promotional decisions is necessarily precarious and subject to strong employer prerogative.

All system policy can be misapplied and the possibility of this with regard to teaching Standards should not stop us from pursuing genuinely progressive policy. The danger of



limiting teachers' freedom or imposing oppressive work practices is not a function of Standards but of negative intent toward teachers. Negative, anti-teacher policies are not facilitated by Standards, but by policies that leverage employer prerogative and time management. Standards that credibly capture the complexity of effective teaching in fact help mitigate the dangers of employer control and the use of crude accountabilities.

Young Teachers Value the Formal Professional Status that Standards Help Facilitate.

Through the consultation processes for developing the Standards it became clear that young teachers were very positive about the status accorded by Standards requirements. While they were also in most cases positive about the industrial protection that unionism afforded, they did not see a Standards agenda in opposition to this and in fact were more likely to see unionism as contemporary and relevant if it is aligned with professional status.

The Effects of Implementation of Professional Teaching Standards in Australia

In 2005 NSW adopted a Framework of Professional Teaching Standards and a range of accreditation policies as described elsewhere in this paper. Other states, most notably the next largest states of Victoria and then Queensland also adopted formal Professional Teaching Standards with variations on the policies adopted by NSW.

In 2011, a slightly amended set of Professional Teaching Standards were adopted as a national framework, with processes of applying the Standards left to each state, and with a national body, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), established to build coordination and cooperation.

All states have since adopted the National Framework of Standards, while implementation processes vary across the nation. Governance arrangements also vary, reflecting the history and general level of awareness and comfort in each jurisdiction. Processes for accreditation at the higher levels in particular have varied, but the three largest jurisdictions are all now implementing versions of Accreditation/Certification of Accomplished and Lead Teachers.

All processes associated with the Standards rely on teacher judgments to be implemented. It is perhaps the most important development arising from the Standards debate, that teachers throughout the highly varied Australian federation are engaging in a common and coherent discussion of what constitutes effective professional practice.

The effects of applying Professional Teaching Standards in Australia have been overwhelmingly positive, for teachers, teacher unions and the community. In NSW, the following are among the general and specific developments:

- The importance of teaching, and respect for teaching, has become a more significant part of public discourse. While there has always been a general recognition of teaching as a social contribution, there is now a vigorous and continuously evolving discussion about how quality of teaching can be supported. There is far less political value sought in simplistic criticisms of teachers. The general discussion has focussed on how the quality of individual students entering teaching can be improved.



- This ‘settling’ of what constitutes effective teaching, through the consensus on the Standards, has disarmed conservative critics to some degree, and has shifted the focus to what policies will likely help achieve a high uniformity of practice. The description of the complex substance of teachers’ work has made it harder to assert ill-considered policy prescriptions for teachers, as those prescriptions don’t align with the Standards.
- Teacher unions have been at the heart of a range of policy developments. Important policy initiatives have been constructed with the close involvement of unions, and the anti-union discourse that previously dominated educational discussions over half a century has dissipated.
- Minimum Standards have been set for entry into teaching degree courses. Only courses that apply minimum academic and personal entry requirements, as determined by the Standards Authority are eligible for recognition by the Authority, and are therefore eligible for producing legally employable graduates, reflecting the expectations set for graduates in the Standards.
- Minimum quality requirements have been set for student Professional Practicum. These require school and university supervisors to judge the student against the relevant Graduate Standards. The process has allowed protocols and partnerships toward increased understanding and cooperation between schools and universities.
- Funding to support teachers’ professional learning in government schools has been increased by fifty percent and indexed. This emerged directly through an increased understanding of the value of teachers’ continuing professional learning, as required by the Standards.
- Teachers participate in 100 hours of formal Continuing Professional Learning over five years with at least half of those hours identified by the teachers themselves. The other fifty hours are selected from among courses that have been approved by a committee constituted by teachers, including union representatives.
- Professional learning opportunities have expended and improved substantially. In particular, it is no longer the case that teachers rely on their employer (government or other systems) to determine their professional learning opportunities, as a range of reliable providers have emerged to address the Standards. Among the most significant providers of professional learning opportunities for teachers are teacher unions. All providers are vetted and so there is a quality assurance available for all teachers seeking learning opportunities.



- The NSW Teachers Federation (AEU, NSW) has negotiated for new teachers in government schools, and their mentor, to be allocated a lower teaching load for their first year of teaching. The Standards highlight expectations already held of new teachers and the importance of mentor support to genuine professional induction, thus supporting this initiative.
- All new teachers are guaranteed a Professional Induction. The induction uses the Standards as the basis for professional support and guidance for new teachers. The induction guidelines have been developed by teachers through the Standards Authority. It is almost universally agreed that the process provides more reliability, clarity and support for new teachers.
- Teachers in public schools that are Accredited as Accomplished or Lead Teacher levels receive a pay increase above the seniority based pay scale. The pay increase generally equates to a midway point between the top of the salary scale and the first promotion step. There is no quota on the number of teachers that can achieve this status and increased salary. Teachers accredited as Accomplished or Lead are not allocated any additional formal tasks but are expected to exercise genuine professional leadership in their every-day professional interactions, in particular in dealing with new teachers. This status remains with the teacher if they move to other schools within the system.
- Some low socio-economic schools have been allocated a new position of Teacher Mentor, selected from teachers Accredited at Accomplished or Leadership. There are some 20 Teacher Mentors in NSW, operating within or across small schools.
- Employers are increasingly including accreditation at Accomplished or Lead as a Desirable criterion in advertisements for promotional positions, in effect, recognising the validity of judgments being made by teachers independently of the employment process.
- There has been no measurable or discernible increase in the number of teachers being subjected to performance review processes. There does appear to be an increase in the proportion of teachers resigning before completing the base level Registration process.

It would be misleading to present the implementation of Professional Standards as purely positive. In particular, teachers report directly and through their unions that in some schools, principals sometimes use the Standards as a rationale for demanding particular or additional activities. This has now been mitigated through union activity and by establishing direct communications between the Standards Authority and all teachers, ensuring that teachers are aware of their rights and responsibilities with regard to Standards.



Until recently another point of concern was that the 'grand-parenting' process for Proficient Registration was creating two categories of teachers – 'new scheme', for those required to achieve registration and 'old scheme' for pre-2004 teachers who were originally excluded from any mandatory requirements. This is being addressed through a policy championed by all parties, including teacher unions, of all teachers being included under Proficient status from 2018.

Some Reflections

Standards underpin professional processes and status

Commitment to Professional Teaching Standards is premised on understanding their importance to building a sustainable professional culture that is recognised by the community generally. The validity of Standards is based on their necessity for building the profession.

On this basis, work to develop Standards should ensure that teacher judgment and discretion is inherent in the wording of the Standards and necessary for the Standards to operate. Commitment to professional status for teachers helps shape the Standards.

A Standards Framework can allow for varied approaches

Different jurisdictions are at different states of readiness in implementing Professional Teaching Standards. An effective Standards Framework will include statements to which all teachers can commit without pre-empting specific policy actions.

Australian states in 2011 were at substantially different points of readiness in implementing Standards, and initially adopted the Framework on an 'in-principle' basis. States have since moved at their own pace to implement various aspects of the Standards. The common Framework has allowed all the profession and unions across sectors in all states, to work in a productive and coordinated fashion.

The development process must be inclusive of teachers and their representative organisations

The Standards process must engage teachers comprehensively. The specific wording of Standards needs to be owned by teachers and their representative bodies to achieve credibility. This is appropriate in all circumstances. Standards are not chiselled in tablets and processes will include teacher feedback for review of Standards over time.

The political arguments around Standards reflect broader political tensions

Standards can be broadly characterised as a regulatory approach to supporting the teaching profession. Liberal/market ideology fuels the main opposition to Standards. There is increasing awareness among governments of the importance of education to a jurisdiction's relative competitiveness and prosperity. In a global economy with easily shifting capital flows, the relative advantage of most economies is in the quality of the 'human capital' which might attract investment. This makes the quality of education an important, if not the most important, social and economic policy lever.



The single most direct policy lever for improving educational attainment is teaching. We teachers may want to emphasise complex contextual factors that influence our effectiveness, but for decades

now the story has been a simplistic one among legislators – lift teaching to lift educational outcomes to lift investment. Policy makers are restless in their search for influence over teaching.

The advantages (for policy makers that might be categorised as antagonistic toward Standards), of a liberal/market approach, include that it is relatively inexpensive; locates responsibility elsewhere; aligns with a generalised market ideology.

The advantage of Standards is that they hold at least the prospect of legitimate professional control and allow the case to be made for systemic support for, and investment in, the profession.

Standards are not in themselves a solution, but their absence may be a problem.

Standards, in whatever form, cannot and should not try to define teaching or the quality of teaching. They can only be a reference point for inclusive and coherent professional discussions on the nature of teaching and how to support it. In Australia, and in NSW in particular, such discussions have led to substantial and positive policy developments. These policy developments have entailed complex processes of engagement with unions, government agencies and others in internal and external deliberations over time. There is now broad understanding that a lack of Standards would have allowed a vacuum to be filled by a liberal/market approach.

The challenges relating to relative quality of education and teaching are not solved when Standards are introduced, but the debates do not go away when the Standards option is removed. The market option simply becomes more prominent, and indeed, the default position.

Sustaining and Spreading Standards

There are reasons for optimism and for pessimism in the NSW and Australian experience. The optimism is captured in the list of positive developments since the adoption of Professional Teaching Standards, reforms that have been wide ranging and real in their benefits for teachers. Moreover, the incorporation of the Standards discourse by all sides of mainstream politics has afforded space for constructive engagement by teachers and their unions, to the benefit of the whole community.

The pessimism draws from an understanding that the battle for professional recognition is not over and there are still voices calling for crude and punishing systems of 'accountability'. Most particularly, it is increasingly difficult to ensure that all individuals that undertake teaching duties are formally qualified with recognised degrees. While Teach for Australia makes headway, the quality of some university courses is eroded by marketised policies for undergraduate study.



This is perhaps the self-interested reason for Australian teacher unions to be eager for more jurisdictions around the world to join the many that have already taken on the Professional Teaching Standards agenda. The survival of our own gains will ultimately rest at least to some extent on the global currency of teaching Standards and the stability that this would entail for our own work.

But we also consider our perspective a genuinely expansive and inclusive one, in the interests of teachers everywhere. External reference points and shared ideas are important for any policy work, and as teaching is increasingly global, policy challenges must also be addressed on a global scale. Corporate and political dynamics spread beyond borders of their own volition, and now more than ever. Teaching has no choice but to meet the challenge of this international dynamic.

There is an abundance of evidence that trends counter to the interest of teachers as well as students are rapidly adopted when they match the 'no responsibility' approach of market ideology. This can only be counter-veiled by a coherent, coordinated, credible professional perspective. There is no doubt that the legitimacy of profession organisations, including unions, relies on effective local or on-the-ground work, but in a globalising context the profession cannot protect its interests from a local or domestic base alone.

In themselves Professional Standards call for nothing more or less than a common and agreed position on what constitutes appropriate professional practice. Simple as this may be, it is the most stable, perhaps the only, genuine foundation for building common activism on a global scale. Standards provide the reference point for discussions on what is legitimate policy and what is not. They provide the weight behind arguments going to adequacy of policy for supporting teaching. In the absence of formal statements of what constitutes, and what is necessary for, effective teaching, all sides are simplistically equalised. In the absence of Professional Standards informed by the actual work of teachers, all arguments are more likely seen as competing self-interest. Credible Professional Standards that can apply coherently across the profession are a touch-stone for policy effectiveness in the new, fraught global environment.

What is new about the international policy dynamic relating to teaching has less to do with the current conditions of teaching, and more to do with what actually constitutes teaching - what defines it. For those with negative views of teaching, the specific conditions under which teachers' work can wait. The bigger ambition is to define the professional requirements out of teaching. This may not apply in all jurisdictions immediately, but the global trend is clear, and the challenge is therefore pertinent to all members of the profession.

On this basis, the NSW and Australian approach has sought to stabilise and secure a common understanding of professional practice. We are now all too acutely aware that in the absence of a coherent international approach to Standards, the profession in Australia and everywhere remains vulnerable to retrograde policies that are anti-teacher, and anti-professionalism.



Notes

ⁱ https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/apstresources/australian_professional_standard_for_teachers_final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Teacher Unions involved in NSW were the NSW Teacher's Federation and the Independent Education Union of NSW and ACT.

ⁱⁱⁱ The combined effect of dominant conservative political cultures and cumbersome political structures can also be given credit for protecting Australian education from some of the more ephemeral trends that are sometimes characteristic of educational policy development, from both ends of the educational political spectrum. When any ideological head of steam begins to build, political realities release the pressure. In other words, our cumbersome political system has protected us from the best and the worst of educational trends. On the other hand, not much gets done or improved and reforms are in a constant state of negotiation. The specific political history of NSW meant that atrophy was a chronic condition.

^{iv} See Hansard Parliamentary Debates, Australian Senate, 30 November 1999, pp11054-11068.

^v See for example: R Cavenagh, 'Teacher Registration – Very Much a National Matter', *Independent Education*, Vol 21 No 4, December 1991, pp13-19.
35 P Lee, Deputy General Secretary of the New South Wales Independent Education Union, 'Lessons to be learnt', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 1997

^{vi} An important part of the liberalisation 'push' in Australia was the shift in relative federal funding toward non- government or private schools. A new funding model was implemented which increased funding in relative terms to private schools which also withdrew funds to the government sector as proportions (not numbers) of students shifted toward non-government schools.

^{vii} The concept of Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) was expressed in a report of the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1997 'Teachers Learning'. National teaching unions developed the broad model for AST to be pursued through the 1990 Award Restructuring round of industrial settlements, implementing an education sector component of the Austral Reconstructed agenda. It was pursued through government and non- government teaching awards at State and level. Commitments to restructuring such awards with AST included generated a first 3% award payment from late 1990. All teaching awards over 1991-1994 developed versions of AST. The specifics of the concept then started to vary greatly, evolving really into a soft barrier for access to a further salary step or range.

^{viii} See for example: Ingvarson, Lawrence, "Strengthening the profession? A comparison of recent reforms in the UK and the USA" (2002), and Ingvarson, Lawrence, "Development of a national standards framework for the teaching profession" (2002).



http://research.acer.edu.au/teaching_standards/7
http://research.acer.edu.au/teaching_standards/10

^{ix} The report was originally commissioned to consider: The quality of teaching and teachers; the implications of technology for pedagogy; behaviour management in schools and classrooms; the practicum and professional experience of teachers

^x In particular Ms Jennifer Leete of the NSW Teachers Federation and Mr Patrick Lee of the NSW Independent Education Union. While the process was excruciatingly incremental, it had also only survived through fortunate circumstances. The resistance to the policy from employer groups and conservative politicians had been substantial and the proposal to establish an Institute of Teachers had been rejected by the NSW cabinet. At that point a change of education Minister to the left leaning John Watkins occurred for the unrelated strategizing of government intent on quelling teacher industrial concerns in the lead up to the state election. To fulfil his mandate and because he was impressed by the proposal Minister Watkins re-introduced the proposal and won a reprieve on the condition that more detailed proposals were returned to cabinet for approval.

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^{xii} Note the term Framework of Standards which includes the organising principles and Standards Statements, rather than Framework for Standards which would include only the taxonomy and principles for organising standards.

^{xiii} It was never argued that valid and reliable data student learning data was irrelevant to considerations, rather that professional effectiveness cannot be judged by student data alone. Professional judgement is crucial to all considerations.

^{xiv} The New South Wales Institute of Teachers, was supplanted by the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational standards in 2014 and the New South Wales educational Standards Authority in 2016. These administrative changes do not go to the core issues addressed in this case study.

^{xv} The committee operates under the auspices of the Quality Teaching Council, which itself is constituted by a majority of teachers, including union representatives.

^{xvi} NSW still uses the term Proficient Accreditation rather than Registration.

^{xvii} New South Wales Educational Standards Authority



^{xviii} Initially, the largest organisations, including the major school systems and the teacher unions were asked to nominate at least one teacher for each level of schooling. These nominations were received, and their teaching areas and professional backgrounds analysed, and in the next stage other organisations were asked to nominate currently practicing teachers having regard to particular domains that were underrepresented in the initial nominations - for example: young teachers, early years, rural schools, Aboriginal teachers, senior secondary mathematics. Each school system employer and the two unions were also invited to offer additional representatives from among their staff with appropriate expertise. On the same basis specific special interest groups were convened separately from the school stage/year groups, specifically; Aboriginal students, non-English speaking background, students with special needs.

^{xix} Each group was briefed on the rationale for developing Standards, as well as background research on Standards and their purposes, and potential application of Standards in NSW. The fundamental purpose was emphasised as describing the nature of teachers' work, from the perspective of teachers, to be recognisable and verifiable by other teachers. Groups were mixed and re-formed on different criteria, especially curriculum areas, and then re-formed again on the basis of school level (primary, secondary). Special interest groups were convened independently as well as mixed with broader mixed groups. Drafts of the Framework were workshopped, developed by officers and presented to groups for consideration, having regard to the arguments made from different perspectives from each group.

^{xx} Conducted under the auspices of Professor John Pegg of the University of New England, New South Wales Australia

^{xxi} The argument has developed another, and even more fundamental dimension as liberal market ideology has been applied to university enrolment policy. Entry into teaching education courses in Australia is perhaps the clearest example of 'market failure' over recent years. A policy of unlimited enrolments into university undergraduate courses was originally intended to be moderated by the subsequent employment market for each degree. For teaching however, some universities have allowed enrolment despite very low-level achievement and students have continued to enrol even as the teacher employment market has become saturated.