



# Code of Conduct

Discussion Paper

August 2022

*The Board is exploring how to develop a South Australian Code that provides clear, aspirational guidance to all teachers in South Australia.*

**trb**

**Teachers  
Registration Board**  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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## Glossary of terms and abbreviations

ECT	Early Career Teacher
HALT	Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
PST	Pre-service Teacher (those currently studying at a higher education institution to become a registered teacher)
SAT	Special Authority for an Unregistered Person to Teach
The Code	The Code of Conduct
The Board	Teachers Registration Board of South Australia
Teacher	A registered teacher, working at a registered site in South Australia
Learner	Any person being taught at a registered site in South Australia, from birth to senior secondary
Site	A place where teaching and learning takes place, such as school, or childcare or day-care centre

# Overview

South Australia has a long and proud history of maintaining high standards for the teaching profession. Since the 1970s The Teachers Registration Board (the Board) has regulated the teaching profession to ensure teachers are fit and proper to have care of children. Today the Board registers teachers working with learners from birth to Year 12, with South Australia being notable for registering early childhood teachers.

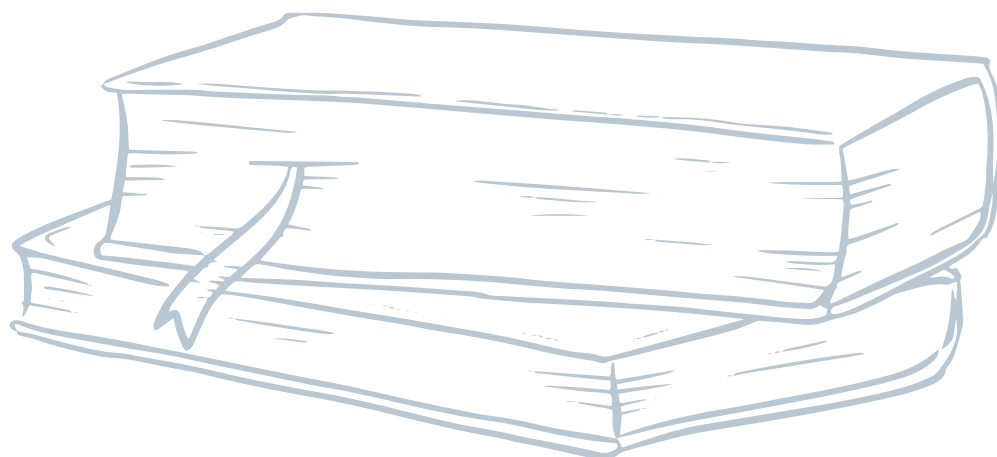
In 2021 several changes were made to the Teachers Registration and Standards Act 2004. As part of these changes, the Board was given the ability to develop a Code of Conduct for teachers (the Code). Developing this new Code is part of the Board's commitment to the teaching profession in South Australia.

This document outlines the development and consultation process the Board is undertaking, and the next steps in developing this important proposed

resource. The first phase of consultation has already taken place, an initial consultation event which was attended by teachers, parents, carers, employers, and unions (see below for further details). Their feedback has helped to develop this Discussion Paper.

As the Board moves to the next phase in the development of the Code, the primary focus is to work with those who will use it, such as teachers, parents, carers, learners or school leaders. Anyone who interacts with the teaching profession is encouraged to contribute to the Code, to ensure that the end result is something that all connected to the profession can be proud of.

For any resulting Code to be a useful document, it will require input from the whole community. The aim is to develop something that complements existing site or employer codes and to provide a resource that is useful and valued by all involved with the teaching profession.



# Why a code of conduct?

Many professionals have a single, overarching code of conduct that is specific to their profession, for example nurses and lawyers. There are also many important documents that protect young people from the most serious of physical or emotional harms. Recently the national report *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia (2018)* focused on teaching as a single profession. The Board recognises that most teachers work at sites that have their own Codes of Conduct which govern the functions of that site.

The Board is developing a South Australian Code that provides clear, aspirational guidance to all teachers in South Australia. It is not intended to replace these other documents. Instead, it is to be an overarching professional code, rather than one for a specific workplace/site. The Board is seeking to work in collaboration with all stakeholders to develop a Code that aims to provide guidance and support to teachers, no matter where they work.

This proposed Code of Conduct aims to complement the Board's existing Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics is based on three values: respect; responsibility; and integrity. These are among values identified by teachers in the Code's initial consultation event (see below), as being central to their practice. In the existing [Code of Ethics](#), "Upholding our professional standards" currently sits under the "Respect" domain. Together with the Board teachers have already embraced the idea that professional standards are a fundamental aspect of professional practice for teachers.

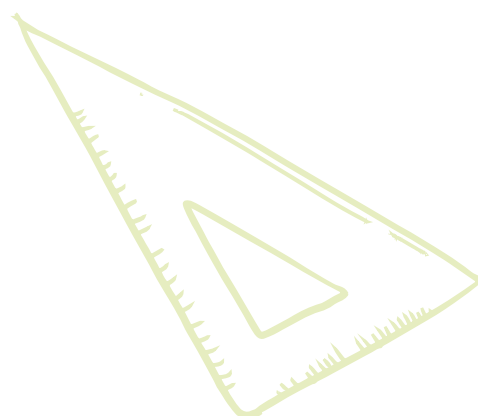
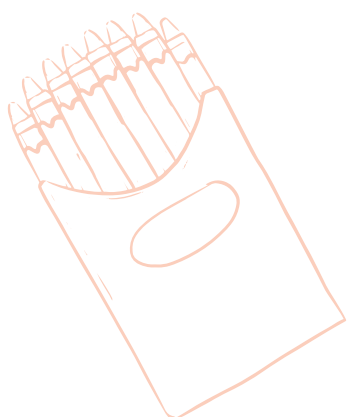
The terms conduct and behaviour are sometimes used interchangeably. However, conduct goes beyond behaviour. Conduct is not just what a person does, but

the way in which they choose to do it. This is the link between teachers' values and teachers' actions, and helps us to describe what is expected of the profession. It is this connection that this Discussion Paper seeks to explore.

As the Teachers Registration Board does not currently have a Code of Conduct, it is seeking input from all involved with the teaching profession. This could include:

- Current teachers (from early childhood to senior secondary), from all parts of South Australia
- Parents, carers and learners
- Higher education organisations providing Initial Teacher Education (ITE)
- Employer groups
- Organisations associated with child protection
- Education unions
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups
- Indigenous education representatives
- Holders of Special Authority to Teach (SATs)
- Pre-service Teachers (PSTs)
- Other education stakeholders

If you are reading this, we encourage you to be part of this conversation.



## How will the Code be used?

The Code is, primarily, intended to be a resource for teachers. It is envisaged that it will be something that can be referred to, to assist in resolving or discussing issues related to the profession. The Board recognises that almost all teachers are adhering to the behavioural standards expected of the profession. However, it is also recognised that teachers are fallible. Sometimes people fall short of the mark, or need help to decide what is the right thing to do.

The Code aims to provide teachers with a resource to assist them when thinking about the range of issues they encounter in their professional lives. It could also help them in their discussions with colleagues.

It is not intended that this Code will be a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts'. However, on occasion, there may be a situation where a teacher moves from a poor choice to unprofessional conduct. These cases are often reported to the Board for investigation. As a starting point, the Code could be one of the tools used to determine if a teacher should be required to respond to an assertion of unprofessional conduct.

Just as the Code could illustrate exemplary behaviour, it could also shine a light on unprofessional behaviour. This Discussion Paper will ask you to think about this continuum of teachers' conduct.

## Where did it start?

The Board started this process by considering what has already been done with teaching codes, and this work has been based on UNESCO guidelines for developing a resource like this one (Poisson 2009). There are a number of other excellent codes of conduct that exist. These have informed both the initial consultation event discussed below, as well as elements for further exploration. In Australia, examples are represented by the Victorian Institute of Teaching's Code of Conduct (2021), and internationally by Ireland (2016) and Ontario, Canada (nd).

The UNESCO guidelines have helped the Teachers Registration Board with its initial thinking, and in deciding how we can involve individuals from the teaching profession. You may wish to look at these examples when thinking about your discussion responses (see the reference section at the end for the relevant links).

# Initial Consultation Process

## Stage 1.

### Initial Consultation Event



Consultation for the Code commenced with a launch in March 2022. A day-long event was supported by Board staff at independently facilitated round-table discussions, and was attended by individuals representing a wide range of stakeholder groups.

Participants represented early childhood, primary and secondary teachers, representatives of the three schooling sectors (Catholic, government, and independent schools), the two South Australian education unions, parents, carers and South Australia's four higher education providers.

This day was a starting point for the Code's planning and development phase. Participants explored the notion of values and ethics, and how these relate to conduct issues in the following five teacher relationship groups.

1. The Teacher and the Learner
2. The Teacher and Other Teachers
3. The Teacher and the Wider Community
4. The Teacher and Other Professionals
5. The Teacher and the Regulator

These groupings were used to stimulate the discussion for those who were at the launch, but the final Code does not necessarily need to use these groups.

## Stage 2.

### Follow-up Survey



Following the initial consultation event, a short, anonymous online survey was sent to attendees. This survey was designed to assess whether participants, having engaged with the start of the process, felt that a Code of Conduct was an important tool the Board should pursue, what they felt about the five teacher relationships, and their reflections on areas of conduct relevant to the development of a code.

The Board received 19 responses from 37 individuals, broadly representing all attending stakeholder groups. The Board was pleased to see that all respondents believed the development of a Code of Conduct should proceed, although there was not consensus about what the purpose of such a code might be, or whether it would contribute to teaching being considered as a single profession. Similarly, there was not consensus that the five relationship groups listed above were the only ones on which to focus.

# Responding to the Discussion Paper

The Board is seeking input into this discussion from as wide a range of individuals as possible, including pre-service teachers currently studying at a higher education institution, current teachers, school leaders, teacher educators, parents, carers, education-based community organisations, holders of special authorisations to teach, employer groups, and unions. In other words, anyone connected with learners or the teaching profession.

You can contribute your written submissions through the [online survey](#). When you log on, you will see the questions listed on the following page. You can respond to all of these, or just some, if you wish. There will also be the option for you to address any other areas or issues you think are important for the Board to consider.

The Board asks that when compiling your response, you keep in mind the idea of conduct or behaviour. Please remember that the Board already has a Code of Ethics, and there are a number of site-specific employer codes already in use. The Board seeks and values

your views on developing a profession-wide teaching code of conduct, and appreciates the time and effort of respondents in providing input.

The Board may distribute or publish responses as part of the development, launch, or management of the Code of Conduct. There are details about this on the submission webpage for you to review.

Through this process we are looking to stimulate conversation and the sharing of ideas informed by evidence, expertise, and experience. Written submissions are currently being sought, and there will be opportunities to attend face-to-face or online consultation events as well (see below).

The Board would like to assure all stakeholders that no decision has been made about a resulting Code(s), the form they will take, or how the Code might be implemented and used.

All feedback is welcome, as we work together towards developing this potential resource.

# Discussion Questions

The questions below have been formed from feedback from the Code's initial consultation event and follow-up survey. They do not include every issue raised on this day but bring together some of the more significant ideas.

The following questions are listed individually on the [Discussion Paper Online Submission Portal](#). Submissions can respond to as many, or as few, of these questions as you wish.

We encourage you to expand on your responses, and to provide the Board with some background as to why you have chosen to respond the way you have. Please include any implications of a proposed Code of Conduct that you think should be considered.

1



**What advantages/disadvantages might result from having a Code of Conduct for the teaching profession?**

2



**Should a Code of Conduct be something aspirational (but achievable), or should it set a baseline for teacher conduct? Should/could it describe unacceptable conduct? Please expand on what you think the Code should include.**

*The Teachers Registration Board recognises that there are topics which comprise teacher conduct at a site, but which usually are outside of its regulatory scope, for example, site policies around email response times, or dress-codes. Each site will have its own rules that should be covered by local codes and procedures.*

3



**A profession-wide code applies to a teacher 'everywhere', not at a particular employment-site, many of which would have an employer-sanctioned code. How might these different codes complement, or contradict, each other?**

*Not all learners are minors and some teachers have learners who are so close in age they are almost peers. This may impact on choices teachers make about the way they behave.*



# Discussion Questions

4



**A Code of Conduct needs to cover a broad range of practice from Early Childhood to Senior Secondary. How can a code address this span?**

5



**Should there be a single Code which includes registered teachers and holders of a Special Authority to Teach (SATs)? Should SATs have a code of their own?**

**What about pre-service teachers? Why?**

*Under the Act, the Teachers Registration Board can register individuals with “Special authority for an unregistered person to teach”. These are people who carry out particular teaching roles in individual schools, such as specialist music teachers, or people who hold particular roles in a religious community.*

*Holders of a Special Authority to Teach (SATs) need to comply with all of the TRB’s requirements about being a fit and proper person to teach, including a criminal history check and a Working With Children Check. Some of these people will be completing an education/teaching qualification, but some will not. SATs attend schools and teach individuals or classes but are not registered teachers.*

6



**Should the Code be structured around the five relationships discussed at the initial consultation event (see page 6) or should the Code be based around broader concepts (see the Victorian Institute of Teaching’s Code of Conduct for an example of this). Please expand on your answer.**

*Parents/carers are part of the community, but the relationship between teachers and parents/carers may need to be thought about separately.*

# Discussion Questions

7

**Teachers live and work in a range of locations. Can there be a single definition of a teacher's 'community'? How could this be represented in the Code?**



*In some rural and remote schools teachers work in small communities. In these communities your friends may be your learners and their families. You may play sport or socialise with both learners and parents. In these situations, the school community and the wider community can merge.*

8

**Like anyone else, teachers live their lives in public. How should teachers' professional and private conduct intersect? To what extent would a Code of Conduct need to apply to both a teacher's professional and private conduct?**



*Social media has created complexities in the online environment and re-set many goal posts. This can impact on teachers' relationships with learners, but also bring their professional and personal lives into conflict.*

9

**The Teachers Registration Board has an existing Code of Ethics. How do you think these two documents could support each other, or should the Code of Ethics be reviewed as well?**



*Values, ethics, and conduct sit side-by-side when we think about a scenario and relationships. The UNESCO Guidelines state that "ethical norms (or values) – concepts such as integrity, honesty, truth, fairness and respect for other – should underpin the work of the members of the profession... .. (and) should serve as inspiration for the development of the professional standards" (Poisson, 2009, p. 20).*

# What will happen once responses to this paper have closed?

The responses received to this paper will be examined along with the feedback from the initial consultation event and will be developed for group sessions. These sessions will be held at the Board's office in the Adelaide CBD, or online, on the dates indicated below. A booking system for these events can be accessed via Eventbrite – please see the [Board's website](#) for updates.

Larger groups from schools, sectors, or regions, who would like to host an online or face-to-face group are encouraged to approach us to see if a dedicated time can be arranged to meet their needs.

Following these focus group sessions, a first draft of a proposed Code of Conduct will be written and distributed via the same channels as this Discussion Paper.

Face to Face Sessions	Online Sessions (via Teams)
All sessions 3.30pm to 5pm	
Tuesday 21 February	Wednesday 22 February
Wednesday 1 March	Tuesday 28 February
Tuesday 7 March	Wednesday 8 March
Wednesday 15 March	Tuesday 14 March

*Please note that face-to-face sessions are subject to change, based on possible COVID restrictions.*

[Click here for the online survey](#)



[Email your submission](#)

## References

Poisson, M. (2009). **Guidelines for the Design and Effective Use of Teacher Codes of Conduct.** UNESCO, France

Victorian Institute of Teaching (2021) **The Victoria Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct.**

Education Services Australia (2018). **One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia. Victoria, Australia**

Teachers Registration Board of SA. (2007). **Code of Ethics.**

Ontario College of Teachers, Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario (nd). **Exploring Ethical Professional Relationships.**

An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireacht, The Teaching Council (2016). **Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers.** Ireland.



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