WHAT HAPPENED TO THE NATIONAL STATEMENT FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION?

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Introduction

In 2003, 15 teacher associations put together a National Statement from the Teaching Profession on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism. It recommended that

*A nationally coordinated, rigorous and consistent system should be established to provide recognition to teachers who demonstrate advanced standards . . . The enterprise bargaining process between employers and unions will be an important mechanism for providing recognition for professional certification. All employing authorities should be encouraged to provide recognition and support for professional certification as the process comes to demonstrate its credibility and its effects on professional learning. (p. 4)*

The Statement was the culmination of three years work coordinated by Australian College of Educators. “Certification” as used here refers to an endorsement by a professional agency that a member of that profession has attained a designated standard of practice.

Ten years later, it is time to revisit the Statement. How much progress has been made toward such a system for promoting and recognising highly accomplished professional knowledge and practice? More particularly, how much progress has been made toward ensuring that responsibility for its operation rests with the profession, given the commitment that many teachers’ associations made to it ten years ago?

What is certification and whose responsibility is it?

The Statement encapsulates the mutual responsibility that the teaching profession and governments have for ensuring all students have quality opportunities to learn. Certification of accomplished teaching practice is an essential means of promoting widespread use of successful teaching practices. If teachers want recognition for accomplished practice, they must be able to demonstrate through rigorous processes of certification that they can set high standards and identify those who have attained them. If governments want to lift student performance they must place high value on teachers who attain those standards and create a strong market for their services.

The National Statement carefully distinguished the certification role of the profession from the recognition role of government and other employing authorities. Responsibility for professional standards and certification usually rests with national level and independent professional bodies, such as Engineers Australia. However, the way in which governments and other

¹ This paper has benefited greatly from the comments and suggestions of several people, particularly Elizabeth Kleinhenz at ACE and Gregor Ramsey.
employing authorities may choose to encourage and reward attainment of that certification is, of course, their prerogative.

Certification systems are the key means by which established professions promote widespread use of proven practices - and drive continual improvement in their member’s practice, in their own and in the public interest. They provide novices with high, research-based standards to aim for over several years. They also provide a rigorous and independent system for assessing when they have attained those standards. Successful applicants gain a respected certification that employers are willing to pay for, thus creating a strong market for their knowledge and expertise. They gain the esteem of having “made it” in their profession.

Governments and other employing authorities usually do not see themselves as having the expertise or the responsibility for developing professional standards and methods for assessing performance against those standards. Professions other than teaching have therefore been given “jurisdiction” to establish their own certification agencies, traditionally by means of a royal charter, in return for evidence of capacity and rigour. Teaching however remains unique among professions in having no equivalent agency. The puzzle is why governments that talk so much about promoting teaching as a profession rarely treat it as if it was one.

The need for a national professional learning and certification system

The current policy framework for promoting quality teachers and teaching is clearly not working. The past year saw yet another decline in the academic quality of students allowed to enter undergraduate teacher education programs. Only 5% had ATAR scores above 90, compared with an average of 28% across all courses. Less than 50 per cent of entrants were from the top 30 per cent of the Year 12 cohort, compared with 86% for engineering, 72% for health and 70% for management and commerce courses.

Certification is the way most professions drive continual improvement in their member’s practice, in their own and in the public interest. It is hard to see how Australia will join the top five nations in educational performance by 2025 without a rigorous profession-run certification system - a system that will justify significant increases in salary and ensure that the teaching can compete more successfully with other professions for the ablest graduates, prepare them well and promote widespread use of effective teaching practices.

Australia’s rank is slipping on international tests of student achievement. Ninety-two per cent of Australian teachers in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) reported that if they improved the quality of their teaching they would not receive any recognition in their school (OECD, 2009a). And eighty-three percent reported that the evaluation of their work

2 The Australian College of Nursing was established on 1 July 2012 as a result of the unification of the Royal College of Nursing, Australia and The College of Nursing to provide a single, focussed voice for the nursing profession within Australia.
has no impact on the likelihood of their career advancement. As a recent OECD report points out,

*A problematic aspect of the teaching profession in Australia is that career structures are, in most jurisdictions, dissociated from teaching standards and (certification) processes. This translates into a detrimental separation between the definition of skills and competencies at different stages of the career (as reflected in teaching standards) and the roles and responsibilities of teachers in schools (as reflected in career structures).* (Santiago et al., 2011, p. 89)

In tune with so many earlier reports, the OECD report identifies the need for a professional certification system in teaching. (The same report made it clear that it did not support the Federal Government’s bonus pay approach.) Funding such a system is arguably the best use to which Gonski money could be put, especially if it gives principals in less advantaged schools greater capacity to attract and retain highly accomplished teachers.

Creating such a system calls for bold policy-making that appeals to the professionalism of teachers and entrusts them with the resources and responsibility of developing a rigorous professional learning and certification system for their members.

**Strengthening teaching as a profession: A consensus gained and lost**

Another recent OECD report (OECD, 2011) points out that:

*There may be a relationship between the degree to which the work of teaching has been professionalised and student performance. Indeed, the higher a country is on the world’s education league tables, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners.* . . . (p. 240)

Recent policy action stemming from COAG National Agreement on Teacher Quality is not consistent with this finding. A splendid opportunity to professionalise teaching and treat teachers as trusted professional partners looks all but lost because COAG members have not supported the concept of a national and independent professional certification body for Australia. A little history will serve to support this argument.

The 1998 Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teaching recommended that:

*A system of professional recognition for teachers must be established, which is based on the achievement of enhanced knowledge and skills and which retains teachers at the front line of student learning. Such knowledge and skills should be identified, classified and assessed according to criteria developed by expert panels drawn from the profession. Education authorities should structure remuneration accordingly.* (p. 7)

The Senators recognized that a professional certification system has two components essential to its success: a rigorous process for the *certification* of teachers who attain high standards; and *recognition* for the value of that certification in terms of substantial salary advancement and new career opportunities, for example in teacher leadership. They recognised that responsibilities for these two components should be kept distinct, for good reasons. The first
rests with the profession; the second with governments and other employing authorities if they are committed to promoting high standards.

The 2003 National Statement was consistent with the Senators’ recommendation and with several other major reports at that time, such as, the Ramsey report, *Quality Matters: Revitalising teaching: critical times, critical choices* (Ramsey, 2002), the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003) and the Business Council of Australia (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008)

In addition, during the 2000s, sixteen professional associations developed certification standards for their specialist field (most with Australian Government funding amounting to several million dollars). Two had already developed their standards and assessment methods to the point where they provide a potentially valid basis for a national certification system.

In July 2003 the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, announced that the Australian Government would establish a *National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership*, later retitled Teaching Australia. The Minister had a medical background and, in an earlier career, was the president of the Australian Medical Association. With this background, he assumed that teaching would have a similar national professional association to advise him on professional matters. On not finding one, he set about establishing such a body - unfortunately, with little prior consultation with state ministers of education or teacher unions.

Initially, the Board of Directors of Teaching Australia was not prepared to commit to a voluntary assessment and certification system. However, as support for the idea from teacher associations grew, the Directors began to embrace the concept. In 2008, the Board of Directors agreed that supported the introduction of a voluntary system of professional certification and believed the profession should independently manage this system, working in partnership with employers, regulatory bodies and the community. By this time however, there was a change of government at the national level and support for Teaching Australia had weakened. The incoming Labor Government had promised in 2007 to establish a rigorous standards-based certification system for recognizing accomplished teachers.

By 2008, a remarkable consensus had emerged about the need to establish a national certification system. Teacher unions were supportive provided teachers would be assessed by an independent and fair process and rewarded through salary increases.

In an address to a Teaching Australia and BCA Symposium (15 October, 2008) the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard MP, stated

> In broad terms, both the Business Council’s and the AEU’s proposals for a rigorous national certification system are consistent with the approach currently being examined by COAG and MCEETYA.

Following this, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established in 2010, replacing Teaching Australia, with responsibility “for developing and implementing a nationally consistent certification function”.

4
Factors limiting the development of an effective certification system

AITSL has made considerable progress in several areas, but I believe it is time to review whether it has the capacity to ensure that Australia gains the respected profession-wide certification system that it needs. There are several factors currently that limit its chances of success.

1. Lack of independence and authority

The first factor, perhaps the main one, is AITSL’s lack of independence and authority, especially in a context where support for the National Partnership Agreements is waning. AITSL bears little resemblance to certification agencies in other professions. It reports to state and territory Ministers of Education and representatives of other employing authorities. Jurisdiction to operate a certification system in the way that applies to other established professions has not been granted to AITSL. Instead, MCEEDYA members directed that the certification function be delegated to state and territory “jurisdictions”, meaning that Australia would have at least eight different certifying bodies, and probably several more.

In some states, such as NSW, this directive meant that there would be more than one certifying authority: one for public school teachers, one for teachers in the Catholic school sector and one for teachers in the independent school sector. After considerable confusion about who would actually have the jurisdiction, or want it, it now appears that the certifying authority in most states and territories will turn out to be the teacher registration body, the regulatory body responsible for licensing teachers. This is in contrast with most professions where a distinction is drawn between the registration and certification functions, which are carried out by different agencies. (For example, each state has a statutory Medical Practitioners Board with responsibility for registration, but advanced certification is the responsibility of national professional bodies, such as the Royal College of GPs. Nursing has one national body, the Australian College of Nursing, which is an authorised Higher Education provider and is recognised as equivalent to a university.)

This will prove to be a critical weakness. Despite years of rhetoric about the importance of strengthening teaching as a profession, MCEEDYA members excluded the idea of an independent professional certification body from the consultation process. Nor were national teacher associations consulted on the matter, ignoring the fact that some of these associations had demonstrated their willingness and ability to operate a single national certification system ten years earlier.

Except for NSW, it is not clear that the states and territories actually have “jurisdiction” to provide certification, in the sense of legislation specifically specifying such authority. Most established professions in Australia and England received their jurisdiction through some form of Royal Charter many years ago. More than twenty professional associations in Australia now operate under a jurisdiction overseen by the Governor-General. It may be time for the Australian teaching profession to seek a charter similar to the one a Select Committee of the House of Commons recently recommended for teachers in England.

We acknowledge and support the case for a new, member-driven College of Teaching, independent from but working with Government, which could play important roles, inter alia, in the accreditation of CPD and teacher standards. We recommend that the
Government work with teachers and others to develop proposals for a new College of Teaching, along the lines of the Royal Colleges and Chartered Institutions in other professions.

Because AITSL lacks independence, its capacity to develop a rigorous national professional certification system has been undermined (this is not to say that an independent national professional body should not embrace governments and other employing authorities on its governing board, as a wide range of interested parties). The Council of Australian Governments directed that AITSL develop a “nationally consistent”, not a national, system of certification. In effect, state and territory Ministers of Education and other employing authorities have successfully assumed responsibility to operate their own local certification systems (even though, strangely, they will be based on the same set of national standards agreed to by all.)

As a result, there is uncertainty regarding AITSL’s future role. This situation is quite different from the situation in which certification bodies are placed in other professions. It is also quite different from the situation in which teacher certification bodies are placed in other countries. The General Teaching Council for Scotland has been operating for nearly 50 years. The NBPTS in the USA was established 25 years ago. Both bodies are relatively independent of political cycles and influence and both are highly respected by the profession and governments.

2. Lack of a stable policy context

A second related factor limiting AITSL’s capacity to deliver an effective certification system is that Government decisions have undermined the concept of certification itself. AITSL’s brief keeps shifting in significant ways with changes in government policy and changes in ministers of education at federal, state and territory levels.

During the last election, the Australian Government suddenly announced that it would introduce a Reward Payments for Great Teachers bonus pay scheme if elected. The task of developing what was called The Australian Teacher Performance Management Principles and Procedures scheme was handed to AITSL, in addition to its previous certification brief.

This bonus pay scheme was clearly inconsistent with AITSL’s original brief to develop a certification system. It bore all the hallmarks of what politicians will say to win elections. Bonus pay schemes are the business of employers and it was inappropriate for a federal governments to be imposing one. In addition, the methods listed were undeveloped and untested, the scheme would be expensive and a burden for schools, and would have a negative effect on staff relationships.

This proposal ignored the original certification role the Ministers had given to AITSL. Quite apart from the fact that this scheme was an ill-conceived election promise, it placed AITSL in an awkward, if not contradictory, position. Was its main role now to establish a nationally consistent certification system, or was it to provide school managers with procedures for their performance management and annual bonus pay schemes? The latter was an unusual thing for a federal government to do, given that education in Australia is a state responsibility.

In effect, the Australian certification scheme has been transformed into a performance management and bonus pay scheme. Under the current directions from the Australian
Government Minister for Education, teachers who apply successfully for certification will gain a one-off bonus, not a certification recognised in terms of advancement to higher salary levels. At this time, it is unclear whether a teacher’s certification gained in this mode will be recognised profession-wide in other states or sectors of the education system.

Unsurprisingly, given the increasingly unstable political context, AITSL’s initiatives in this area also appear unlikely to gain national acceptance and support. After recent elections and changes in government, two states, Queensland and Victoria have opted out of the AITSL certification system. The Victorian Government has rejected the idea of certification in favour of a merit pay scheme for state schools, currently at the centre of a fierce and disruptive industrial dispute. The scheme will require school principals to evaluate all of their teachers every year and place them into one of four or five payment categories; those who will receive no salary increment, those who will receive an increment only, and those who will receive an increment plus a 10%, 6%, or 1.4% bonus.

It is apparent that Australia provides a good example of a problem that Elmore (2011, p.35) identifies in the USA:

> I used to think that policy was the solution. And now I think policy is the problem . . . To policy makers, every idea about what schools should be doing is as credible as every other idea, and any new idea that can command a political constituency can be used as an excuse for telling schools to do something. Elected officials . . . generate electoral credit by initiating new ideas, not by making the kind of steady investments in people that are required to make the educator sector more effective. The result is an education sector that is overwhelmed with policy, conditioned to respond to the immediate demands of whoever controls the political agenda, and not in investing in the long-term health of the sector and the people who work in it . . .

> For the future, I am putting my energy into building a stronger profession, not into trying to repair a desperately dysfunctional political system.

It takes a stable policy environment to establish a successful certification system and a patient long-term trust in the capacity of teachers to ensure its rigour. As the House of Commons select committee recognised, independence is essential. However, AITSL has been given less than a year to develop the assessment methods and processes for training assessors before the system goes “live” to scale. A rushed agenda to meet a political timeline will risk imposing a system that fails to gain credibility and respect with the profession.

3. **Failure to appreciate the complexities of the task**

Third, the timetable imposed on AITSL to develop valid and reliable assessment methods for advanced certification reflects little understanding of what it takes to do it well; or, the importance of engaging the profession. Development of the methods of assessment, the methods to be used to train assessors and the setting of performance standards has not reached the level of sophistication and rigour it needs to be at if certification is to go to scale and gain respect.
Reliability in judgements seems unlikely as the current guidelines about assessment tasks, such as portfolio entries, are not structured in ways that will ensure teachers interpret them in the same way. Consequently, it will be difficult to train assessors to the levels of consistency required. There needs to be greater clarity in the assessment guidelines about what exactly a teacher is expected to demonstrate in the evidence they provide in each portfolio entry. This calls for carefully structured assessment tasks, such as portfolio entries. Contrary to expectations, research indicates that structure is welcomed by teachers and leads to perceptions of fairness in the assessment process. Transparent structure breeds confidence in a system.

Current AITSL guidelines for assessment methods are being implemented in different ways across states and territories. Reliability also requires that the assessment methods together cover all the National Standards and provide adequate evidence from each of the Domains. However, under current guidelines, evidence for the Knowledge Domain is poorly sampled, even though research indicates its importance. (For example, applicants are not asked to demonstrate current knowledge of subject matter or research about teaching and learning in their specialist field, although research shows possession of this knowledge leads to better student outcomes.)

Current guidelines also need to recognise the need to ensure generalizability; that is, the need to gather a sufficient sample of teacher’s knowledge and performance to be able to generalise confidently about their capability to meet the standards. One portfolio entry or one case study cannot provide sufficient evidence to make a reliable and valid judgement about a teacher’s capacity to meet the standards. At a minimum, for example, a primary teacher’s portfolio should contain several independent entries showing their ability to promote learning in each of the main key learning areas of literacy, numeracy, science and social studies. Likewise, a secondary teacher’s portfolio should contain several independent portfolio entries, each from different classes and year levels.) Early indications are that some certifying authorities are asking for limited direct evidence of highly accomplished classroom practice and ability to advance student learning compared with evidence about activities beyond the classroom.

No procedures for arriving at a final decision about whether or not to certify a teacher appear to have been developed. This is a complex process, not be dealt with in a casual way. It involves decisions about the relative weighting that will be given to the different types of evidence. It involves developing a defensible process for amalgamating the assessment scores and setting the standards for certification; that is, for deciding what levels of knowledge and performance represent meeting the standard. This depends on developing rubrics based on the standards that clearly distinguish qualitatively different levels of performance. However, the current National Standards do not provide an adequate basis for developing such rubrics, as they do not provide elaborations of the standards describing the key indicators and critical attributes of highly accomplished practice.

Without developing and testing such procedures, doubts about the validity and comparability of certification will spread quickly – its ability to distinguish teachers who meet the standards from those who do not needs to be established by well-resourced trials and research. Previous research indicates it would be unwise to proceed before confidence in the validity of the certification process has been demonstrated.
The development of a credible professional certification system is a major educational measurement exercise requiring the highest levels of psychometric expertise. That expertise needs to be assembled in the service of a national professional body. It is unrealistic to assume that it exists across the eight or more current state and territory certifying authorities. A profession-wide approach is more likely to lead to a rigorous and efficient certification system than that which appears to be emerging across the states and territories.

4. **Quality of the National Professional Standards Framework**

Many of these concerns about the rigour of the assessment procedures stem from the quality of the National Professional Standards Framework itself. Expert teachers and researchers played little part in its development, consequently the standards are not well grounded in contemporary research on what accomplished teachers know and do. For example, what should a graduate teacher know about recent research on teaching reading? What should a mathematics teacher know about identifying and rectifying misconceptions in learning important mathematical concepts? Without such elaborations, the standards do not reflect the complexity of the professional knowledge base in teaching.

Nor do the levels reflect an underlying theory about the development of expertise. For example, no distinction is made between “highly accomplished” and “proficient” teaching of English, physical education, or drama, etc., in terms of classroom skills. What highly accomplished teachers know and do differs significantly across the different specialist areas of teaching, but these differences are not recognised in the standards. There is

There needs to be much more clarity and elaboration of the core knowledge and capabilities expected of accomplished teachers in different fields of teaching. These weaknesses make it difficult to develop rubrics that distinguish different levels of knowledge and performance. Consequently, it will be difficult to train assessors to the levels of reliability essential for a credible certification system.

5. **Governments are not living up to their side of the National Partnership Agreements.**

The National Partnership Agreement on teacher quality contains an agreement to provide recognition and reward to teachers who reach high standards and gain certification. This is an employer’s task if they accept responsibility for promoting quality teaching.

The final and perhaps most important factor limiting AITSL’s capacity to deliver an effective advanced certification system is that most state and territory governments and the Australian Government appear to be withdrawing from their side of the bargain, which is to use certification as the basis for substantial salary advancement beyond the top of current incremental scales. As a result, certification will not realise its capacity to become a powerful driver toward widespread use of successful teaching practices.

At a time of national concern about the ability of teaching to attract and retain high quality graduates, this seems short-sighted and irresponsible. As the recent Productivity Commission report points out, teachers’ salaries have not kept pace with increases in other professions. Teachers salaries in Australia are only 30% above GDP per capita, whereas the average in OECD countries is 65%.
Our governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring that salaries and career pathways enable teaching to compete with other professions for the best graduates. A rigorous certification system gives the profession a sound basis on which to press governments to meet this responsibility. Rhetoric about the importance of teacher quality is hollow if this responsibility is not met. Likewise for the profession’s side of the bargain; teachers wanting greater respect and rewards must embrace the responsibilities of a profession to set their own high standards and demonstrate their ability to assess those who have reached them.

**Final comments: Teachers and principals should claim the right to Certification is a professional**

While AITSL has established the basic architecture of a “nationally consistent” system for the certification of Highly Accomplished, and Lead Teachers, its ultimate success will depend on two closely related factors. The first is that this system proves itself to be a valid and reliable indicator of effective classroom teaching, both to employing authorities and to teachers. Unless it does this, it will fail. The second is that the profession takes greater responsibility for its operation at all levels and builds a sense of ownership and commitment to ensuring its success. These remain major challenges for the future.

The main argument of this paper is that the long-term stability of a national certification scheme will be more assured if Australia establishes an independent national professional body responsibility for its development and operation. This was the vision so clearly articulated in the National Statement of 2003. As it stands, however, state and territory ministers have successfully appropriated responsibility for the certification system, contradicting the concept of professional certification. Teachers and their associations have been sidelined.

I believe it is time for the Australian teacher and principal professional organisations and associations, to create a national forum that would enable the profession to revisit the 2003 National Statement and review progress toward the principles it espoused. Three years since COAG agreed to the National Partnership on Teacher Quality, it is time to ask if current arrangements are consistent with its original expectations.

Key questions for such a forum might include whether current arrangements have the capacity to deliver the rigorous and respected certification recommended in the National Statement and in many related reports and inquiries. Will the current national standards provide a sound basis for more effective professional development and performance assessment, or should the standards developed by teachers’ professional associations be elaborated and used for these purposes? Will the quality of the certification lead governments and other employing authorities to create a strong market for nationally certified highly accomplished and lead teachers? Is it time that the profession established its own national professional certification body?

For a third time (following the Australian Teaching Council in the 1990s and Teaching Australia in the 2000s), Australia has tried to establish a national body for the teaching profession, but it is not third time lucky. The currently fragmenting National Partnership is not a context conducive
to steadily building a professionally and publicly credible system for recognising and rewarding accomplished teachers.

In 1959, as the Australian College of Education was being established, James Darling wrote that:

*Despite its importance, the teaching profession as a whole has never yet had a voice with which to speak. There are innumerable professional associations, at different levels and of different degrees of specialised interest, but there is no organisation to speak for education as a whole in matters of principle, which concern the whole body of those who teach. There are acknowledged leaders in specialized fields, but no leaders of the profession as a whole.*

Fifty-four years have passed since Darling wrote those words and still the teaching profession remains leaderless and powerless in the sense he identified. Progress has been made, but the old obstacles remain and new ones have been created. If ever there was a time when the profession needed to be able to speak on equal terms with governments and other employing authorities about matters central to quality teaching and learning that time is now. It is time to establish our own Australian College of Teaching for promoting and recognising highly accomplished professional practice in teaching and school leadership.