



HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION *of* VICTORIA

► Submission

National Review of Teacher Registration

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The History Teachers' Association of Victoria welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the National Review of Teacher Registration.

This submission will focus on the following questions from the consultation paper:

- I. How is the national teacher registration framework working across Australia?
 - How has the embedding of the Teachers Standards in the Framework supported teacher quality?
 - How could current teacher registration arrangements be improved to strengthen both teacher registration implementation and teacher quality?

Submission

National Review of Teacher Registration

The embedding of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers into the teacher registration framework has clarified the need for every teacher to engage in relevant professional learning every year. It has codified the expectation that regular, high quality professional learning will improve and maintain any teacher's capacity. John Hattie's research demonstrates that 'teacher effectiveness' is not fixed and can be developed and improved with professional learning.¹

Evidencing the Standards requires teachers to self-evaluate their current skills and knowledge and identify the next areas in which they should pursue professional learning. While this approach recognises the professionalism of teachers and encourages valuable reflection on current practice, it can produce unintended consequences.

As a professional teachers' association, we believe that a requirement to undertake professional learning each year *in the disciplines in which you are currently teaching* is the only way to improve teacher quality, student engagement and learning outcomes, and raise the esteem in which teachers are held by the community.

APST Standard 2 – Know the content and how to teach it

Do teachers know the content?

Education reform often begins with an assumption that teachers are experts in their subject. The reforms therefore focus on optimizing teaching

strategies, accommodating student diversity, and weaving in the capabilities that will prepare students for the future.

These reforms will not achieve their intended results unless the assumption that underpins them is examined and addressed. While all teachers would like to be expert in their subject, there are financial, structural and workforce imperatives that currently prevent this.

For example, HTAV is aware that some schools now prevent their teachers from exercising their professional judgement and insist that all funded professional learning will occur in-house, in generalised areas prescribed by the school.

This submission will, throughout, use the discipline of history as an illustration of the relevant points.

However, the issues raised apply across the full range of school subjects/disciplines.

The impact of out-of-field teaching

In Australian schools today it is possible for a teacher to teach history (for example) indefinitely without any training in history as a discipline, and without engaging in any professional learning in history education. The same is true for mathematics, geography, languages, and for every other subject.

This is best illustrated by an example. Liz is a specialist English teacher who is trained and knowledgeable in the content and pedagogy associated with the teaching of English at all year levels. However, due to the staffing profile at the school and the exigencies of timetabling, Liz is always 'under loaded' after she has been allocated her English classes and is therefore allocated one or two history classes from Year 7 to Year 9. *This is not Liz's preference or choice.* Though she teaches history every year, she does not think of herself as a history teacher and neither does her school. She therefore focuses her 20 hours of professional learning on keeping up to date with developments in English or literacy, on the teaching of students with disabilities,

¹ Hattie, John. (2008). *Visible Learning*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

on fostering student wellbeing and on learning how to use new educational software. She does no professional learning in history, year after year, relying on in-school guidance from her Head of Department (not necessarily a history teacher) and her peers (not necessarily teaching history at the same year level *which means* not teaching the history of the same era or region).

As a result, year after year, though Liz might be facilitating wonderful learning in her English classes, she is not teaching *history* as well as it should be taught. This scenario is playing out across Australia in every subject, including STEM subjects.

A proficient or accomplished teacher of history would have been able to foster a love of the subject, identify and extend stronger students, develop appropriate activities for students of all abilities, and understand how general capabilities can be fostered naturally through the inherent potential of the discipline. Student and parent satisfaction would be higher. Better learning outcomes would be expected.

In secondary schools, according to an Australian Council of Education Research report in 2015, at least 25% of those teaching history are teaching out-of-field, i.e. are not trained in history. “Currently, about 20% of mathematics and physics teachers are teaching out-of-field. Out-of-field teaching in history (25%), computing/IT (30%) and geography (40%), while lower than in 2010, remains reasonably high.”²

The phenomenon is most prevalent in the middle school years. There is also more out-of-field teaching occurring in small secondary schools, which means there is more out-of-field teaching in rural areas. The ACER report anticipates that this phenomenon will worsen in the decade to 2025.

We understand the logistical forces that lead schools to utilize out-of-field teachers. We also believe that people without pre-service training in a discipline can potentially become excellent teachers of it. Many of Victoria’s outstanding history teachers were initially

trained in different disciplines. They have conscientiously accessed professional learning and peer networks in history and their schools have supported them to do so.

This should not be left to chance. Good teaching requires deep and regularly updated expertise *in the subjects/disciplines being taught*. For history, the curriculum frameworks emphasise key events, historical thinking skills and the core elements of sound historical practice. It takes expertise and depth of subject knowledge to weave these into engaging, accurate narratives that provide students with a sense of competence and confidence. If all secondary teachers were required to be, or to become, learned in the disciplines in which they were teaching, it would raise the overall standard of education in Australia.

In primary schools, it is considered normal for teachers to develop and deliver learning activities in disciplines they have not studied since Year 9 or 10. Even more concerning, the crowded curriculum often forces primary teachers to ‘integrate’ the curriculum of two or more different disciplines into a single activity or lesson, and to do this well requires a highly sophisticated understanding of how to achieve the learning outcomes in each discipline. Primary teachers should be encouraged to undertake professional learning each year in at least one discipline other than literacy and numeracy. Specialist expertise should be valued, and a highly accomplished teacher should have developed strong content and pedagogical knowledge in at least one discipline that they can share with their colleagues and teaching teams. Some primary schools have introduced a specialist STEM teacher to good effect, and a properly balanced school offering would be guided by specialist expertise in other disciplines as well.

Potential improvements to teacher registration:

Proficient and Highly Accomplished teachers should be required to provide evidence that they undertook

² Weldon, Paul R. (March 2015). *The Teacher workforce in Australia: Supply, demand and data issues. Policy Insights, Issue 2, page 9. Melbourne: ACER.*

professional learning each year to develop the capabilities associated with Standards 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Proficient and Highly Accomplished secondary teachers should be required to provide evidence that they undertook professional learning in all disciplines in which they taught during the previous year.

The teacher registration process should specify the discipline(s) in which a secondary teacher attains the status of 'Highly Accomplished Teacher'. Having demonstrated that you meet the relevant standards in the teaching of English does not mean you are a highly accomplished teacher of history or mathematics.

To ensure rural and remote teachers are properly supported in developing expertise in their disciplines, Departments of Education should partner with professional teacher associations and universities to develop online professional learning programs.

Proficient and Highly Accomplished primary teachers should be required to provide evidence that they undertook professional learning each year in at least one discipline other than literacy and numeracy.

Highly Accomplished and Lead primary teachers should be required to develop specialist expertise and lead team or school planning in at least one discipline in addition to literacy and numeracy.

Discipline expertise is not (just) a pre-service issue

Appropriate pre-service preparation would certainly assist teachers to develop the content knowledge and teaching strategies required to teach their disciplines well. For history in particular, even those who are teaching in-field might have studied Education at a university which does not offer history as a separate method, but which integrates it into a generalist 'humanities' specialty. (Only two universities in Victoria offer specialized training in history education.) This is not sufficient preparation for people who will soon find themselves teaching history specifically, and potentially to senior levels.

In primary schools, although the Australian Curriculum is designed to ensure student progress and engagement in all required disciplines, the reality is that while certain primary disciplines are seen to require specialist expertise (art, music, health and physical education, sometimes languages and increasingly science), other disciplines are considered to require no initial or ongoing professional learning.

The answer to this challenge will not be found solely in adjusting pre-service training. Teachers spend three



or four years in training, and (ideally) thirty or forty years developing their practice thereafter. Good quality, post-graduation, discipline-specific support contributes positively to teacher confidence, workload management and retention. It increases the flexibility of the workforce. It enables teachers who trained initially in one discipline to develop real expertise in and passion for another.

APST Standard 7.4 – Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities

The inclusion of Standard 7.4 in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is important and appropriate. It would be challenging for a teacher to achieve Standards 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 without engagement with professional teaching networks and communities.

Professional teacher associations are enduring organisations that support teachers' development of expertise and confidence in specific disciplines. Using

HTAV as an example, the information below illustrates how professional teacher associations continue to develop ‘teacher effectiveness’ long after pre-service training is complete.

The HTAV was established in 1980 to assist and advance education in History in the State of Victoria, and to represent generally the views of people connected with the teaching of History.

In 2018, the HTAV represents 200 individual members (most of whom would think of themselves as specialist history teachers), and 430 institutional members whose subscription provides member benefits for *anyone who is teaching history* at the school. This provides learning opportunities for new teachers and those who are teaching out-of-field.

The HTAV runs the three major professional learning conferences for history teachers in Victoria. These conferences attract around 400 teachers from all over Victoria, and a smaller number of teachers from interstate.

Over 3000 members of the HTAV community receive a regular, online Member Bulletin containing information about resources, new developments in history pedagogy, professional learning opportunities, publications that are aligned to current curriculum, and history competitions for students and adults. Three times a year, members also receive *Agora*, a professional journal which combines articles on history teaching practice with academic, peer reviewed articles on history and history education.

The HTAV also facilitates targeted professional learning to support teachers introducing new curriculum, and teachers who are new to teaching history. Our annual mentoring program connects experienced history teachers with those who have identified professional learning needs. We foster online communities to share information, ideas and support for the implementation of senior history curriculum.

It is professional teacher associations who provide the main vehicles through which Highly Accomplished Teachers can contribute to their professional

network, and Lead Teachers can provide leadership to their broader teaching community.

While HTAV cannot be an impartial observer, we do see every day the benefits for teachers who truly meet Standard 7.4.

The gold standard is professional learning that provides the teacher with an ongoing network of collaborative, supportive peers. Physical attendance and participation is therefore preferable to online engagement, as in-person interactions are more likely to develop and sustain professional relationships. The evidence requirements for the Standards should encourage schools to release teachers to attend professional learning. In-school professional learning fulfils an important role in achieving whole-school change but will not maintain and develop discipline expertise.

Potential improvements:

The evidence requirements for Standard 7.4 should prioritise in-person engagement with professional networks and communities for at least some of the professional learning undertaken.

Where in-person engagement can only be occasional, e.g. for teachers in rural and remote schools, Departments of Education should work with professional teacher associations to establish regional, discipline-specific professional learning opportunities and online communities of practice. Where Departments of Education pursue this work in isolation, they risk duplicating the work of professional teacher associations which are funded by the investment of schools and individuals who care deeply about professional learning.

