

Meeting teachers' professional development needs

1. Preamble

- 1.1 In a context of constant change and pressure to meet growing social and economic expectations, schools generally, and teachers and other education staff specifically, need to be equipped professionally to provide quality educational experiences for the students in their care. One of the key factors in ensuring the quality of education provision is the maintenance of a highly skilled teaching force.
- 1.2 This policy acknowledges that teachers are constantly engaged in a wide variety of professional learning activities, including professional reading, collegial discussion and team work, professional reflection on students' learning, assessment and reporting, conference participation, staff presentations, inservice seminars, action research projects, and formal university studies, etc.
- 1.3 The Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania (the IEU) believes that inservice training and professional development are the cornerstones of innovation in any organisation. Schools, as organisations, must place significant budgetary and policy importance on the provision of high quality training and professional development. This should include the appointment of a Professional Development Co-ordinator in every school. In addition, schools must actively develop the culture of learning communities in order to support the professional learning of staff in an ongoing way.
- 1.4 The IEU endorses the importance of professional development as essential:
 - to ensure that teachers can respond professionally to economic, social, cultural, technological and scientific change through the development of personal and intellectual qualities;
 - to respond to the demand for increased quality of educational outcomes by improving teachers' classroom capabilities, knowledge base and professional judgements;
 - to support teachers in meeting their responsibilities for learning in schools through their own pursuit of learning and excellence;
 - to provide enabling conditions for teachers, employing authorities and other agencies to initiate creative approaches to emerging educational issues;
 - to recognise the professional status of teachers and the consequent career long nature of the professional development process;
 - to sustain the motivation, commitment and enthusiasm of teachers and to enhance their self-esteem and sense of control over their professional lives by providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on, analyse and improve their own performance; and
 - to allow teachers to develop new competencies and skills as they move from classroom positions to administrative or specialist positions, or to new environments.

(Teachers Learning - Improving Australia's Schools Through Inservice Teacher Training and Development 1988 pp 7-8)

2. Provision of Professional Development

- 2.1 School employing authorities must ensure access to quality professional development by all teachers through equitable and transparent processes. The range of professional development opportunities that can be accessed should be both clearly identified and publicised.

- 2.2 All teachers must be provided with professional development opportunities each year, and these opportunities should be designed to meet both the specific needs of the individual teacher, as well as needs which may arise through school, system and government priorities.
- 2.3 Professional development opportunities must be made available during ordinary hours of work.
- 2.4 Teachers in regional and rural locations must have access to quality professional development opportunities, which, as far as possible, should be delivered in their geographical area. The employer must provide a suitable replacement teacher and time for the teacher to travel, if necessary, for professional development purposes, as well as fund accommodation, child care and out of pocket expenses on a reasonable basis.
- 2.5 School employers must provide adequate support for teachers involved in formal university study, including at least 5 days paid study leave each year plus paid leave to attend all examinations and a significant contribution to the payment of HECS. Where a teacher is required by the employer to gain a particular credential, the teacher must have paid leave to attend all classes and the school must pay the full costs of the course.
- 2.6 State and federal governments must adequately resource teacher professional development programs. In particular, the state government must include funded professional development for both government and non-government teachers in the implementation of any government education initiatives.

3. The Role and Responsibility of the School

- 3.1 The school as employer has a range of responsibilities in relation to providing access to quality professional development for staff. Specifically :
 - the school should ensure a mix of self initiated professional development with “external” requirements (i.e. school, system, State);
 - inservice provision should avoid “one off” opportunities, and should be organised in appropriately spaced, sequential modules which allow for input, reflective practice, and further development and refinement;
 - all schools need to allocate sufficient flexible time within the school year timetable for professional development so that opportunities can occur in ways most appropriate to meet the needs of teachers (i.e. allow for team approaches, sequential modules, action research approaches, teacher exchanges/school visits, etc). This approach would clearly indicate (and support)

the view that professional development is a significant and integral part of the school yearly plan;

- schools should be committed to providing, over a given cycle (e.g. three year period), sufficient professional development opportunities so that all teachers and administrators experience a number of inservice opportunities adequate to both their needs and that of the school/system. This would allow for a more systematic, yet flexible, approach to models of provision (e.g. block, team, etc);
- inservice/professional development opportunities should be in school time (but may be augmented by additional personal time, as appropriate);
- schools and individual teachers should be able to plan their own professional development programs over a year or cyclical period, having regard for a mix of personal, school and system needs.
- schools should ensure that the co-ordination of the provision of professional development opportunities is carried out in an adequately resourced manner. For example, the position of Professional Development Co-ordinator should be allocated sufficient time to assist staff in identifying their professional development needs and to locate sources of relevant quality PD providers and opportunities.

4. Access to Effective Professional Development

Teachers are entitled to have access to quality professional development opportunities. Professional development activities should be guided by best practice elements of effective adult learning, including :

- participation is voluntary;
- content has been negotiated in the planning stages by course implementers with prospective participants;
- builds on individual’s skills and experiences;
- encourages “learner collaboration”;
- recognises the interdependence of individuals and their institutional settings;
- starts with work a day experiences and perceptions of individuals;
- addresses “social” as well as “material” realities;
- includes adequate follow up and support to participants at the end of the course;
- course allows participants to proceed at their own pace;
- people in leadership positions within schools also participate;
- the desirability of a “buddy system” so that one has the support of at least one colleague on staff.

5. Access to a Variety of Models of Effective Provision

Teachers’ professional development should not be delivered via one model only. Teachers benefit from experiencing a variety of models of professional

development, and schools need to ensure that their teaching staff are able to access a range of professional development modes including :

- individual skill and knowledge development, in conjunction with a reflective model of adult learning.
- school focussed i.e. job embedded and institutional specific learning activities (individual or team approach);
- teacher action research small scale intervention by teachers in their own classrooms or schools;
- school based collaborative action research;
- school cluster approaches which maximise resources and knowledge and which allow for broader reflection;

6. Access to a Variety of Content for Professional Development

6.1 It is widely acknowledged that teachers' ongoing professional development plans should contain a variety of focus areas. The focus of school-provided professional development should be identified by the individual teacher in discussion with the school's professional development co-ordinator.

7. Credentialling of Professional Development Activities

- 7.1 Employers must ensure as far as possible that professional development activities provided carry credit for university courses. Such credit transfer arrangements help to ensure the quality of provision and facilitate ongoing participation in further training by teaching staff.
- 7.2 Universities must become more flexible in recognising all forms of teachers' professional learning including professional reading, participation in mentoring programs, conference presentations, etc.

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