



Professional Learning Project

Executive Summary

August 2016



Acknowledgements

When the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia introduced the requirement for all currently registered teachers to undertake a minimum of 60 hours of professional learning over a 3-year period, the Board was determined that this initiative should not be seen as simply a compliance requirement. Hence the decision to evaluate the nature, preferences and impact of professional learning on the work of teachers. Ideally this initiative should be a natural harvest of teachers' work.

To that end, the Professional Learning Evaluation represents data provided by a large proportion of teachers in South Australia. While the professional learning summaries were part of the requirements for renewal of teacher registration, we thank teachers for their positive involvement and promptness in dealing with the correspondence received from the Board. We are especially appreciative of those teachers who volunteered to participate in focus group interviews held across South Australia. Your views provided the detailed comments required to inform the data received from the online survey and professional learning summaries.

Particular thanks must go to staff at the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) for their assistance in collating and producing this report: Wilson Quan, Emma Harrison, Cathy Lewis, Kerin Dobie, Helen Robinson, Quang Nguyen, Jenny Hocking, Marilyn Large and Nigel Laity.

A special note of thanks is extended to the various national and international teacher registration and certification providers for their information regarding the professional learning requirements for their own jurisdictions.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the leadership and oversight of Associate Professor Debra Panizzon who authored the report and inducted many of the staff of the TRB to the rich possibilities of educational research. In any such endeavour, expert advice is sought and Professor Andrew Boulton helped ensure that the statistical analyses of data provided valid and reliable interpretations of the findings.



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The Teachers Registration Board South Australia contracted Associate Professor Debra Panizzon to design the evaluation project and to oversee its implementation. The Board gratefully acknowledges her expertise and dedicated work in completing this task.

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Contents

Introduction	1
Background Research Literature	2
Research Design	3
Teacher Demographics	4
Key Findings	5
Conclusions	18
Recommendations	23
Glossary	28

Introduction

The aim of the evaluation was to collect evidence regarding the impact of professional learning from a large sample of teachers renewing their registration for 2015-2016. It comprised two sections:

- A review of the professional learning undertaken by teachers as part of the renewal process including links with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (APST), the impact on their professional growth, and the challenges in meeting this requirement.
- Provision of feedback to the Teacher Registration Board (TRB) about the processes used and how these might be enhanced to ensure that the APST attained by the profession are meeting the expectations of the TRB.

Guiding the evaluation were the following Research Questions:

- RQ1. What is the nature of the professional learning experiences undertaken by the teachers sampled?
- RQ2. What impact did teachers perceive these learning experiences had on their professional growth?
- RQ3. To what degree did the professional teaching standards (APST) align with the professional learning experiences reported?
- RQ4. How did teachers record and provide evidence of their professional learning? What was the nature of this evidence?
- RQ5. What are the key challenges experienced in meeting professional learning requirements?
- RQ6. What areas of interest and need are identified by teachers in supporting their professional learning into the future?
- RQ7. What was the response to the TRB's communications strategy in disseminating information to teachers in SA around new professional learning requirements?

Background Research Literature

The Professional Standards Council defines a profession as:

A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards. This group positions itself as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and is recognised by the public as such. A profession is also prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others (<http://www.psc.gov.au/what-is-a-profession>).

In order to maintain, enhance and broaden knowledge, expertise and competence over time, professionals are required to engage in some form of continuing professional development (CPD). Not only is there a specified number of mandatory hours or points of CPD required to maintain certification but the activities must be documented incorporating evidence of completion. Audits are also undertaken by most professional organisations as part of an ongoing monitoring process (e.g., Medical Board of Australia, Engineers Australia). A general review of the professions identifies that these expectations are applicable to a broad range of professions, including general practitioners and specialists, nurses and midwives, occupational therapists, certified practising accountants, professional engineers, and financial counsellors (to name a few). The review of all these professions identifies three key points worthy of keeping in mind before considering teaching as a profession.

1. There is a consistency across the professions in the use of the term *continuing professional development* CPD.
2. In most part, the role of CPD is to allow individuals to self-select what they require to enhance their own learning in the profession. In some cases, there are mandated hours or points required in relation to specific areas of CPD but this still leaves the majority of time or point allocation open to members to choose areas of relevance and interest.
3. Most professions have an auditing process with members expected to log their own CPD that should be readily available to the certification authority if requested.

In terms of teaching, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established to provide national leadership around the promotion of excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. A part of this role involved establishing consistency across state and territories regarding teacher professional learning. At present, there is some inconsistency evident in the use of the terminology with professional development, professional learning, and continuing professional development used across the different states and territories. While 20 hours of mandatory professional learning

per annum is required in most states and territories, this can vary across the registration cycle (i.e., 30 hours in one year, and 10 in the next). The Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales are the only jurisdictions where programs and courses for professional learning undergo some form of accreditation by the teacher regulatory authorities, with lists of accredited programs available to teachers on the websites. Importantly, in all states and territories the emphasis is around teachers selecting professional learning that suits their own needs and those of the school in which they are located. However, some states and territories do require teachers to undertake a proportion of their professional learning across mandatory areas of professional learning (e.g., Australian Capital Territory) that are defined by the teacher regulatory authority.

When compared to other western countries, Australia appears to be leading the way in professional learning with a move to mandatory hours while still allowing teachers to select their own areas of interest and need. The result is that teachers can self-regulate and exercise a high degree of professional autonomy around their professional learning but with it brings the need to document this in some way.

The full literature review is available either in the Final Report or from the TRB website: <http://www.trb.sa.edu.au/sites/default/files/PdfDocuments/TRB-PL-Literature-Review-20151022.pdf>

Research Design

In order to optimise representation of approximately 9 210 teachers renewing their registration during the 2015-2016 period, 2 254 teachers were selected randomly for inclusion in the evaluation.

However, 162 summaries were not included in the findings reported as teachers required extensions beyond the time needed for analysis. The evaluation comprised three forms of data collection:

- Summaries of teachers' professional learning evidence (mandatory for all teachers identified in the random sample) ($n=2\ 092$ teacher summaries excluding late submissions);
- An online demographic survey (voluntary for all teachers identified in the random sample) ($n=1\ 980$ surveys completed); and
- Focus group interviews (voluntary for teachers interested in involvement as indicated on the online survey) ($n=116$ teachers).

All data from the professional learning summaries and online surveys were imported to a spreadsheet. Quantitative data were analysed to determine statistical differences where appropriate with a focus on non-parametric methods given the nature of the data. Alternatively, the project team coded qualitative data from the professional learning summaries and online surveys with frequencies calculated to produce graphical representations. Full details of the data analyses are available in the Final Report. Data collected from the focus group interviews were used to support and/or explain the findings in ways that provided a 'teacher's voice'.

Please note:

Only the professional learning summaries of teachers selected for the evaluation were audited (i.e., 2 254) by the TRB and not all of the summaries submitted as part of the renewal procedure (i.e., 9 210). Also, the results presented here are based solely on the summaries as submitted by teachers. We recognise that the minimum requirement was 60 hours but we acknowledge that many teachers will have completed more than this requirement even though not documented.

Teacher Demographics

Teachers currently registered with the TRB are teaching in South Australia, interstate and overseas while there are a proportion who are not teaching presently (e.g., on secondment). A summary of the proportion of teachers in the various teaching cohorts (excluding 150 teachers who identified as not currently teaching¹) comprising the evaluation sample is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of cohorts of teachers comprising evaluation sample

Employment Status		Employment Setting		Employer Sector	
Cohort	Proportion of total	Cohort	Proportion of total	Cohort	Proportion of total
Permanent Full time (>90%)	893 (49%)	Long day care	19 (1%)	Department for Education and Childhood Development	1 112 (62%)
Permanent Part time (51-90%)	306 (17%)	Pre-school	109 (6%)	Association of Independent Schools of SA	335 (19%)
Permanent Part time (<50%)	59 (3%)	Primary	947 (53%)	Catholic Education SA	278 (15%)
Full time contract	252 (13%)	Middle school	152 (8%)	Other (private providers)	70 (4%)
Part time contract	134 (8%)	Secondary	568 (32%)		
Short term contract	37 (2%)				
Temporary relief teacher (TRT)	149 (8%)				

The other important cohort discussed in this table were registered teachers who identified as not currently teaching on the online survey. In total, 150 teachers accounting for 8% of the total sample aligned to this group. Approximately 3% of teachers acknowledged being retired, 9% as employed in universities, 9% on career break (i.e., maternity leave, childrearing) and 9% on secondment in other positions. The remaining 17% cited being on extended leave (i.e., personal illness) while the largest proportion 53% indicated that they were in alternative employment to teaching even though maintaining their registration.

An alternative way to consider representation of the evaluation sample is around geographical location given this is known to affect the experiences of teachers in relation to professional learning (Lyons, Cooksey, Panizzon, Parnell & Pegg, 2006²). Approximately, 73% of teachers comprising the sample were teaching in schools in metropolitan Adelaide, 24% in schools in country South Australia, 1% in schools in remote areas of South Australia while the remaining 2% were either teaching interstate or overseas. Hence, the evaluation sample adequately represented the key cohorts of teachers currently registered in South Australia.

¹ These are teachers in alternative positions so out of the classroom at the time of the evaluation. They are identified throughout the report as not currently teaching

² Lyons, T., Cooksey, R., Panizzon, D. Parnell, A. & Pegg, J. (2006). The SiMERR National Survey prepared for the Department of Education, Science and Training. National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia. Armidale: University of New England.

Key Findings

The results from the 25% sample of teachers who renewed their registration at 31st January 2016 are presented and discussed in this section.

Audit of Professional Learning Summaries

As part of the evaluation, each professional learning summary (i.e., 2 092) was audited by TRB staff. The audit highlighted a number of issues in relation to the learning activities submitted by teachers, such as:

- Inclusion of inappropriate activities, e.g., “*parent-teacher nights*”;
- Inclusion of teachers’ interests or hobbies that did not actually align to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)*, e.g., “*volunteer work in the community*”;
- Provision of vague descriptions of the activities undertaken including acronyms that were not easily recognisable, e.g., “*WAVE meeting*”;
- Lack of clarity regarding the dates and time commitments for activities, e.g., “*2015*” for the time undertaken;
- Emergence of ‘shades of grey’ areas between professional learning and professional practice;
- Unclear reference to the standards with a lack of annotation as to how the activities helped meet the standards with just the standards identified; and
- Lack of evidence provided in the summaries.

A clear area of confusion displayed in a proportion of these summaries was a lack of understanding around what constituted *professional learning* as opposed to *professional practice* or what are the core duties and responsibilities of a teacher. While some of this confusion may have resulted from differing expectations between TRB and employer requirements around professional learning, the findings of this audit indicate that there is some work to do in supporting teachers to differentiate between these two components. For example, just because work is undertaken after school hours does not automatically mean that it is professional learning (e.g, attending a careers meeting at the school; preparing lessons for the following day, which is part of a teacher’s role). However, this type of confusion was evident in a large proportion of teachers’ summaries.

Nature of Professional Learning

The total number of activities submitted by teachers in their learning summaries was 38 479 representing a staggering 239 946 hours of work. All of the professional learning activities identified by teachers were aligned to the five modes of learning currently being used by the TRB in communication materials. Overall, 82% of all learning activities comprised face-to-face opportunities, 1% represented study undertaken by the teacher, 4% private research completed by the teacher, 8% towards online learning, and 5% around establishing and working as communities of practice in schools.

A comparison of these modes of learning in relation to teacher employment location (i.e., metropolitan, country or remote areas) identified that face-to-face learning activities predominated regardless of the employment location of teachers. This is an interesting outcome as one might expect these proportions to vary given that access to face-to-face workshops are difficult for teachers in country and remote locations to access as indicated by teachers during the focus group interviews. Statistically, two significant differences emerged with a higher median (i.e., midpoint) for face-to-face activities evident from metropolitan teachers and a higher median for online learning activities for country teachers when compared to the other locations.

Face-to-face learning opportunities were the highest mode of learning accessed by teachers regardless of their type of employment (i.e., employment status, see Table 1). Tested statistically, a number of significant differences emerged across all modes except study. These differences included:

- A lower median (i.e., midpoint) for face-to-face activities for temporary relief teachers (TRTs) than for teachers employed permanently or on longer-term contracts in schools;
- A higher median for TRTs and teachers on short-term contracts for research compared to full-time teaching staff;
- A higher median for TRTs for online learning compared to teachers employed as permanent FT (FT>90%); and,
- A higher median for permanent teachers (regardless of percentage of employment) compared to TRTs for communities of practice.

These results indicate that TRTs appear to engage in particular types of professional learning more frequently probably because access to much of the school-based professional learning (i.e., face-to-face, communities of practice) is not readily available. During focus group interviews, it seemed that TRTs in country locations were incorporated

“Face-to-face learning opportunities were the highest mode of learning accessed by teachers regardless of their type of employment.”

“...TRTs in country locations were incorporated into face-to-face workshops and other professional learning activities conducted in schools on a more regular basis than their colleagues in metropolitan schools.”

into face-to-face workshops and other professional learning activities conducted in schools on a more regular basis than their colleagues in metropolitan schools.

A similar investigation of the modes of learning across employment setting (i.e., primary school) found a high preference for face-to-face for all groups with the exception of teachers in long day care or early childhood centres/sites. For this group of teachers, 71% of their activities were face-to-face while 25% of their professional learning was allocated to online learning. When tested statistically, significant differences were evident as a general trend *only* for teachers not currently teaching. Actually, these data demonstrate a shared experience between TRTs and those not currently teaching that aligns to expectations. For example:

- The median (i.e., midpoint) for face-to-face activities for teachers not currently teaching was lower than all other groups except for long day care teachers.
- The median for research activities for teachers not currently teaching was higher than all other groups of teachers.

Given that teachers who are not currently teaching are in positions out of schools, these results might be expected. However, what was interesting is that the median for online learning for these teachers was the same as other groups (i.e., no significant differences) even though this mode offers a viable alternative in meeting the 60 hours of professional learning requirements.

In order to explore consistency across the data obtained from teachers and their views regarding professional learning, a number of items were also included on the online survey (see Figure 1). Results from these items confirmed the strong place held by face-to-face learning with teachers.

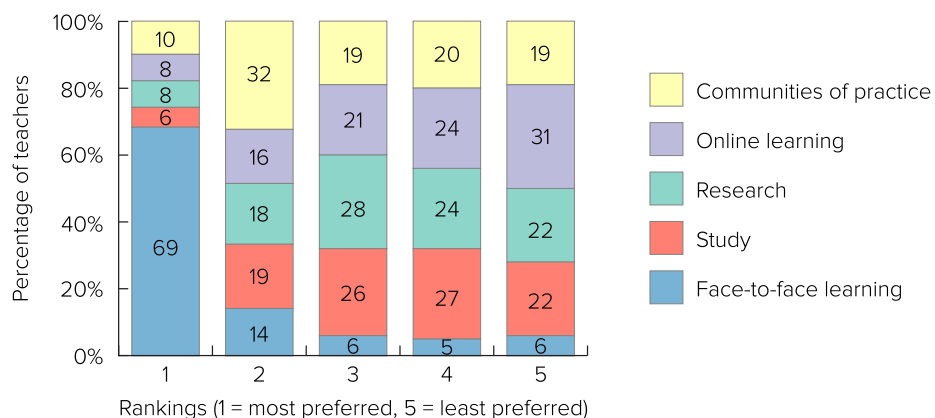


Figure 1: Rankings for preferred professional learning modes for all teachers as proportion of the total number of teachers (n=1 980)

Subsequent statistical analyses for each of the modes of learning and the teacher rankings (1-5) identified that the ranking of '1' for face-to-face learning was consistent across each of the different cohorts of teachers represented in the evaluation sample.

Impact of Professional Learning

The impact of professional learning on teachers proved to be a difficult construct to collect detailed data around even with provision of appropriate items on the online survey. In response to the online survey, teachers responded positively (i.e., high impact/moderate impact) to each of the modes of learning. Statistical analyses of these data identified significant differences, mainly for TRTs who selected 'high impact' for online learning more frequently than other cohorts of teachers while teachers not currently teaching did the same for activities that were represented as research. Again, these results are not surprising as these two cohorts of teachers seek to meet their professional learning requirements often in isolation given that they work outside of the communication networks normally available to staff employed permanently within schools.

During the focus group interviews, teachers were asked to share a professional learning activity that had a positive impact on their learning. In general, teachers spoke about the immediate impact of vibrant presenters who captured the audience and helped broaden one's thinking at the time. They explained that it was these kinds of presentations and the opportunity to engage with other colleagues that led to the high interest in face-to-face sessions. However, many teachers were cognisant that impact might not actually be realised until much further down the track, such as when dealing with a new teaching situation. It is only when conditions change that one might reflect back on a reading, discussion, or a workshop that provided appropriate and useful insights in dealing with the altered condition. Hence, in this case, impact is not immediate but much longer-term.

“...many teachers were cognisant that impact might not actually be realised until much further down the track, such as dealing with a new teaching situation.”

In their conversations around impact, some teachers were sceptical about the emphasis on professional learning. The view shared was that although teachers might complete the 60-hour requirement, many had attended “*poor quality*” professional learning that had a negative rather than positive impact on teachers. As demonstrated here, the idea of what constitutes impact and how it might be gauged is complex and multi-faceted. Hence, to be explored to the depth necessary requires a targeted and carefully considered project conducted over a longer period.

Alignment of Professional Learning to Standards

Teachers were able to align their professional learning activities to all of the APST with Standard 6 demonstrative of the highest proportion of activities. The least cited by teachers was Standard 5 regarding assessment. A tally of the numbers of standards (1-7) aligned to all the activities by teachers in their professional learning summaries is summarised in Table 2 ($n=2\ 092$).

Table 2: Number of standards targeted by teachers

No. standards	No. teachers
1	4
2	8
3	11
4	29
5	66
6	248
7	1 726

It was clear from the comments made by teachers during focus groups that the majority attempted to address as many standards as possible in each of the activities comprising their professional learning summaries. One of the difficulties some teachers mentioned was in aligning their learning to the focus areas under each standard. However, this was not an actual requirement of the TRB.

“ I had no trouble aligning to the standards but the sub-standards were tricky for me – I found it hard to align to these and some are not really relevant to where I am teaching.

Statistical analyses across employment status, employment setting, and years of teaching identified a number of statistical differences across the various cohorts of teachers. In most instances, no general trends were evident with the exception of TRTs and teachers not currently teaching. The patterns that emerged for these two cohorts of teachers were similar with the median (i.e., midpoint) number of standards significantly less than other cohorts of teachers.

One component that was not included in the majority of professional learning summaries was an annotation explaining how the activity supported the teacher in addressing the standard specified. This became an issue in those instances where the activity submitted by a teacher bordered between professional learning and what appeared as professional practice. The addition of an annotation, in most instances, helped to clarify how the activity facilitated a teacher’s learning in relation to the standards selected. This is an area requiring improvement.

Nature of Evidence of Professional Learning

The evidence provided for the majority of learning activities was either certificates or notes with resources and attendance records being identified less frequently. Some creative teachers provided alternative sources of evidence that were also applicable, such as “*minutes from meetings*”, “*email communication trails*”, “*personal blog/tweet*” after the activity. As part of the auditing process, TRB staff identified two major areas of improvement in moving forward:

- Inclusion of sources of evidence given that 12% of learning summaries submitted by teachers did not provide this information even though it was requested as part of the learning summary record; and
- Inclusion of inappropriate evidence for particular activities e.g., “*flyer for workshop*”. The problem is that a flyer does not support actual attendance at the workshop only that a teacher received information about the event.

Focus group interviews with teachers highlighted that documenting a source of evidence was a key area of anxiety in completing the professional learning summaries. In fact, the area was so confusing, teachers explained, that they deliberately sought face-to-face professional learning to obtain a certificate of attendance because they knew this constituted a valid source of evidence. These findings indicate an important area of follow up for the TRB in helping teachers understand the types of evidence that are appropriate and acceptable for particular modes of professional learning.

Challenges for Teachers around Professional Learning

The results collated around challenges indicate that there are cohorts of teachers who are more likely to experience difficulties in being able to access a range of professional learning in order to meet the 60-hours required. In particular, TRTs emerged as being the most affected group followed closely by teachers not currently teaching. The only other group of teachers who appeared to experience more challenges than others was teachers on short-term contracts. Statistical analyses identified these cohorts of teachers as being significantly different to all other teachers in relation to a ‘lack of employer support’ and ‘professional learning is too expensive’.

An open response item on the survey generated 726 responses from teachers regarding the main challenges faced in undertaking professional learning (see Figure 2). It is important to note here that two sets of the comments provided by teachers are highlighted as ‘positive’ because teachers either specified that no challenges were met or they explained how they enjoyed the chance to engage in professional learning.

Clearly, the biggest challenge specified by 132 comments received from TRTs and teachers not currently teaching was for ‘accessing professional learning’ because they were not included in school-based activities. Comments made by teachers during focus groups provided additional challenges, such as the cost associated with their professional learning, and having to juggle family and work responsibilities on a daily basis.

“ Because I am contract and TRT teacher I have had to mostly seek out my own professional development opportunities. It is a challenge not being permanently linked with a work-site.

“ I worked part time and TRT during past 3 years. As a TRT you were not included into schools professional development or it meant saying no to a school and paying for a professional development day yourself, meaning losing a days relief teaching pay - which was a big struggle compared to being permanently employed at a school previously and getting paid to attend a learning day and also have the course paid. Very difficult as a relief teacher.

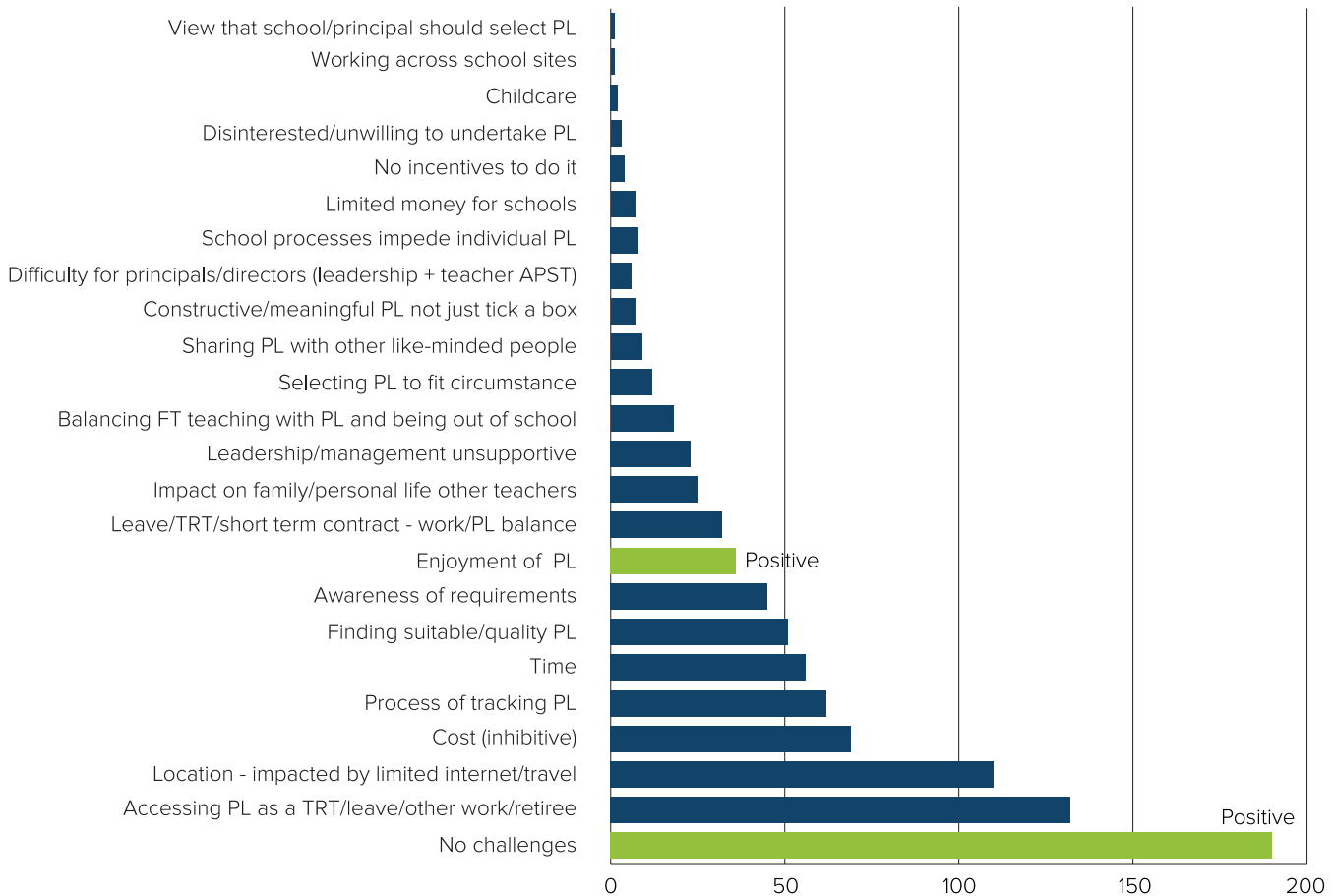


Figure 2: Summary of challenges as frequencies emerging from teacher responses (n=726)

Similar statistical analyses across school location also found significant differences for country teachers in relation to being able to access relevant professional learning, issues

of time, and juggling family and work responsibilities. In their open responses on the surveys, 110 teachers in country and remote schools explained how distance and the time required accessing professional learning often limited their opportunities as cost became an inhibitive factor. For others, the internet was not a viable alternative due to intermittent access depending on the time of day and weather conditions.

“Most training is offered in the city and not in the country areas. A day doing training and development is a night away or 8 hours travel on top of the training. Other training is between 4pm to 6pm which means country teachers can't access it. Cost is another issue food, accommodation, petrol and the cost of training.

“There are no incentives and we are severely disadvantaged over teachers in the metropolitan area and nearer country in accessing quality training opportunities. Also, nearly all training opportunities are on weekdays or after school on weekdays, which is fine for metropolitan teachers but not for country teachers. Online trainings are sometimes available but they are hard to get real support with and often your questions don't get answered promptly (if they get answered at all).

The discussion so far has focused around individual teachers but another group of challenges were identifiable that were school-based. In the comments provided by teachers (Figure 1), the following were identified:

- Leadership and management being unsupportive (e.g., not allowing a teacher to go to a subject-discipline workshop) (f=23)³;
- Difficulty in balancing teaching full-time with professional learning and being out of school (f=18);
- School processes (i.e., signing off to attend) that impeded professional learning (f=8) because of the time taken to process teacher requests; and,
- Limited money in schools to support professional learning (f=7).

These issues were corroborated by comments made by teachers during the focus group interviews. For example, a number of teachers explained that while they easily attained their 60 hours of professional learning through the allocated days of in-service provided by the school, they had not been supported to attend activities outside of the school unless it specifically aligned to the school strategic plan. While teachers recognised the value around the leadership imperative, they explained that they still had specific subject specialisations that they needed to pursue to maintain their expertise that may not directly relate to the plan.

3 Frequency of responses provided by teachers

“ I had no problems in getting the 60 hours but all of this was PL provided by the school – it was the direction of the leadership team in the school. But when I wanted to go to a conference in my subject area, I was not able to go. Part of this is that money is not as accessible as it was and if the school allocates money to PL for staff to do as a whole, it reduces what we can then access for other activities.

“ As a full-time teacher in a school I got way more than 60 hours. Most of this was just from what I did in school but I have had to pay for PL that I really wanted to do as I was not able to get it covered by the school.

Pivotal to these decisions in schools was the funding available for professional learning, which varied among schools regardless of the sector (e.g. government or independent). The diversity among schools within the sector though, appeared greater than the diversity across sectors, with a number of full-time teachers sharing with TRTs how they too had to pay for much of their own professional learning.

A third group of challenges tabled in 62 teacher responses focused on the process of tracking professional learning. These included:

- Finding suitable or quality professional learning ($f=51$); and,
- Understanding and awareness of the requirements ($f=45$).

Again, the focus group interviews allowed teachers to elaborate on these challenges. For example, some teachers spoke about the anxiety experienced in not being aware of the requirements in documenting their professional learning. The focus groups highlighted that even though the TRB had been very active in its communication strategy with teachers around the professional learning requirements, there were still teachers who had not heard about the online Teachers Portal. Hence, there is still ongoing work for the TRB to do in this space.

In considering the findings around challenges, it is interesting that many of the references made to professional learning actually referred specifically to face-to-face opportunities. Teachers explained how cost, their inability to leave classes, the lack of availability of these sessions in their local area, or having to juggle family commitments to attain the 60 hours of professional learning were difficult. Yet, it is possible for teachers to undertake their own research, include their own study, complete online learning, and join a community of practice in their own schools to meet this requirement. Why is face-to-face such a focus then when it is especially challenging for particular cohorts of teachers? Face-to-face is preferred clearly for the intellectual, professional, and social opportunities it provides but it is difficult for some teachers (e.g., parental leave to look after children). While the TRB has provided the flexibility for teachers to target any mode of learning that is relevant to their own professional learning, the findings presented here indicate that teachers

in general have focused on face-to-face sessions. Input from teachers during the focus group interviews, highlights that another contributing factor to this outcome may have been teachers' apprehensions around producing summaries of professional learning linked to evidence that would pass the benchmark for the audit by the TRB. As such, there is further need for the TRB to build teacher confidence by providing examples of a range of professional learning activities that align to the five modes discussed throughout along with the types of evidence that might be retained for auditing purposes.

Needs of Teachers around Professional Learning

The needs of teachers were explored in the online survey using an extensive item that asked teachers to prioritise their professional learning needs from being 'high' to 'no level of need'. The needs that were high and moderate included:

- Knowledge and understanding of relevant curriculum frameworks;
- Knowledge and understanding of particular subject areas;
- ICT skills for teaching; and,
- Differentiating the curriculum for individuals with special needs.

Statistical analyses of all these data in relation to educational status found definite trends for particular cohorts of teachers.

- TRTs as a group selected not applicable for more needs than any other cohort.
- Significantly more full-time contract teachers identified a high level of need for 'assessment practices and evaluation of individual learning', while short-term contract teachers opted for no need. These results make sense given the different types of teaching positions held.
- 'Behaviour strategies to manage the learning environment', 'teaching individuals from different multicultural and/or diverse backgrounds', and 'leadership and management' attracted the majority of significant differences across different cohorts of teachers. In most instances, these could be explained by considering the levels of employment, such as the high levels of need demonstrated by TRTs and contract teachers for behaviour management.

Similar analyses across employment setting found the greatest statistical differences in relation to 'knowledge and understanding of particular subject areas', 'assessment practices and evaluation of individual learning', 'behaviour strategies to manage the learning environment', and 'incorporating play in the learning environment'. Of interest is that the results do not identify clear trends for particular cohorts in relation to these needs with the majority easily explained given the teacher setting. For example, 'incorporating

play in the learning environment’ was a high level of need for long day care teachers but considered not applicable by secondary teachers.

Teachers were provided with the opportunity to elaborate on these needs in an open response item with 468 teachers providing a comment. A summary of these individual needs is provided in Figure 3. As viewed, the most cited need related to content with 191 teachers providing a specific area they wished to pursue.

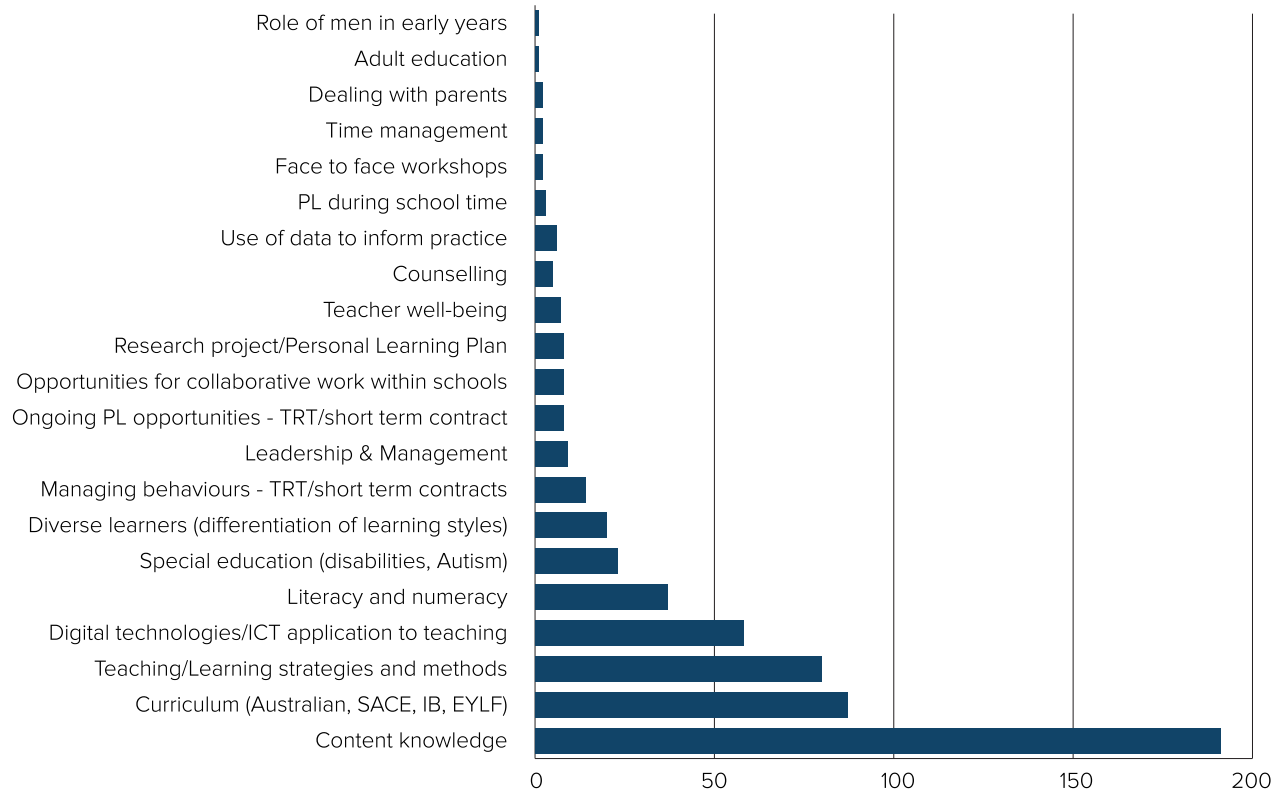


Figure 3: Summary of needs as frequencies emerging from teacher responses (n=468)

In relation to ‘content knowledge’, the most frequent areas identified were:

- Mathematics ($f=28$);
- Humanities and social sciences ($f=28$);
- Sciences ($f=21$);
- Arts, drama and dance ($f=20$);
- Languages including Greek, Italian, Japanese, German and Chinese ($f=19$);
- Music ($f=18$); and,
- Health and physical education ($f=16$).

Interestingly, when these content areas were considered in light of educational setting, with the exception of mathematics that represented middle and secondary school teachers, half of the remaining comments were from primary school teachers. These results demonstrate that teachers across the board are seeking opportunities to enhance their understanding of specific subject disciplines.

The focus groups provided further opportunities to explore the areas of need with teachers. While the difficulties of TRTs have permeated many of the findings, their needs were also quite distinctive. Given that many are semi-retired, highly experienced practitioners who have been involved in education for many years in numerous positions including leadership (e.g., ex-principals) they are very keen to pursue professional learning that is of direct interest. A number expressed the difficulty they faced in actually finding relevant professional learning that was simply not “*more of the same*”.

“For the most part the journey of building up 60 hours of professional learning was a very lonely one. I am currently a temporary relief teacher and the lack of professional networking opportunities for people like me in this space was tricky. Throughout this experience I never really felt the same sort of support that other professionals get when they are a part of a staff body. Moving forward from here I think it is also important that professional workshops and conferences have some sort of subsidy for those like me, who are not working full time so that they are more accessible.

However, an alternative to this highly experienced group of TRTs are the early career teachers who are trying to transition into permanent teaching. This group appears to be interested in all forms of professional learning as it all seems “*highly relevant*” and necessary for them as they enter the profession. Hence, this TRT group is a challenging cohort of teachers with very experienced and discerning practitioners at one end of spectrum, and new practitioners who are looking for guidance and mentorship at the other end of the spectrum.

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TRB’s Communications Strategy around Professional Learning

Information sessions were conducted by TRB staff at 12 regional locations with 19 sessions for professional leaders and registered teachers between 28th April and 18th June 2015. A total of approximately 1 011 teachers attended with 113 participants at the leaders sessions.

Additionally, the TRB held an inaugural conference for teachers on 5th June 2015 that was attended by 230 teachers free of charge. Feedback from these information sessions and the conference were extremely positive with teachers providing specific comments about their usefulness in their survey responses and during the focus group interviews.

The Teachers Portal is a dedicated secure website with individual accounts established for teachers to access their personal details and record their professional learning over the renewal period. The portal, as a tool for documenting professional learning, was promoted heavily during the information sessions with favourable feedback and interest received from teachers. Of the 9 210 teachers who renewed their registration, 6 682 teachers, representing 75% of the cohort, used the portal to submit their learning summaries for the evaluation.

Professional learning information and opportunities were also promoted through the *Registration Buzz*, which was sent via email to teachers every fortnight. During the focus group interviews, teachers spoke highly about this means of communication for informing them about possible professional learning opportunities and keeping them informed.

In terms of the evaluation, the majority of teachers responded favourably to the request for submission of professional learning summaries. While there was some degree of “*initial anxiety*” about the audit part of the evaluation, given the new requirements around professional learning, most teachers understood the change. Many felt that documenting their professional learning was a powerful reflective tool as it allowed them to think carefully about what they had experienced.

“*Professional learning is part of being a competent educator. It is difficult sometimes due to family responsibilities but it is worth it in the long run to improve my knowledge and skills as a teacher. It is good to be challenged as a teacher and to build on a repertoire of skills and knowledge.*”

Alternatively though, there were teachers who considered that the requirement questioned their integrity and professionalism to “*do the right thing as a teacher*”. Hence, the new requirement to document professional learning produced some mixed views from teachers.

“*I am surprised that schools and principals do not be trusted to manage the professional learning of staff... I am further surprised that despite being professionals we are not entrusted to be responsible for ongoing learning... surely this is something that should occur as part of professional dialogue between principals and staff... it feels like we have been enmeshed in a climate of distrust.*”

Conclusions

The evaluation of teachers renewing registration in 2015-2016 identified a number of key findings around the professional learning undertaken by teachers throughout their renewal period. These are now discussed in relation to each of the key Research Questions 1-7. In addition, a summary of the insights gained from the audit of teachers' learning summaries is provided.

Audit of professional learning summaries

The audit identified a number of issues in the majority of summaries, even those considered to have passed the benchmark established by the TRB project team for this first experience. A key finding was that a proportion of teachers did not discriminate between their roles and responsibilities as a teacher and their own personal professional learning. While there are likely to be 'shades of grey' in some instances, this is where the annotation in relation to the APST becomes critical. Further confusion was evident with work undertaken after hours (e.g., a school camp) submitted as professional learning when it is professional practice.

“A key finding was that a proportion of teachers did not discriminate between their roles and responsibilities as a teacher and their own personal professional learning.”

A concern for the TRB is that teachers did not receive feedback regarding their summaries so there may be teachers who now consider that the activities submitted were acceptable when inappropriate activities were actually deleted from the 60 hours during the audit process. However, given that most teachers had submitted an excess of 60 hours, they still successfully met the benchmark. It was clear from the telephone calls, comments made by teachers on the survey and during the focus group interviews that teachers are being confronted with conflicting information from many different sources (not the TRB) with many teachers not seeking clarification regarding their questions from TRB staff.

RQ 1: What is the nature of the professional learning experiences undertaken by the teachers sampled?

The evaluation found evidence of the five modes of learning currently used by the TRB

“Of interest was the low proportion of teachers providing learning activities that aligned to the mode of online learning.”

in its communication in the kinds of activities submitted by teachers. Face-to-face was clearly the preference of all teachers regardless of their employment status, employment setting, employment location and years of teaching determined by statistical comparisons. Of interest was the low proportion of teachers providing learning activities that aligned to the mode of online learning.

These findings are surprising given the difficulty for particular cohorts of teachers, such as those employed in country or remote locations, TRTs and those not currently teaching. While teachers clearly prefer face-to-face for a variety of reasons as validated by individual items on the survey, there was the added anxiety shared by teachers about having to produce evidence of professional learning if required. Hence, this was likely a confounding factor in the results presented in this evaluation.

RQ 2: What impact did teachers perceive these learning experiences had on their professional growth?

The impact of professional learning on teachers was actually a difficult construct for which to collect evidence even though items were provided on the survey. While statistical differences emerged for these items, no clear trends for particular cohorts of teachers were identified. From the comments provided by teachers it was clear that impact might best be considered on a spectrum with immediate change around teacher thinking, ideas or practice at one end, with longer-term impact at the other end of the spectrum. In general, teachers view professional learning as being an important component of what is required in their role as a professional. However, a minority of teachers considered that the requirement to document and show evidence of their professional learning as a sign of mistrust that undermined their professionalism. There is clearly a need to explore the impact of professional learning further especially as the 60-hour requirement is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Given the complexity of measuring or assessing professional learning as supported by the research literature, this will require a targeted and specific project conducted over a longer period.

“In general, teachers view professional learning as being an important component of what is required in their role as a professional.”

RQ 3: To what degree did the professional teaching standards (APST) align with the professional learning experiences reported?

Teachers were informed about the APST and were able to align their professional learning activities to each of the standards. All standards were targeted by teachers with 1 726 teachers addressing all the standards in their learning summaries even though this was not a requirement for the TRB.

Having said this, the alignment of activities to particular standards was not always clear, especially for activities that bordered between professional practice and professional learning. This is where clear annotations by teachers helped clarify how a particular activity had supported the individual in addressing the standard. Even though teachers aligned activities to standards, the majority of teachers spoke positively about providers that issued certificates with the standards identified. The issue here though is that it does not actually provide teachers with the ownership to contextualise the standards to their own teaching.

RQ 4: How did teachers record and provide evidence of their professional learning?

The majority of evidence cited on the professional learning summaries was certificates and notes. Of all the requirements, identification of appropriate evidence emerged during the focus group interviews as being particularly problematic for teachers. In fact, teachers shared that they were so concerned that they deliberately sought activities that provided certificates of attendance. The result was a preference for face-to-face sessions or even online learning where certificates were distributed. There is clearly a need here for further examples of various activities and the types of evidence that would be considered acceptable in documenting professional learning.

RQ 5: What are the key challenges experienced in meeting professional learning requirements?

Teachers identified a number of challenges in meeting the 60 hours of professional learning. Analyses of the data from the summaries and online surveys identified that TRTs were the most affected cohort followed by teachers not currently teaching and those on short-term contracts. In terms of employment location, teachers in country schools faced significant challenges around professional learning compared to their peers in

“In terms of employment location, teachers in country schools faced significant challenges around professional learning compared to their peers in metropolitan schools.”

metropolitan schools. Many of the challenges for these four cohorts involved distance, time, cost, and the impact of family and work-life balance.

Further insights provided during the focus groups and from comments on the surveys highlighted the difficulties some teachers faced in gaining support from senior management to attend particular professional learning opportunities. The result was they had to attend on weekends or after school while funding the activity personally. Importantly, these comments came from teachers in each of the three sectors indicating that it is not sector-driven but by individual schools based upon budgets and strategic plans established by schools in relation to future directions.

Stepping back from this, it is important to note that much of the discussion related to face-to-face professional learning and not to the other modes of learning that were available for teachers to access. The drive for face-to-face learning activities is evident for all teachers even though there are quite limiting constraints for particular cohorts of teachers, such as TRTs, those not currently teaching and teachers in country schools.

RQ 6: What areas of interest and need are identified by teachers in supporting their professional learning into the future?

A variety of needs emerged from the analysis of teachers' responses from the online surveys although no definite trends were identifiable with the exception of TRTs and teachers not currently teaching. In the majority of cases, the needs identified could be explained given the particular cohort that was affected. TRTs are especially interesting regarding their needs in that they represent a diverse group with early career teachers trying to enter the profession at one end and highly experienced, semi-retired teachers at the other with very different views about their needs around professional learning.

The open responses provided by teachers indicate that teachers are seeking professional learning around specific content areas (e.g., mathematics, humanities, languages, sciences, music) and curriculum frameworks. Importantly, approximately half of the teachers interested in content areas are in primary schools so this is not just about secondary teachers pursuing their discipline specialisms. This was an interesting finding given that this type of specialist professional learning is not likely to be provided as school-based professional learning thereby requiring teachers to seek out these opportunities in the wider educational community (e.g., through associations, universities, or online).

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RQ 7: What was the response to the TRB's communications strategy in disseminating information to teachers in SA around new professional learning requirements?

The communications strategy of the TRB received extremely positive responses from teachers in relation to the information sessions, website, *Registration Buzz*, emails and telephone communication. Teachers were complimentary about the clarity they received regarding the expectations around professional learning from TRB staff. The Teachers Portal was considered easy to use and very useful by the teachers who documented their professional learning electronically. While some teachers experienced minor glitches in gaining access, the majority spoke positively about it as being “*fit for purpose*”. A few teachers perceived the documentation as duplicating what was already being undertaken in their schools, hence critical of the need to replicate the process.

The evaluation of 2 254 teachers (i.e., total number selected) progressed without major difficulties with a clear process established for notifying and communicating with teachers comprising the sample. The audit of summaries did not provide feedback to individual teachers so there is a possibility that these teachers consider their activities met the learning requirements for TRB. However, the findings in this report provide many examples from teachers that will be useful in sharing via the website and *Registration Buzz*.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based upon the key findings presented in this report. They are provided for consideration by the TRB in planning future directions around the professional learning requirements of registered teachers. They are collated into three broad categories:

- Building Teacher Ownership of Professional Learning,
- Systems Alignment through Cooperation, and
- TRB Processes and Communications.

Presented in this manner they represent a scaling of focus from overarching recommendations that might be viewed as the responsibility of all educational stakeholders and authorities through to those recommendations that are specifically relevant to the TRB.

Building Teacher Ownership of Professional Learning

1. The TRB and other educational stakeholders promote greater clarity around the differences between professional learning as part of professional growth of a teacher and professional practice that embraces those roles and responsibilities that constitute the normal activities of a teacher regardless of the employment status (i.e., contract or permanent).

An overarching framework for supporting teachers in making these distinctions might be Standard 6 *Engage in Professional Learning* along with the associated foci: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4. The evaluation demonstrates that the majority of teachers aligned their learning to this standard (not surprisingly). However, the foci encourage teachers to consider their learning at a deeper level in relation to (i) planning around their own needs; (ii) being able to reflect on how their learning enhances their practice; (iii) engaging in collaborative networks; and, (iv) ways in which their learning enhances student learning.

2. The TRB and other educational stakeholders encourage teachers to consider the impact of their professional learning by reflecting on the:
 - Insights or ideas gained as an immediate outcome of their learning;
 - Insights or ideas that emerge after a substantive period of time from engaging in professional learning so are longer-term in impact; and
 - Opportunities for teachers to apply their insights or learnings with their peers either in the same school, local community of teachers, or at an association level (i.e., within communities of practice).

Note: Impact is an important consideration but also very complex given there are no easy measures to apply in a valid and reliable way. Hence, further investigation would require a specific project targeted at this particular goal.

Systems Alignment through Cooperation

3. The TRB will clarify with the Department for Education and Child Development, Catholic Education South Australia, the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, and early childhood services the professional learning expectations of employers to better align the expectations of teacher registration renewal by the TRB.
The TRB clarify with educational stakeholders that the focus of professional learning is around individual teacher registration. As such, teachers need to be supported in seeking specific professional learning that is relevant to their own unique needs through workshops, online resources, individual research, or personal study. This professional learning is necessary in order for teachers to address the APST.
4. The TRB collaborate with the Department for Education and Child Development, Catholic Education South Australia, the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, and early childhood services to ensure greater equity for those teachers finding difficulties in meeting the professional learning requirements by accessing a range of different opportunities. This might include:
 - Exploring ways for teachers not permanently attached to a school or a service, such as TRTs or teachers not currently teaching, to gain greater access to work-based professional learning opportunities where they can participate with colleagues.
 - Providing teachers in regional areas similar opportunities to their peers in metropolitan areas, such as a one or two-day regional conference that might be held in areas including Eyre Peninsula, the Upper North, the Riverland, and the South East of South Australia.

TRB Processes and Communications

5. The TRB consider Standard 6 and the four foci as an overarching framework to encourage teachers to think more deeply about their own professional learning needs to enhance personal ownership while ensuring that it does not become a 'tick box' exercise in order to merely complete mandatory hours.
6. The TRB staff:
 - Continue to encourage and support teachers to record their professional learning through the online Teachers Portal, which is a secure environment allowing teachers to also update their own personal details.
 - Revise the labels or modes of learning forming the 'flower' on the current information sheets for professional learning as there is a high degree of overlap between these labels that do not help teachers to identify the variety of professional learning that is possible (links to Recommendation 7).

7. The TRB update their information about professional learning using examples of actual de-identified data obtained from the evaluation to share with teachers through the website and *Registration Buzz*. Further specific information is required to support teachers in completing their professional learning summaries so that they meet TRB requirements. This includes:
 - Provision of authentic examples of activities that might be undertaken by teachers online through their own personal research or study along with appropriate annotations as to how these activities align to the APST.
 - Greater detailed examples of activities that are not demonstrative of professional learning so should not be included in teachers' professional learning summaries.
 - Further examples of the types of evidence that might be used for specific learning activities in professional learning summaries.

8. The TRB consider future reviews of professional learning summaries to include a stratified random sample of 10% of teachers currently renewing their registration. This might align to the actual renewal process so that only teachers who meet all the requirements (including appropriate professional learning) gain their certificate of registration.

Glossary

Term/Acronym	Definition
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APST	<i>Australian Professional Standards for Teachers</i>
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
IB	International Baccalaureate
PL	Professional Learning
<i>Registration Buzz</i>	A fortnightly e-newsletter published by the TRB
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
Teachers Portal	A secure online website that allows teachers to record their professional learning
TRB	Teachers Registration Board of South Australia
TRT	Temporary Relief Teacher



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