

# Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders

A shared responsibility and commitment

August 2012



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The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has been working closely with key education stakeholders to develop the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (the Charter). The Charter describes the importance and characteristics of high quality professional learning in improving teacher and school leader practice.

In developing the Charter, AITSL consulted with national and international experts, state and territory education authorities, Catholic and Independent school authorities, teacher regulatory authorities, peak national bodies, including principal associations, and teacher professional associations.

The Institute's responsibility to lead this work is outlined in its Letter of Expectation from the Commonwealth Minister for Education.

The *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* was endorsed by Education Ministers at the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) on 3 August 2012.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership with funding provided by the Australian Government.

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# The importance of a professional learning charter for teachers and school leaders

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* sets the ambitious goals of Australian schooling promoting equity and excellence and of all young Australians becoming successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. To achieve these objectives, research tells us that there is no higher priority than further improving the quality of teaching in Australian schools. There is also a growing body of research that emphasises the importance of professional learning in changing teacher and school leader behaviour in order to improve student outcomes, and that provides clear messages about the types of professional learning that are most likely to lead to sustainable change.

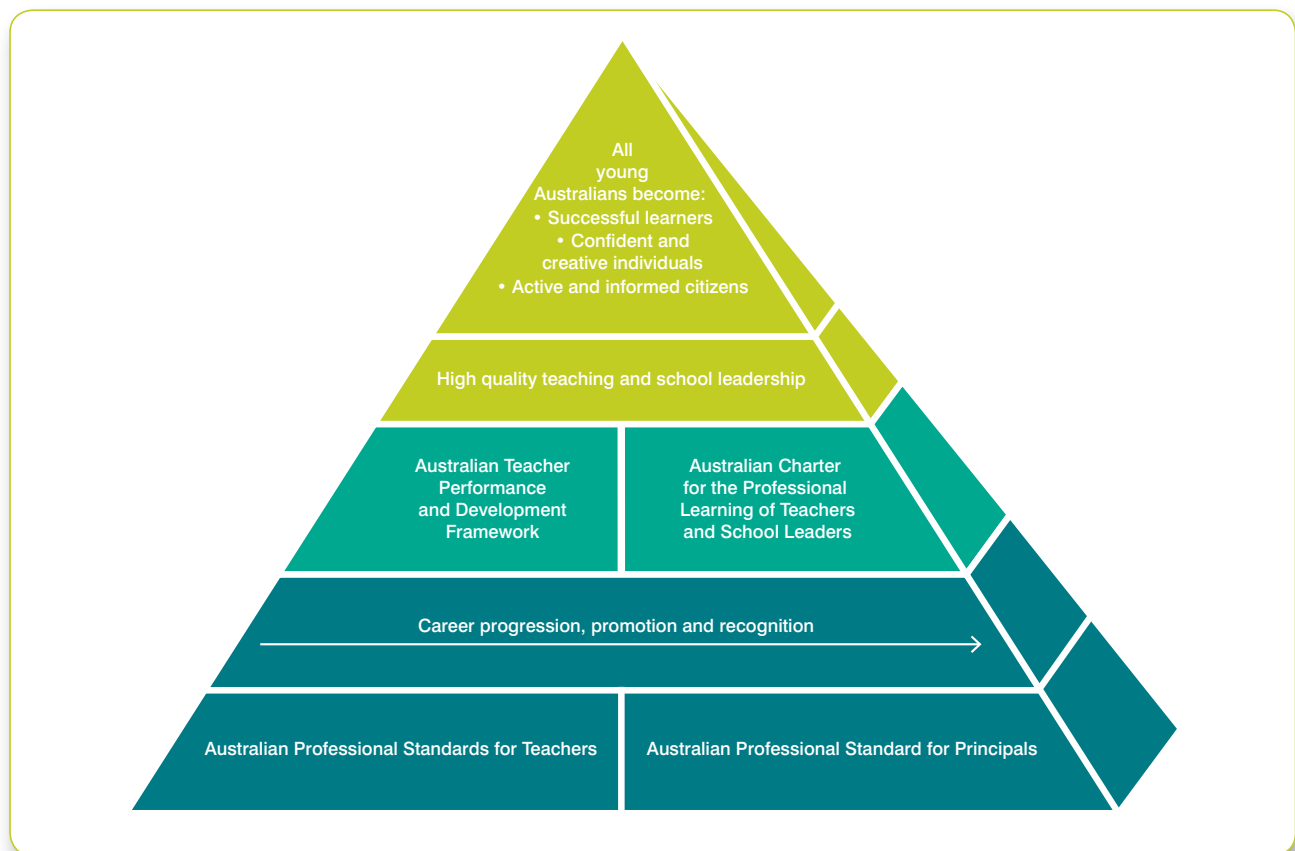
Professional learning is the formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school's collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement

with learning and wellbeing. At its most effective, professional learning develops individual and collective capacity across the teaching profession to address current and future challenges.

The *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (the Charter):

- > affirms the importance of learning in improving the professional knowledge, practice and engagement of all teachers and school leaders to achieve improvement in student outcomes
- > articulates the expectation that all teachers and school leaders actively engage in professional learning throughout their careers
- > describes the characteristics of a high quality professional learning culture and of effective professional learning, to assist teachers, school leaders and those who support them to get the most from their professional learning.

## Professional learning in context



# A professional learning culture

Professional learning will be most effective when it takes place within a culture where teachers and school leaders expect and are expected to be active learners, to reflect on, receive feedback on and improve their pedagogical practice, and by doing so to improve student outcomes. The *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* advocates for the creation of a performance and development culture in all Australian schools. With its focus on development, such a culture provides support for professional learning, and creates the conditions where professional learning can be most effective.

A high quality professional learning culture will be characterised by:

- > a high degree of leadership support for ongoing adult learning and risk taking
- > collective responsibility for improving practice
- > disciplined collaboration aimed at specific and relevant goals that relate to the learning needs of students
- > high levels of trust, interaction and inter-dependence
- > support for professional learning through school structures, explicit planning and the allocation of time
- > a focus on the professional learning that is most likely to be effective in improving professional practice and student outcomes.

## Evaluation of professional learning

A strong professional learning culture will include a commitment to evaluating professional learning. Research, including that summarised in the Charter, provides guidance on what effective professional learning looks like. It is important that this is backed up by evaluation of specific professional learning activities. Sophisticated, robust, multi-method ways of evaluating professional learning are required to identify the impact and effect size of professional learning activities. It is important that this evaluation:

- > is built into programs from the start
- > evaluates outcomes at multiple levels
- > focuses on changes in teacher and leader practice leading to improved student outcomes
- > tracks change over the short, medium and long term.

# Characteristics of effective professional learning

A commitment to engage in professional learning must be matched by an understanding of which types of professional learning are most likely to be effective in improving pedagogical practice and student outcomes. Although teachers and leaders will engage in a range of professional learning activities for different purposes, overall the research is clear that the size effects of some types of professional learning on practice and outcomes are much greater than others. In an OECD survey, teachers from around the world report that individual and collaborative research, qualification programs and informal dialogue have the greatest impacts on their practice. Attendance at conferences and seminars and one-off visits to other schools are reported to have less impact. This is confirmed by research on the size effects of different types of professional learning on student outcomes, which suggests that observation, practicing new approaches and feedback are more effective methods than discussion, lectures and field trips to other schools.

Research also sheds light on the specific characteristics of high quality professional learning. Professional learning will be most effective when it is relevant, collaborative and future focused, and when it supports teachers to reflect on, question and consciously improve their practice. These characteristics of effective professional learning should be considered when designing, selecting, reflecting on or evaluating professional learning.

## Relevant

Improving student outcomes is the ultimate goal of all teachers and school leaders, and of the professional learning they undertake. Professional learning will be most engaging for adult learners and have the greatest impacts on practice when it assists teachers and school leaders to address and adapt to the challenges they face in improving student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing.

Therefore we need to look for professional learning that:

- > assists teachers and school leaders to meet the identified needs of students to achieve immediate goals and long term outcomes
- > encourages teachers and school leaders to find new solutions to persistent issues, by challenging their assumptions about their practice
- > is based on current research on effective leadership, teaching and learning
- > links closely to school, sector and system goals and initiatives
- > is matched to the experiences, strengths, current knowledge, career stage and goals of the adult learner
- > is available when needed.

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## Collaborative

Collaboration has a powerful effect in magnifying and spreading the benefits of professional learning and adds a new and valuable dimension to the learning undertaken by individuals. It connects teachers and leaders to their colleagues within and across schools and to external experts. Effective collaboration involves more than simply working together. It demands a disciplined and purposeful approach to collaborating to solve the challenges that are most important to improving student outcomes.

Therefore we need to look for professional learning that:

- > promotes teacher and leader ownership of their learning through active involvement in the design, content, practice and evaluation of their learning
- > provides opportunities to receive feedback on practice, and observe the practice of others
- > offers support to change practice through coaching, mentoring and reflection
- > provides opportunities to access and learn from experts
- > develops professional learning communities within and between schools
- > uses technology to enrich collaboration and learning.

## Future Focused

Effective professional learning seeks to develop teachers and school leaders who are adaptable and able to deal with new and unexpected challenges. It exposes teachers to new and emerging practices and the theories that underpin them. It should focus not simply on improving existing practice, but also on assisting teachers and school leaders to understand the theory behind what practices work in different situations, and when and how to apply a broad repertoire of strategies.

Therefore we need to look for professional learning that:

- > equips teachers and school leaders to deal with future as well as current challenges
- > promotes action research and inquiry and develops teachers as researchers
- > develops high level skills that allow teachers and school leaders to adapt and excel in a rapidly changing and hyper-connected world
- > supports teachers and school leaders to explore research that challenges their thinking, encourages them to develop their own theories of practice and promotes use of a range of effective pedagogical practices
- > promotes innovation in teacher and school leader practice.

# The Charter in action

There is clear evidence that purposeful professional learning for teachers and school leaders is one of the most effective strategies for improving student outcomes in our schools. The professional learning undertaken will vary to suit the context and priorities of teachers, leaders, schools, systems and sectors, but the imperative to engage actively in high quality professional learning remains the same. The Charter unequivocally defines effective professional learning as a shared responsibility that must be taken up at all levels of the education system – by teachers, school leaders, system leaders and policy makers.

Changing culture and professional practices is not easy and will require sustained effort, but the clear message of the Charter is that the results will be worth the effort. High quality professional learning is central to improving the quality of teaching, and through this to improving the outcomes we achieve for all young Australians.





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# About AITSL

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The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership with funding provided by the Australian Government.

AITSL works with the education community to:

- > set and maintain standards to promote excellence in teaching and school leadership
- > lead and influence excellence in teaching and school leadership
- > support and recognise excellence in teaching and school leadership.

To find out more about AITSL and its work please visit [aitsl.edu.au](http://aitsl.edu.au).

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