

High Quality Professional Learning National Dialogue 2018

Stimulus paper – November 2018



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Why professional learning is important

Teachers make a difference. It is well-known that teacher quality is the single most important in-school factor influencing student achievement¹. Good teaching is also not an accident. Being an effective teacher is the result of study, reflection, practice, and hard work². It's also the result of effective ongoing professional learning.

A review of nine studies that investigated the effectiveness of professional learning found that on average, 49 hours of professional learning can boost student achievement by 21 percentile points.³ On average, a teacher helps their students to progress about 14 percentile points in a single year⁴. In other words, professional learning can amplify the teacher's effectiveness by a factor of 1.4.

Professional learning undertaken by teachers needs to be relevant and focussed on the next learning move in their individual context, as well as on the profession's collective goal to improve learner growth and achievement. However, the effectiveness of professional learning should ultimately be judged by the difference it eventually makes to outcomes for learners.

Effective professional learning approaches expose teachers to evidence-based strategies and discipline specific content that includes strategies to support their learners to acquire such content. For this reason, the most effective professional learning approaches are education setting-based and managed. These approaches focus on improving teaching practice, taking into account the specific circumstances of each education setting.



Dr Simon Breakspear, Executive Director of Agile Schools, outlines the importance of practice-based and research-informed professional learning.

Another crucial factor in professional learning is collaboration within a teacher's context. Effective collaboration encourages ongoing observation and feedback among colleagues where a culture of professional sharing, dialogue, experimentation and critique becomes commonplace. Effective collaboration is frequent and ongoing and, when most successful, an integral part of daily routines.

Collaboration promotes change beyond individual classrooms, resulting in whole school or site improvement. In other words, when educators increase their expertise by learning together, all learners benefit.

The environment and culture of the school or setting is key to the transference of knowledge and learning into changed teaching practice. Teachers are well placed to apply their professional learning to classroom practice when there is support for professional learning through site structures, explicit planning and the allocation of time.

¹ Hattie, J. (2009) *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses in education*

² Mizell, H. (2010) *Why professional development matters*, Learning Forward. Retrieved from https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/why_pd_matters_web.pdf

³ Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W.-Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. (2007). *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement*, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>

⁴ Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, J. C. (1996) *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement*. University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center

While this is true for all teachers, there are three cohorts of educators whose circumstances make it difficult for them to access and undertake high quality professional learning. Early childhood teachers, casual/relief teachers (CRTs) and teachers in rural, regional and remote (RRR) contexts face distinct opportunities and challenges that are addressed in this paper.



Three unique groups of teachers

1. The importance of early childhood education is well documented. Research has shown it provides the foundation for later academic and social success of students.⁵
2. Learners in RRR contexts face unique challenges by geographical location. NAPLAN results by geolocation consistently demonstrate that as geographical remoteness increases, achievement declines.⁶ Likewise, attendance data suggest that, as geographical remoteness increases, school attendance declines.⁷
3. CRT numbers have been on the rise since 2012. From 2015 to 2016, the increase in the number of CRTs employed amounted to seven per cent.⁸ This effectively means that more and more students are relying on the teaching ability of CRTs.

The distinct challenges faced by early childhood teachers, CRTs and teachers in RRR settings make it difficult for them to plan and undertake professional learning effectively.

There are approximately 36,000 teachers in RRR settings⁹ in Australia. Due to lack of available data, we do not currently know how many CRTs there are across Australia or where they are concentrated. It is also unclear exactly how many early childhood teachers there are in Australia (although we do know that there are 11,244 preschool services with a teacher¹⁰). It is evident, however, that teachers in these three cohorts represent a significant proportion of teachers in front of learners every day. Clearly, their teaching matters.

While there are several commonalities between these three groups (such as a tendency to be disconnected from the majority of the teacher workforce in Australia), each cohort has a unique set of challenges. Solutions should therefore be nuanced and unique, catering to individual needs. It is important that we continue to value these teachers as full members of the profession and provide them with the support they need to access high quality professional learning.

Who is responsible?

Chris Watt, Federal Secretary, Independent Education Union

Teacher registration authorities in Australia must begin to be proactive in their expectation on employers, government and non-government, to properly fund and support teachers in the requirements for gaining proficiency status (their licence) and maintaining that licence.

While there is rigorous oversight on teachers seeking their accreditation/certification, both initial and ongoing, there has been a distinct failure to quantify the requirements for this processes, regardless of workplace, and to ensure that a teacher's right to support during induction and maintenance periods is realised. There is no agreement or template of industry best practice.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) *Australia's Welfare*

⁶ NAPLAN data (2017)

⁷ <http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/student-attendance>

⁸ Department of Education and Training (2018) *Victorian Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2016*

⁹ ACARA schools data (2017)

¹⁰ ABS, preschool education, Australia, 2017

Two groups are particularly vulnerable and unless there is a quantifiable commitment to these professionals, there is a very real risk emerging around the capacity of schools to continue to operate on a 'business as usual' basis. The two groups are casual/temporary teachers and regional/rural teachers.

Casual and temporary teachers are often extraneous to the consideration of school employers/principals in their thinking about the professional learning needs and support mechanisms in the school's vision and plan.

Year after year one reads reports such as the following by Anna Patty in The Herald: "As universities pump out increasing numbers of teaching graduates, the new crop are joining more than 44,000 trained teachers in NSW on a waiting list for a permanent position. Last year, only half of 16,000 trainees who graduated across Australia had permanent employment four months later."

Those teachers who get a job in school education will invariably be in casual and temporary positions. These teachers need to be part of a process that ensures their appropriate induction into the profession, but invariably they are often not anyone's responsibility.

Even the simple provision of professional learning opportunities usually finds these teachers out-of-pocket, because they will be required to surrender a day's pay to attend a professional learning experience or not even been invited.

The chance of these beginning teachers getting any form of structured induction, including time and access to a mentor, is less than remote. For experienced casuals, who have their licence, the scene is no better in relation to access to professional learning that does not come at a significant financial cost.

Yet the day-to-day viability of schools is entirely dependent on a competent, well-supported, professionally resourced pool of casual and temporary teachers. If these teachers are unable to, or find it too difficult (financially or otherwise) to maintain their professional licence, it is every school and every one of their colleagues who will bear the cost.

To date, employers, school system authorities and school boards, have excitedly promoted the flag of teacher standards, but simultaneously failed to structurally review operations to support every member of the profession, not just those in permanent positions.

An early career teacher working as a casual teacher does not have the employment capital to guarantee a fair, responsible and well-resourced induction into their profession. This can only be and must be a fundamental requirement on the school and the employer.

The further one moves from the metropolitan area of major centres the harder it is to access face to face PL which is vital for building networks. Where face to face PL is offered in regional centres, the topics are extremely limited and may not be what an individual professional has identified as a need. The majority of PL that is offered in regional settings is what providers determine will be commercially viable or employers or other agencies determine as own priorities.

The geographical challenge regional and rural teachers face also economically disadvantages both the individual teacher and the school. If a course is running in the capital city, the teacher may need release from the day before the course to travel (which might also include fuel and/or flight costs), accommodation the night before and/or after and release for the actual day of the

course and to get home. Even if the course free to attend (which many aren't, usually costing from \$300 to \$2000 a day), the cost of attending the course is significant. These opportunities would not be offered to all permanent staff, let alone casual or temporary staff.

Online PL resources are growing but these are almost exclusively after hours and require IT infrastructure not always available due to the spotted roll out of NBN resources.

About this paper

This stimulus paper highlights some of the key challenges and opportunities for access to high quality professional learning by three unique cohorts of teachers, to be used as the basis for discussion and co-creation of solutions. This paper includes written and video provocations from a number of education experts in order to stimulate thinking. Video icon provides links to the videos.

For each cohort we've included 'ideas to get you started'—potential big picture or creative ideas that have come out of consultation with a range of stakeholders including teachers and school leaders; and 'food for thought'—prompting questions around what might be needed or considered when designing solutions to address the challenges faced by these three cohorts.

Early childhood teachers

There is substantial evidence available showing that quality early childhood education is fundamental. Since the most influential factor in the quality of that education is the qualifications and training of the workforce, professional learning in the early childhood sector must be viewed as a vital contributor to improving learner outcomes for all ages.

In an Australian study, researchers demonstrated that children who had attended a pre-school program at ages four or five in 2004 achieved up to 20 points higher across NAPLAN domains in year 3 in 2008, compared with students who did not attend pre-school. This equates to approximately 20 weeks of schooling by the year 3 level that students who did not attend pre-school missed out on¹¹.



Explore international trends in early childhood professional learning with Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In contrast to school settings, professional learning in the early childhood sector is often seen as a reward rather than a necessity. The professional learning that is offered is often not tailored to teachers' needs or does not allow for deeper engagement. Early childhood teachers are frequently isolated, often with only one teacher based at each site. Even if a teacher can find and fund professional learning, additional challenges are faced in finding CRT cover to enable them to attend the professional learning.

This stimulus paper has already identified the need for professional learning activities to be followed up with collaborative opportunities to try new activities and receive feedback, especially from leaders. How do we then provide opportunities for early childhood teachers to collaborate with similarly qualified colleagues?

We need to ensure that regardless of whether a teacher is employed at a small parent-governed kindergarten or a large long day care centre, they receive equal opportunities for professional learning and feedback.

Ideas to get you started

- The recent report *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia* review, recommends that all early childhood teachers should be registered with their teacher registration authority and be required to undertake professional learning. While not a cure-all solution, this would assist in raising the status of early childhood teachers within the profession and show that their learning and growth are valued at a system level.
- Develop partnerships with schools to make better use of professional learning activities and facilitate collaboration for more isolated teachers. Using schools as sources of collaboration and learning could provide stretch for isolated degree-qualified teachers.
- Develop a collaborative approach or exchange program between larger and smaller early childhood sites. This would have multiple benefits including the sharing of expertise and cover

¹¹ Warren & Haisken-DeNew (2013) <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>

between sites. The use of video observations may provide opportunities for teachers to receive feedback from their peers where off-site activities are not possible.

- Develop micro-credentials for early childhood educators (diploma and certificate qualified) to cultivate their skills in certain education elements in order to facilitate collaboration with early childhood teachers. There would then be some common education knowledge and skills across an early childhood site, reducing the isolation of early childhood teachers.
- Match early childhood teachers to mentors through AITSL's My Induction app, allowing them to access the expertise they need, online and at the point of need.

Food for thought

1. How might we enable communication and collaboration between early childhood sites (especially for those who might be in single educator services)?
2. How might we better cater to the specific learning needs and contexts of early childhood teachers?
3. How can the models being used in schools and other sectors be shared with and adapted for early childhood sites?
4. What can be done to existing materials, resources and advice to make them more inclusive and accessible for early childhood educators? What is missing completely?



Casual/relief teachers

Casual/relief teachers (CRTs) are not captured in Australian Bureau of Statistics schools data and as such we generally know very little about this group, which is estimated to make up 20 per cent of the teaching population. Anecdotally, we understand that teachers' motivations for being CRTs and their expectations of being part of a school community or the profession as a whole vary considerably. It is also worth noting that some of the issues highlighted for CRTs stretch beyond their professional learning and may have industrial implications, however consideration of these matters is outside the scope of this work.

We know that, on average, students spend three hours per week with CRTs and that “students might be in the care of CRTs for one year or more throughout their schooling”¹². Yet the focus on professional learning for CRTs has been found lacking, with 27 per cent of CRTs stating that they had not taken part in any professional learning in the previous 12 months compared to only three per cent of teachers in a permanent position¹³.

For CRTs, the responsibility lies heavily with the teacher themselves to identify, attend and evaluate professional learning activities. The degree to which CRTs have access to professional learning offered at schools where they regularly teach varies widely, however anecdotally we know of the positive benefits for both schools and individuals where CRTs have been ‘adopted’ as a staff member by schools.

The best casual/relief teachers can read the school culture in a matter of minutes and are a valuable source of knowledge and insight. The effectiveness of these teachers is shaped by how collaborative the school is – if there is a lot of team teaching and interdisciplinary work, they come in as part of the team, if not, they are more on their own.

Andy Hargreaves, Research Professor, Boston College

The perceived impact of professional learning activities may also be lower for CRTs with the emphasis falling on compliance rather than improvement of teaching and learning outcomes. The vast majority of teachers are able to identify a specific action or change they wanted to make as a result of participation in a recent professional learning activity. How do we support CRTs to implement professional learning when they infrequently teach the same group of students?

¹² Nicholas & Wells (2016) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1169506>

¹³ AITSL HQPL Summary findings report (2017)

The impact of professional learning extends beyond the activity itself. When teachers have the support of school leaders, opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, space to experiment with new strategies in a safe environment and an opportunity to receive feedback, a change in practice is more likely. However, for CRTs these supporting factors are not commonly in place, reducing the impact of any activity on teaching practice or student outcomes.

CRTs are registered teachers too

Julie McKenzie-McHarg, casual/relief teacher in NSW

The difficulties associated with professional learning for CRTs are clear – support.

Support in three main areas: locating relevant professional learning courses; financial support for engaging in professional learning; achieving registration.

If CRTs are required to be registered just like permanently employed teachers and required to meet the same number of professional learning hours, why are they not accorded the same amount of support?

Due to the nature of casual teaching, the chances of being assigned to just one school are low. Finding face-to-face professional learning for a CRT in NSW would entail (state and territory requirements may differ):

1. Nominating a school that is willing to provide a supervisor – which is very challenging if not impossible as it takes a lot of time and commitment from the supervisor as well as the CRT.
2. Considering the cost implications. Where can a CRT find professional learning courses suited to their needs that are not too expensive? A CRT will often prefer to access free professional learning.

A CRT must maintain their professional learning hours in order to be employed. It is essential that a CRT is afforded the feedback opportunities that permanent staff are given. If a CRT does not meet the needs of the client they are simply not employed again.

Achieving the required 100 hours of professional learning shows a CRT's commitment to high standards of excellence in education. But those 100 hours are the equivalent of approximately 16 days of unpaid work. Further demonstrating the difficulty of a CRT to achieve the mandated requirements for registration.

CRTs need greater support to meet the professional learning requirements set by teacher regulatory authorities. Teacher regulatory authorities should recognise the difficulties faced by CRTs in attaining their registration.

Ideas to get you started

- Casual relief teaching networks or casual employment agencies could take a more active role in offering targeted high quality professional learning to this group. Although this takes place in some areas, systems/sectors or teacher registration boards could work collaboratively with these already formed networks to ensure that the professional learning being offered is based on action-research and that opportunities to embed learning with support of school leaders is offered as part of the professional learning activity.

- The majority of CRTs work within a very small number of schools on a regular basis. Since professional learning is most impactful when it is developed around an improvement cycle, regular CRTs could be part of the school improvement cycle and therefore have greater 'buy-in' to the culture of continuous professional learning.
- Schools are provided additional funding from systems to open up their professional learning to CRTs with the possibility of being able to pay the CRTs a small amount to attend if the funding was significant enough. Where there are enough professional learning activities available, the solution is in linking the professional learning activities to the CRTs.
- CRTs are employed by schools or systems on a full time or part time basis and 'float' as relief teachers as needed by the school. This gives CRTs benefits such as a system email address, ongoing employment stability and access to professional learning as well as benefiting the school through efficiencies in having relief teachers already in place.

Food for thought

1. How can we create the conditions needed for CRTs to make professional learning activities impactful? e.g. school leader support, space to experiment, opportunities to collaborate.
2. Who is best placed to advise on or offer professional learning activities that target a specific change most relevant to this group?
3. How can we support CRTs to engage in professional learning for the benefit of students? What tools could they be provided to encourage ownership of their professional learning journey?

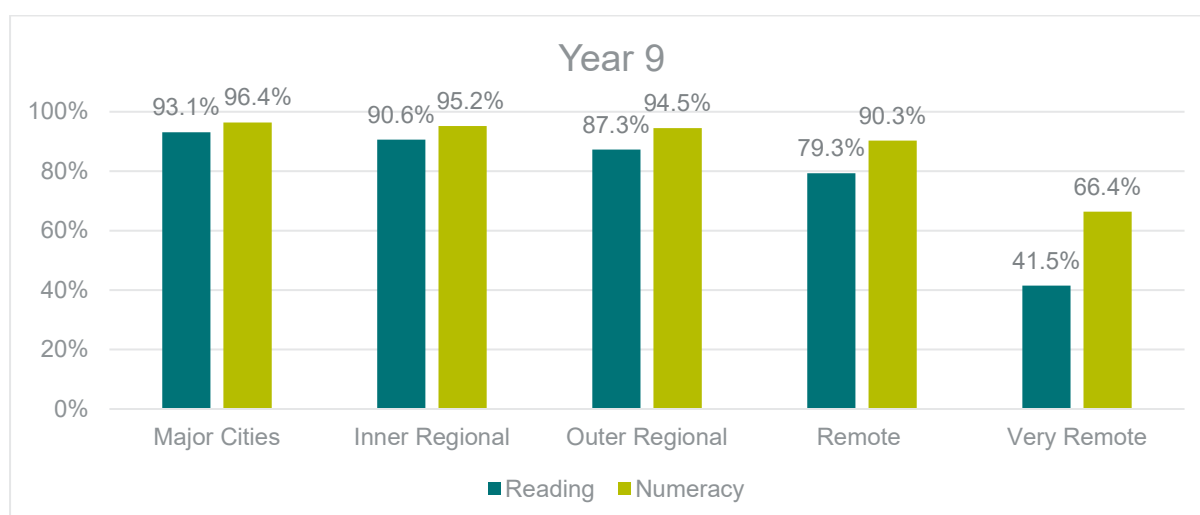


Rural and remote teachers

Students, teachers and communities in regional and remote areas face complexities that are unique to, or exacerbated by, their geographical circumstances. Within these settings, there are high proportions of disadvantaged students. As per the recent Grattan Institute score card¹⁴ and Gonski Institute for Education report¹⁵, high levels of disadvantage contribute to the low levels of progress seen in NAPLAN results in regional and remote schools.

NAPLAN results by geolocation consistently demonstrate that as geographical remoteness increases, achievement declines. For example, in 2017 over 93 per cent of year 3 and year 9 students in major cities achieved at or above the national minimum standard (NMS) across the reading and numeracy domains. In comparison, a considerably lower proportion of students in remote and very remote locations achieved at or above the NMS (Figure 1). This achievement gap is particularly evident at the year 9 level – only 41.5 per cent of year 9 students in very remote locations achieved at or above the NMS on the reading domain, compared with 93.1 per cent of year 9 students in major cities.

Figure 1: Achievement (proportion at or above national minimum standard) of Year 9 Students in Reading and Numeracy, by Geolocation, 2017



Attendance data suggest that in Australia, as geographical remoteness increases, school attendance declines. Students in remote and very remote locations, in both primary and secondary school, have considerably lower attendance rates in comparison to students in major cities or regional areas (Figure 2).

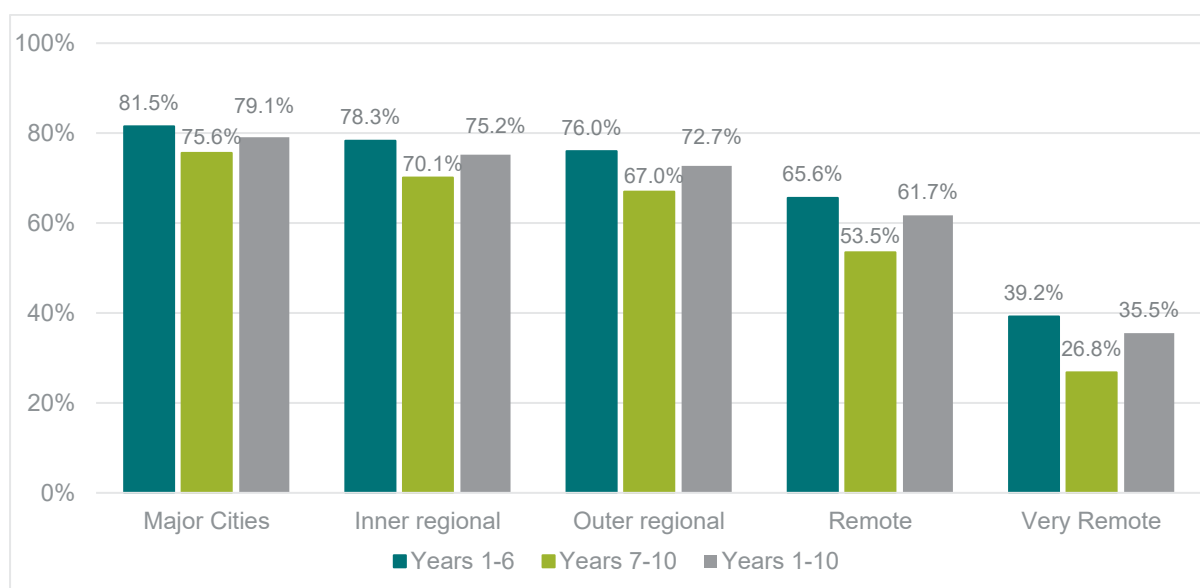
In 2017, only 26.8 per cent of junior secondary students in very remote schools attended at least 90 per cent of all school days, compared to 75.6 per cent of junior secondary students in major cities¹⁶.

¹⁴ Grattan Institute (2018) *Measuring student progress: A state-by-state report card*. Retrieved from <https://grattan.edu.au/report/measuring-student-progress/>

¹⁵ Gonski Institute for Education (2018) *The Economic Impact of Improving Regional, Rural & Remote Education in Australia*. Retrieved from https://education.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/EDUCFile/Gonski_Institute_Report_Cost_of_Education_Gap.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/student-attendance>

Figure 2: Australian attendance levels (attended 90 per cent or more of school days) by geolocation, 2017



As quality teaching is the greatest in-school factor to improving student outcomes, access to high quality professional learning for teachers in these settings could contribute in some way towards improvements in achievement and attendance gaps.

Rural and remote teachers have limited access to expertise delivered in their region and as such rely on attending metro-based professional learning. How do we encourage a change in perceptions about what effective professional learning is, potentially leading to a reduced reliance on professional learning 'events' as well as getting expertise out to the regions?

What if we divided regional Australia into zones similar to the AFL recruitment zones where individual Universities (and other providers) were responsible to deliver structured PL to schools. This would give providers ongoing responsibility for a cluster of schools rather than what happens now where providers dip in and dip out with no degree of accountability for PL outcomes and least of all any improved student outcomes.

Hon. Adrian Piccoli, Director, Gonski Institute for Education

There is also a shortage of CRTs in rural/remote areas to cover teachers to participate in professional learning—both external and school based. We need to find sustainable and creative ways to increase the availability of CRTs in rural/remote areas as well as providing collaborative opportunities for rural/remote teachers who work in small school settings.

It is worth noting that online learning can be a solution. However, it shouldn't be the only solution and will only be successful if certain conditions are met. Online learning can minimise opportunities for important face-to-face collegial and networking relationships and it is often set up as a once-off rather than providing iterative learning opportunities. Reliability of Internet connectivity can prove an issue in some areas, which impacts on the effectiveness of this approach.



See what Natalie Polak, a nationally certified Highly Accomplished teacher at St John's College in rural Dubbo, NSW, has to say about leveraging expertise within rural and remote school communities.

Ideas to get you started

- If teachers in RRR locations have difficulties getting to the professional learning they need, the professional learning could come to them. Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs), for example, are proven experts in sharing expertise and come from a broad range of contexts and geographical locations. A 'travelling HALTs' program could bring effective professional learning to RRR locations, taking into account their unique challenges.
- Retired teachers and principals could be supported to travel to rural and remote areas to provide casual/relief cover for teachers to attend professional learning.
- Establishing regional pools of CRTs for cross-sectoral work could solve the problem of providing casual relief in those locations. Additionally, professional learning providers could employ CRTs to supplement the numbers of CRTs available, when delivering professional learning in regional centres.
- Teachers could be supported to undertake their professional learning in school holidays in order to eliminate the need for CRTs and the challenge to get them to RRR locations.
- Establishing an online platform or 'Research Hub' where teachers can collaborate on 'problems of practice', trial and refine strategies and develop resources for all teachers to use. This would encourage deep rather than surface conversations and provide teachers in RRR contexts (and also CRTs and early childhood teachers) access to a wider network of colleagues. Universities, research institutes and systems/sectors could sponsor research initiatives for teachers to collaborate on.

Food for thought

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages, risks and opportunities to getting more expertise and professional learning into regions, reducing the reliance on metro-based professional learning 'events'?
2. How do we encourage more between-school and cross-sectoral collaboration in rural and remote areas?
3. What is the role of technology in fostering collaborative and networking relationships? What are some examples of where this has worked successfully?

