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Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning

Australian Education Union (Vic) Submission

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INTRODUCTION

The AEU (Vic) welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee's Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning.

The AEU knows, both from research and the vast professional experience of thousands of its members, that professional learning is central to the process of improving teaching and learning. The nature and quality of teacher learning and student learning are deeply intertwined. Effective learning institutions, whether they be schools, kindergartens or TAFE Institutes, encourage and support continuous learning processes for teachers as well as students. Professional learning runs right through a teaching career from pre-service education to pre-retirement and takes place every day, both formally and informally, through a wide range of learning experiences.

Professional learning strengthens teachers' knowledge and skills, enables them to work collegially to share and explore new ideas, and generally contributes to a climate of professional growth. These outcomes in turn contribute to improved student learning. Development in this context is not just a series of one-off events that are added on to a teacher's ordinary load, but a continuing process that is integrated with their day-to-day work. It requires active reflection on one's own practice and that of others, the consideration and implementation of new ideas (including findings from educational research), working and planning with others on a regular basis, discussion of educational issues and teaching practices and providing and receiving feedback aimed at improving practice. It is a vital investment in capacity-building of members of the teaching profession which the eminent Professor of Education at Harvard University, Richard Elmore, has described as the major path to school improvement.

The AEU, and its predecessor organisations, has had a longstanding commitment to the professional learning of those who work in education. Our professional programs have covered curriculum change, best practice in curriculum, school organisation, student learning, student welfare, teaching standards, vocational education and training,

information technology, school leadership, early childhood education, programs for new and returning teachers and many other areas. The AEU presently provides professional learning programs through its own dedicated incorporated associations – the Teacher Learning Network (with the Victorian Independent Education Union), AEU Education Services Inc and the Victorian Educational Leadership Consortium. We also offer a range of programs in partnership with universities and the Department of Education.

Principles and Practices of Professional Learning

There are a number of principles and practices which underpin professional development strategies that have been shown to succeed in improving teaching. It is important that professional learning programs, particularly where they are implemented or funded by the Department of Education or government statutory authorities, should have these principles and practices incorporated into them. Good summaries of these principles have been outlined, from an international perspective, by Linda Darling-Hammond and, from a local perspective, by the Victorian Department of Education.

Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Education at Stanford University, developed the following list from her extensive research into this area.

Effective professional learning is:

- Experiential, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, and observation that illuminate the processes of learning and development.
- Grounded in participants' questions, inquiry, and experimentation as well as profession-wide research.
- Collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators.
- Connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students as well as to examinations of subject matter and teaching methods.
- Sustained and intensive, supported by modelling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems of practice.
- Connected to other aspects of school change.

The Victorian Department of Education produced its own set of 'seven principles of highly effective professional learning' which usefully contrasts the qualities of good professional learning with less than effective strategies:

- Professional learning is focused on student outcomes (not just individual teacher needs)
- Professional learning is focused on and embedded in teacher practice (not disconnected from the school)
- Professional learning is informed by the best available research on effective learning and teaching (not just limited to what they currently know)
- Professional learning is collaborative, involving reflection and feedback (not just individual inquiry)

- Professional learning is evidence based and data driven (not anecdotal) to guide improvement and to measure impact
- Professional learning is ongoing, supported and fully integrated into the culture and operations of the system – schools, networks, regions and the centre (not episodic and fragmented)
- Professional learning is an individual and collective responsibility at all levels of the system (not just the school level) and it is not optional.

The results of the AEU survey of teachers on professional learning (outlined below) are consistent with these sets of principles and practices.

The Scope of Professional Learning

By the very nature of their occupation, teachers' professional learning encompasses a wide variety of activities, including:

- Formal academic award activities, i.e. accredited studies leading toward degrees, diplomas and certificates;
- Conferences, seminars, workshops and induction programs;
- Formal representation on professional bodies, eg boards of study and registration boards;
- Participation in the work of professional and industry associations;
- Education setting and area-based activities such as collaborative planning and evaluation;
- Participation in job-embedded development projects;
- Working with other teachers using "critical friend", and reflective techniques, mentoring, coaching, modelling, work shadowing, visits to other classrooms, educational settings, and resource centres;
- Professional reading;
- Release to industry experience;
- Courses initiated by systems to meet system objectives, such as the introduction of new curricula;
- Writing, developing and monitoring curriculum;
- Writing articles for professional journals;
- Conducting various forms of research at an institutional level and in a wider context, often using an 'action research' model;
- Participation in local education setting communities and education setting councils;
- Participation in internet and email-based research and discussion groups and networks.

Any recommendations arising out of this review of teacher professional learning should be based upon an understanding of its extent and nature and seek to foster and support these features.

Support Processes

Time for teachers to participate in professional learning during their working week is especially important, and that is both an institution and a system responsibility. The system needs to ensure that

institution budgets contain sufficient resources to ensure time is available for teachers to meet regularly in their teams, sharing their professional views and working together on improvement strategies. Institutions need to structure their organisational arrangements so that team planning time is maximised and the difficulties of coordinating team members are reduced (eg. by timetabling team members to share as many of their non-teaching sessions as possible).

Whilst time is needed each and every week, one method of providing some concentrated time for teams to meet, especially when there are new initiatives that need to be implemented, is to provide a further one or two planning days per year where students do not attend and teachers can meet free of the usual work-day demands. There is also a need to recognise that much professional development activity occurs in city locations, with the result that teachers in rural and remote settings can be disadvantaged. Certainly issues of access and cost which hinder teachers' overall professional growth need to be addressed within budgets set for each educational institution to ensure both a measure of equity between teachers and the ongoing improvement of teaching wherever it occurs in this state.

Developments in Professional Learning

A review of teacher professional learning needs to take into consideration a number of recent initiatives and developments:

- The introduction of the Department of Education's Teacher Professional Leave program for government school teachers. This program has provided teachers with valuable release time and a degree of flexibility (eg block release, one day per week release etc) to engage in school priority-related professional learning. Funding for this program should be continued over the next few years. The feasibility of extending this type of program to TAFE and early childhood should be investigated.
- A valuable resource in an area of growing need is the range of leadership development programs provided in 2007 through the Department of Education to government school teachers and principals. One important feature of most of these programs, which should be built into all Department of Education funded or provided professional development, is that they are of no cost (or low cost) to participants.
- The new renewal of registration procedures required by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) involve documented levels of professional learning in relation to designated VIT standards by each registered teacher over a five year period. This process should not require any significant increase in the level of professional learning for most teachers but will demand greater levels of documentation by both registered teachers and professional development providers and auspices.
- The introduction of formal teacher professional learning processes for new teachers and those returning to teaching after an absence have recognised the special needs of these groups. The mentoring/induction programs for new teachers through the Department of Education and the VIT provide structured support for those joining the profession. The Department of Education-funded 'Refresher' courses, now in their third year, provide a nine day professional learning program for 300 teachers p.a. returning from extended periods of leave (eg Family Leave) and for interstate and overseas teachers who have not previously taught in Victorian government schools.

- The creation of community education centres/education precincts (comprising pre-schools, schools and TAFE) have opened up the possibilities for cross-sectoral professional learning involving teachers in early childhood, primary and secondary schools and TAFE. It is in the interests of student transition, and the cohesion of their education experience, that such cross-sectoral professional learning should be encouraged and more widely available.
- The establishment and operation of the TAFE Development Centre has opened up greater opportunities for TAFE teachers to undertake structured professional learning relevant to their teaching role.

AEU SURVEY ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In June 2007 the AEU carried out a survey of groups of our membership on a series of key issues related to professional learning. Those surveyed included our extensive school professional development and curriculum coordinator networks and AEU Council teacher members from schools and early childhood centres. The survey asked teachers to respond to 5 qualitative questions:

1. What sort of professional learning have you found to be the most useful/effective/relevant?
2. What are the problems associated with existing professional development provision?
3. What could be done to improve the existing professional development provision for teachers?
4. Which delivery mode of professional development do you prefer? And why?
5. How have your professional development needs changed over the course of your career?

The results of the survey (based on 101 responses) provide a valuable insight into how professional learning processes for teachers can be improved. The findings arise out of the direct experience of teachers themselves, many of whom carry out crucial professional learning roles in their institutions, such as professional development coordinator.

Survey Findings

Schools

1. What sort of professional learning have you found to be the most useful/effective/relevant?

Teachers indicated that the most effective and useful professional learning has the following characteristics:

- Peer-based and collegial where teachers are able to work in groups, using their combined expertise and experience, to address new ideas, analyse and solve problems and review existing policy and practice.
- Workplace-based involving either the whole staff or teams.

- Time is made available so teachers can learn together.
- Practical/hands-on relevant to classroom use and school needs at that point in time.

Variations on these features supported by significant numbers of teachers included:

- Visits to the classrooms of other teachers, visits to other schools.
- Peer-based with guidance from experts/consultants – with recent/current teaching experience.
- Work with a consultant in the institution with follow-up support in the classroom.
- Planned approach (generally workshop, coaching etc) sustained over a period of time (as compared to one-off activities).
- External professional development, such as conferences, with processes in place (eg school teams participate) to feed the professional learning back into the institution and providing opportunities to network with other teachers.
- Subject-based professional learning for secondary teachers.

Comments from survey teachers:

"I think I need two types of professional learning. One where I am informed/kept abreast of new research/ideas in education or best practice pedagogy. And another where I work with a small collegiate groups to implement these ideas/practices. Working collaboratively makes me refine my understandings, gives me access to other people's understandings and therefore deepens the learning. It also means that there is an application to the learning. The learning opportunities that I have had the most impact on my understandings/practices are those that are more than 1 day in length. These programs all contained elements of between session reading/homework as well which I thought were important in reinforcing/practising new ideas. Another element that has been important is being able to share new knowledge with other people. When I have attended outside workshops with one or two colleagues I have been able to more easily effect change at the school level."

"You need to be able to say at the end of the PD that 'I can do that' and 'I can use that in my classroom'. Often learning from peers within the school is more effective as it can cater more precisely to where you are at with regard to what you are learning."

"PD which involves multiple sessions over the course of weeks/months. This provides you with an opportunity to digest information; apply new learnings; conduct additional reading; discuss with colleagues; is consistent with the learning process increasing the chances of deeper understanding of the topic/content."

"Watching other expert teachers at work. This allows you to visualise strategies and think about how/whether it would work in your classroom. Suggest: week long visits to take part in the grade of an expert teacher from another school; - sort of like undergraduate teacher

rounds, but only with an expert in your area of need and more of a mentoring, discussion of tactics role."

"In house coaching is most relevant because it can be designed around a school priority, and brings into the school best practice based on current research, and enables us to develop our own experts in classrooms who can model and share that best practice. The coaching can be delivered over a period of time to enable teachers to observe, learn, plan, co-teach, reflect, practice, receive supportive feedback, and become independent in best practice which is embedded in their teaching repertoire."

2. What are the problems associated with existing professional development provision?

Teachers indicated that there were a range of problems (with existing professional development provision) which placed barriers in the way of effective professional learning:

- Lack of funds to finance the professional learning needs of teachers taking account of the cost of professional development programs and the attendant costs of participation, such as Casual Relief Teachers (CRTs). Lack of funds to finance identified effective professional learning such as school teams participating in external professional development.
- A wide range of rural-related issues including: the concentration of professional development in metropolitan areas, venue locations, travelling time, petrol and accommodation costs and the need for (and lack of) CRT cover.
- The lack of CRTs in certain geographical areas.
- The lack of time to work together, for structured follow-up and implementation of new ideas and for information dissemination.
- The Department of Education overloading teachers with too many demands and initiatives at the one time and not providing sufficient implementation time and funds for schools (and squeezing out professional development for teachers' own subject and skill needs).
- The use of after-school time (not optimal learning conditions after a full day's teaching), weekends and school holidays for professional development. Staff need this time to deal with the existing workload and for family and other commitments and to recharge batteries.

Additional concerns voiced by significant numbers of teachers included:

- One-size-fits-all professional development which lacks depth and is too broad to meet the needs of the individual.

- On-line professional development (and on-line professional learning resources) which creates workload and time issues, and is unable to meet just-in-time needs.
- Too many one-off professional development activities without any follow-up.
- Programs determined by the school management/leadership without enough input from teachers about their priorities and needs.
- A lack of 'truth in advertising' for various programs where there is a clear gap between what is advertised and what is delivered.
- Concern about disruption to classes (particularly in senior secondary) and the accompanying extra workload (having to both prepare work for classes and participate in professional development).
- Too many poor presenters.

Comments from survey teachers:

"Money is a big concern. We have to provide CRT replacement for each staff member who attends PD sessions. As a result many PD sessions are held from 4.00 pm onwards. This is not the most conducive conditions for learning to take place. When major curriculum changes take place eg. VELS extra money and time should be provided so that whole staff understandings can be developed. Learning conditions would be at their optimum."

"It is cost prohibitive. Unavailable and inaccessible to country teachers because of time and distance. For instance the number of PD offerings after school in the city is amazing compared to the country. How can one travel two to three hours to arrive by four o'clock and not have the afternoon to do it? Three hours to a PD in Melbourne which lasts for five hours and then a three hour trip home is exhausting. Traffic delays are an issue when the department will not assist with accommodation because the 'book' says a place like Bendigo is only an hour and forty minutes away. They obviously do not leave at 5.45 am to just scrape in at 8.59 am ...in the city, through the traffic."

"The resourcing is just not there. When the Early Years program was rolled out there was terrific support to ensure that all staff could be skilled up. This model does not seem to be favoured any more, even though the results were very positive, in terms of staff development and student learning outcomes."

"Time is major factor. Everyone points to teacher quality but realistic provision of time to receive and prepare PD is critical. Time out from the classroom is very important. The money provided for PD is pitiful and makes a mockery of the demand for improving teacher quality."

"PD is usually designed for the lowest common denominator, so it is the basics on a topic. This means that you don't get the detail you need, and often hear less than you already know. Suggest P.D's be provided at more than one level, Beginner, consolidating and experienced, so you can have PD that is useful to you."

3. What could be done to improve the existing professional development provision for teachers?

Teachers proposed various improvements to existing professional development provision, often aimed at reinforcing the characteristics in 1 (above) and addressing the problems identified in 2 (above). The following proposals were broadly supported:

- Better funding of professional learning so that institutions can properly implement effective models of professional development eg the use of teams, sustained collaboration with an external consultant, coaching etc.
- There is a need to do more for rural teachers by providing more professional development in regional areas and facilitating consultants/experts to work directly with rural and regional schools.
- More time needs to be provided through additional student-free days, block release of teachers over a sustained period of time and a specific reduction in teaching load to implement new initiatives/improvements, mentoring/coaching, visits to other schools etc.

Other improvements proposed by a number of teachers included:

- Government/Department action to ensure the availability of CRTs.
- Reduction in the cost of professional development programs and more no- cost programs.
- Provision of professional development at different levels (eg beginning, consolidating, experienced) relevant to teachers at different stages of their careers.
- Improvement in the operation of teacher networks.

Comments from survey teachers:

"Provide better timelines for implementing changes, VELS is a good example. VELS was still being written and revised as teachers were implementing it into the classroom. We have changed our report format twice already. These things exhaust teachers and leave very little time for teachers to discuss current best practice in teaching and learning. Many of our staff for the past two years have attended Saturday workshops."

"It is my experience that 1 day PD's are too superficial and supply at most a quick, filler activity or two to be used once and then forgotten. Anything truly worthwhile needs to be accompanied by in-depth analysis and further opportunities for professional readings, classroom implementation, reflection and discussion with peers. Maybe units of PD would be more appropriate than just dipping in and out for one day wonders."

"Networks of schools (dare I say 'clusters'?) should get together for effective district coverage of PD. A one-day PD (covering schools from 2/3 secondary schools and up

to 20 primary schools) with well-selected presenters and opportunities for individuals to discuss materials in the network or even school groups to plan for action, measuring, support and feedback. These can be followed up with further half day PD meetings of even 2 hour sessions at schools with specific foci and feedback opportunities. There are a number of schools that have already established this process and some of the larger secondary schools do this on a regular basis."

4. Which delivery mode of professional development do you prefer? And why?

Teachers interpreted this question in a fairly broad way. Their responses fell into a number of categories covering days and times, length of time, type of activity, type of processes within an activity and the form of delivery. There was general support for the following:

- At the workplace over a sustained period of time with follow-up support and time to implement learning, and based on the identified needs of teachers.
- Practical/hands-on interactive group-based activities – doing rather than listening – related to classroom needs.
- Face-to-face/in person.

There was also mixed support for a range of other 'modes of delivery'.

- Out of school professional development for meeting other teachers and getting new ideas.
- Support (by different groups of teachers) for full day or half day or short sessions.
- Peer-to-peer coaching and modelling
- Workshop mode consisting of peer discussion with the support of an 'expert' about issues of immediate relevance.
- Professional reading.
- On-line professional development where it is well thought-out and delivered in those areas which are suitable for this type of learning.
- A significant number of teachers indicated their antipathy to powerpoint presentations!

Comments from survey teachers:

"Colleague to colleague ... As in shadowing, mentoring, coaching, team-teaching, etc. This allows you to learn from and with colleagues – powerful learning. Also allows me to ask questions, try things out and discuss the outcomes, make changes and try again All with support from a colleague. For the same reasons I like an action research approach.

Also like to hear an engaging and inspiring speaker occasionally. I like a mix of practical and theoretical."

5. How have your professional development needs changed over the course of your career?

Most teachers indicated that their professional learning needs had significantly changed over the course of their careers. This was due to a range of factors: the level of their expertise and experience, wanting to take the next step in their career development, undertaking a new role, changing knowledge demands (eg ICT requirements), the number and variety of Department of Education initiatives, an increase in the knowledge base in most areas and rising external expectations and accountability demands. A number of answers to this question identified the following specific areas of interest.

- A need for professional learning in leadership development.
- A need for professional learning in a range of issues related to Information Communications Technology (ICT).
- A preference for professional development in specific classroom-based issues relating to pedagogy, curriculum and student welfare and management.
- A preference for more sustained and substantial professional development.
- New needs in response to changes in areas and/or levels of teaching.
- From classroom management and teaching skills to a focus on content which is current, relevant and dynamic.
- A need for professional learning about disability and special needs.

Comments from survey teachers:

"The demands of the job are more than ever. Trying to balance everything out over the course of the year. When I first started you had more time to trial new ideas for a particular area over a 12 month period. These days you may be learning something new each fortnight. Follow-up time is poor."

"As a beginning teacher I was interested in topics like effective classroom management, increasing my knowledge of the methodology of my teaching areas. Later I became interested in pedagogy in a broader sense – what leads to engagement, how do you develop deeper understanding, etc. As a Leading Teacher I became more interested in educational research in the areas I was responsible for and how to manage change. At this point of time, I am interested in leadership, what makes a good school, how to achieve school improvement."

Early Childhood

It is important to separate out the survey responses from early childhood teachers as their professional learning situation differs significantly from that of teachers in government schools. They lack the economies of scale existing in the schools sector - there are a lot fewer teachers, they have a range of employers (rather than the Department of Education) and the institutions they work in are a lot smaller (with only one or two teachers each) and with fewer resources.

The professional learning survey responses from early childhood teachers raised many of the same issues as those from school teachers but also reflected the particular parameters within which they work.

1. What sort of professional learning have you found to be the most useful/effective/relevant?

General support was indicated for the following:

- Practical hands-on workshops and experience
- Visits to other centres to discuss approaches and share notes with other teachers.
- Professional learning workshops on very specific topics such as anaphylaxis, autism, students with special needs, behaviour management etc
- Access to the latest research on early childhood and its implications for practice.

Other forms of preferred professional learning included:

- One day conferences with a variety of workshops by practising teachers
- Small interactive groups rather than lectures

Comments from survey teachers:

"I find a range of professional development is important. I have found most relevant at present ways to write up programming and observation through learning and reflection. They are very beneficial and more meaningful for parents and children and myself. There needs to be more opportunities for peer support in this area to help implement change of thinking and planning. We are trying to do this in our Region, however we find it a battle as everyone is too stressed with their workloads."

"Targeted training on issues related to the children I am teaching at that time are particularly useful. You can learn something today and apply it tomorrow. Full day training is usually better than ½ day as you can explore things in more depth. Also additional university training to obtain a higher qualification can be useful."

"One day conferences with a variety of workshops with practising teachers workshopping their ideas and researchers presenting the latest research and implications for practice. On-

line learning may become a good option in order to access researchers from interstate or overseas. I also enjoy visiting other teachers and discussing our approaches to our jobs – I believe that there should be more discussion of this kind.”

2. What are the problems associated with existing professional development provision?

There were two main problems identified by early childhood teachers:

- The difficulties associated with access to professional development opportunities for teachers in regional and rural locations. Access means not only travelling to Melbourne but having to close the centre for the day (most centres have only one teacher). Parents complain if the centre is closed for more than one or two days in a year. Inability to obtain/pay relief staff. Teachers have to use weekends and holidays for their professional development.
- The costs associated with professional development and the lack of funding to meet those costs. The funding depends on the management of the centre (rather than any allocation from government) and often the teacher has to fund their own professional learning costs.

Other issues mentioned by some teachers included:

- The sense of professional isolation amongst early childhood teachers due to the nature of their workplaces.
- The relevance of some professional development and the difficulty beforehand of sorting out the reality from the publicity.
- Impact of workloads
- A lack of variety in presenters (too often the same presenter)
- A lack of consultation with primary colleagues.
- Narrowly-based employer-provided professional development geared to their own philosophy

Comments from survey teachers:

“Most are in the city and they are more difficult to access because of distance when living in the country and sometimes more than one day is involved because of the distance. In the country it is hard to attend as there are very few relief staff and the centre would have to close. Closing once or twice may be all right but more than that and parents complain and the program is disrupted.”

“There is no formal funding in Early Childhood to access PD except grants (eg. The Graduates Association have a grant). If you work for a good Committee or good Council it will be funded but, if not, you will need to fund it yourself. Secondly, there are not enough child free days provided for in MECA for teachers to access PD – if you work in the country

you may need a whole day off to attend an afternoon workshop. This means that teachers are likely accessing PD on weekends and/or holidays."

3. What could be done to improve the existing professional development provision for teachers?

The major improvements suggested by most teachers are solutions to the two main problems identified in 2 (above)

- Professional development should be made more affordable and there should be sufficient funds (from Government) provided to meet all of the costs associated with the professional learning needs of early childhood teachers (eg funds to pay for relief teachers, increasing the pay rate for relief teachers).
- There needs to be more regionally-based professional development.

Other improvements identified by teachers included:

- The establishment of a central body with a coordinating role and information for teachers about what's on offer, costs, venues etc.
- Visits to other centres to see good practice in operation.
- On-line professional development to access interstate and overseas researchers.
- More student-free days

Comments from survey teachers:

"Cover costs of training 100%. Allow generous time release for teachers to attend PD during working hours. Increase pay for relief teachers to make it more attractive to work in this field and so make replacement possible."

4. Which delivery mode of professional development do you prefer? And why?

Teachers were divided between two preferred modes of delivery:

- Most teachers indicated a preference for small workshops and interactive groups where they can discuss issues in depth, seek explanations and develop sustainable networks. This mode allows for access to the practical experience of other teachers as well as the expertise of a presenter.
- There was also some support for conferences with keynote speakers and workshops where there was a greater choice and the opportunity to network with a wider range of teachers.
- A number of teachers also indicated that sustainability (follow-up) should be built into all professional development programs.

Comments from survey teachers:

"I prefer the small workshop delivery mode, where I get to hear what other teachers have to say as well as benefit from the expertise of the presenter. Sometimes the academic presenters have a lot of knowledge but not a lot of recent "real" experience in the field. Other teachers' ideas and experiences are invaluable."

5. How have your professional development needs changed over the course of your career?

Early childhood teachers identified a number of ways in which their professional development needs and professional learning opportunities had changed over a period of time. Most of these changes relate to broader changes in the sector and the needs of their students.

- Teachers are faced with more complex medical and social issues and they have to spend more time gaining greater knowledge to meet the additional needs of their students and relevant regulations.
- Professional development in the past was more about requirements to meet regulations (eg first aid). Now it focuses more on keeping up with current thinking, new ideas and innovations. There is a greater choice and an orientation to professional interest and the development of professional knowledge.

Other issues referred to by some teachers included:

- Involvement in reviews of the sector and input to a range of bodies.
- The impact of the Multi-Employer Certified Agreement (MECA) which require employers to release teachers for two days of professional development per year and requires all teachers to participate in professional development.

Comments from survey teachers:

"As I now seem to have at least 4 children each year with quite significant additional needs, I have found that a lot of my PD time has been spent ensuring that I have the knowledge and skills required to meet these needs. Personally, I would like to make sure that I am keeping up with new educational theories and ideas but these children have taken up so much of my PD time that I have not always been able to attend other workshops."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

The AEU survey of teacher professional learning enabled teachers and teacher professional development coordinators to describe effective professional learning, the problems with existing professional development provision and ways in which existing provision could be improved. These results have been complemented by feedback from other sources, local and overseas research and various developments in education and training. As a result, the AEU calls for the following improvements to be made.

Schools

1. The real costs for effective professional learning for teachers need to be met. This will require additional funds in the Student Resource Package (school global budget), additional specific program resourcing and at least two additional student-free days.

Effective professional learning for teachers requires time to be made available during the working day. When teachers go to professional development external to their school they generally need to go in teams (ie at least more than one) and the costs of providing relief teachers need to be met. Internal professional development linked to major Departmental initiatives (eg VELS, the new reporting system) requires additional student-free days so that the whole staff can work together, and in groups, to ensure the best possible implementation of the new programs. In addition, schools need to have the resources to allow coaching, mentoring, visits to the classrooms of other teachers and to other schools and to sustain these activities over an extended period of time. There is almost no support (and often vehement opposition) amongst teachers for professional development during school holidays, weekends or evenings, and little enthusiasm for professional learning being squeezed into the time after school, following a hard day's teaching.

Schools also need sufficient funding to meet program costs and other associated costs such as travel. The Department of Education should expand the use of their current leadership program model which provides sustained professional development free to Departmental employees.

Other areas where additional funding is required, to meet workforce needs by providing time out of school to teachers, are study leave programs for those teachers who want retraining in subject areas of need and the re-introduction of the very successful Teacher Release to Industry Program.

2. The disadvantages in relation to professional learning experienced by rural teachers need to be addressed. Apart from meeting their additional funding needs – CRT coverage, program costs, petrol and accommodation - there is a need to do more for rural teachers by providing more professional development in regional areas and facilitating consultants/experts to work directly with rural and regional schools. The Department of Education also needs to develop strategies to increase the number of Casual Relief Teachers available in rural areas so that teachers in rural schools are not prevented from participating in professional development because of a lack of relief teachers.

3. The Government, through the Department of Education, should put more planning and resources into its reform and improvement programs. Teacher professional learning should be given the highest priority when new far-reaching policies are introduced rather than being placed on a second tier of importance, undermined by poor time-lines and poorly-resourced policy implementation.

Over the past few years teachers have been overloaded with too many demands and initiatives at the one time. Time-lines which make sense at a political or Departmental level are often detrimental to quality teacher professional learning - which is essential for any initiative to be effectively introduced into the classroom. Many teachers cite the present parallel introduction of VELs and the new reporting system as a case in point. Mainstream change affecting all schools needs to recognise that one size does not fit all and that while the circumstances of one school allows it to meet (and even be ahead of) time-lines, the circumstances of other schools mean that they require more time to achieve the same result.

The Government's major school improvement program – the Blueprint for Reform – has been hampered by a lack of sufficient implementation time (additional student-free days and funded CRT days) for teacher professional learning. In addition, the sheer number of initiatives has meant that any available time and resources for professional learning have largely had to be channelled into implementing these initiatives, crowding out professional development for teachers' own subject and skill needs.

4. Professional learning funded by the Government should prioritise teacher access to professional development which is in keeping with what teachers in the AEU survey identify as effective and relevant teacher learning, including preferred delivery modes and reflecting the range of needs teachers have over the span of their careers.

Early Childhood

1. The professional learning needs of early childhood teachers should be met by a sufficient allocation of funding from the Government to meet all of the costs associated with quality professional development for teachers in this sector eg funds to pay for relief teachers, program costs, travel.

At present the funding of professional learning for early childhood teachers is totally unsatisfactory. Budgets provide an insufficient allocation for professional development and this raises participation cost barriers leading to teachers being forced to attend weekend and evening programs and having to fund their own professional learning costs. The recent move of early childhood to the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provides a welcome opportunity to address the woeful state of professional learning provision in the early childhood sector.

2. The issues outlined in 2 (above) in the schools sector recommendations apply equally, or even more so, to early childhood teachers in rural and regional locations. Access for these teachers means not only travelling to Melbourne but having to close the centre for the day (most centres have only one teacher). Parents complain if the centre is closed for more than one or two days in a year. In the AEU survey early childhood teachers indicate their inability to obtain or pay relief staff.

3. Specific professional development funding should be made available to early childhood teachers to enable them to regularly visit other centres and primary schools to view good practice and to work with other teachers.

One of the early childhood sector characteristics is the small size of centres and the subsequent isolation from colleagues/teachers during their day-to-day work. This means that there are few, if any, opportunities for early childhood teachers to participate in valuable peer-based professional learning similar to that which takes place in school workplaces. Collegiate structures involving both early childhood and primary teachers need to be established across the early years of education.

TAFE

As in other sectors of education, continuing professional learning for TAFE teachers is crucial. The quality of education delivered through TAFE is directly linked to the maintenance of the currency of TAFE teachers' industry and professional knowledge and experience. There is a substantial literature identifying the importance of continual professional learning for teachers working in vocational education and training. This includes the need to keep up to date with technology, rapid changes in industry and the emergence of new industries linked to the knowledge economy. It also encompasses changing modes of delivery, pedagogical innovation, changing student demographics and knowledge development in the different fields of learning.

While the AEU did not conduct, in June 2007, an equivalent survey in TAFE (to that in the early childhood and schools sectors – see above), the 2003 *Have Your Say* report commissioned by the Office of Training and Tertiary Education and the 2006 survey of TAFE teachers by the AEU (Vic) as part of its log of claims development process, provide valuable information about what teachers in this sector see as the major issues in professional learning. These range from the lack of 'backfill' (relief teachers), travel, fees, increasing workloads, geographic isolation, a lack of appropriate professional development to meet identified needs, greater access to industry release, qualification standards, management-directed staff development rather than needs-based professional development and lack of management support for professional development for certain groups of teachers (eg sessional teachers). As a consequence, the AEU endorses the following recommendations regarding professional learning for TAFE teachers.

1. The TAFE Development Centre should be provided with ongoing government funding such that it can meet the professional learning needs of all members of the Victorian TAFE teaching workforce and this provision should only include the public TAFE system.
2. Teachers in TAFE should all have a suitable teaching qualification.

The present requirement for Certificate Level IV Workplace Training and Assessment is at best a minimum. The Multi-Employer Certified Agreement now applying to the sector requires teachers to undertake a suitable teaching qualification which includes teaching methodology studies and supervised teaching practice. This will come at a cost. The AEU believes that this cost should be borne by the government. All stakeholders in the system should work to ensure that TAFE teachers have readily available to them, teaching qualifications that enable them to comply with their professional requirements.

The number of scholarships administered through the TAFE Development Centre to enable TAFE teachers to gain teacher qualifications is insufficient to meet the needs of the teaching workforce. There should be additional funding to enable all teachers who require a suitable teaching qualification to access a scholarship to do so.

3. The government must make standing provision for release to industry programs for TAFE teachers. Recent industry experience is fundamental to maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of education in this sector.
4. Sufficient specific professional development funding should be made available to enable TAFE teachers to gain release from teaching so that they can renew and further develop their knowledge and skills in their field of expertise.

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