

# EMPOWERED EDUCATORS

HOW HIGH-PERFORMING SYSTEMS SHAPE  
TEACHING QUALITY AROUND THE WORLD

## AUSTRALIA: TOWARD A NATIONAL SYSTEM

COUNTRY BRIEF



This paper is part of a series of policy and country briefs produced as part of *Empowered Educators* – a landmark, international comparative study of teacher and teaching quality in the world’s top-performing education systems, commissioned by the Center on International Education Benchmarking® of the National Center on Education and the Economy®. For a complete listing of the materials produced by the *Empowered Educators* project, including a searchable database of recorded interviews and authentic tools, please visit [www.ncee.org/empowered-educators](http://www.ncee.org/empowered-educators).

The National Center on Education and the Economy was created in 1988 to analyze the implications of changes in the international economy for American education, formulate an agenda for American education based on that analysis and seek wherever possible to accomplish that agenda through policy change and development of the resources educators would need to carry it out. For more information visit [www.ncee.org](http://www.ncee.org).

The Center on International Education Benchmarking, a program of NCEE, conducts and funds research on the world’s most successful education and workforce development systems to identify the strategies those countries have used to produce their superior performance. Through its books, reports, website, monthly newsletter, and a weekly update of education news around the world, CIEB provides up-to-date information and analysis on the world’s most successful education systems based on student performance, equity and efficiency. Visit [www.ncee.org/cieb](http://www.ncee.org/cieb) to learn more.

Research for the *Empowered Educators* study was coordinated by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) at Stanford University. SCOPE was founded in 2008 to foster research, policy, and practice to advance high-quality, equitable education systems in the United States and internationally.

## Australia: Toward a National System

For most of its history, Australia's education system has been highly decentralized. Each of its six states and two territories has responsibility for establishing its own policies and operating its own school system. In addition to state-funded schools, there are also Catholic and Independent school systems in each state, which charge tuition, but receive the majority of their funds from the Australian Government. The number of different state and school systems has contributed to a system with significant variation in policies and practices.

Australia typically scores well on international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), although these scores have dipped in recent years. Building a comprehensive policy system to develop teacher capacity is thus seen as a key lever for improving system performance and equity. The federal government has played a greater role in education policy over the past decade to unify and achieve greater consistency across Australia's school systems than in the past.

In implementing these reforms, states and teacher education institutions have begun to transform teaching in Australia. The result is a framework of national policies in a state-based system aimed at preparing students with 21st century skills. This brief outlines the key elements of this system, and how it plays out in two states: New South Wales and Victoria.

### A National Framework for Teaching

The impetus for a stronger federal role was the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Signed by all nine federal, state, and territorial education ministers, it outlines two goals for Australian schooling: that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, and that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

In carrying out these goals, the federal government established the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). AITSL has worked collaboratively with state governments, professional organizations, and teachers' unions to develop a nationally agreed-upon set of teaching standards, a standard for principals, and policies and guidelines for teacher professional learning and performance and development. Together, these national policies have begun to significantly shape the nature of teaching in Australia. For example, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers underpin the accreditation of initial teacher education programs, and teacher registration (certification) in each state.

**States and teacher education institutions have begun to transform teaching in Australia. The result is a framework of national policies in a state-based system aimed at preparing students with 21st century skills.**

**Figure 1: Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**

Domains of teaching	Standards
Professional Knowledge	1. Know students and how they learn
	2. Know the content and how to teach it
Professional Practice	3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning
	4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments
	5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
Professional Engagement	6. Engage in professional learning
	7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

The seven standards outline the expectations of what all teachers are expected to know and be able to do at four different career stages – Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead – providing a common discourse for high-quality teaching across states and school systems. Key among the standards for shaping the work of teachers are the two for professional engagement: “engage in professional learning,” and “engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.” These define teaching practice in Australia as a collaborative endeavor. Teachers are expected to identify their own learning needs, and contribute to the improvement of both their own practice and that of their colleagues. At the higher levels of the standards, teachers are expected to contribute to team, school, and network professional learning initiatives, and support the learning of pre-service teacher candidates.

### **Intersecting with State Policies – New South Wales and Victoria**

The national standards were developed with extensive consultation and collaboration with state governments, teacher professional organizations and unions, and incorporated several sets of existing standards. Two states with the most well-developed policy systems, including standards and processes for teacher registration prior to the introduction of national standards, are New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria. Consequently, the transition to national standards has been relatively smooth in these two states.

State policies aimed at improving teaching quality have generally complemented the national reforms. Victoria, for example, is building on promising models for clinical experience in teacher education developed by local universities to improve the quality and consistency of preservice teacher supervision.

Recent policy in NSW has focused on building the capability and status of the teaching profession, and alignment with national policies. The state government’s 2013 *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* policy reforms provided an evidence-informed, cohesive approach to transform the way that teachers in NSW are selected, prepared, developed, evaluated, and compensated. These reforms include raising and mandating the minimum university entrance levels for education degrees to ensure

that those who choose teaching as a career are high academic performers with strong personal attributes for teaching.

NSW is also refining quality assurance processes to ensure all teacher candidates receive high quality professional experience as part of their teacher education programs, and that programs include a requirement for rigorous and continuous research.

Changes in education and training in NSW are underpinned by a strong belief in the role of education in creating a more equitable society, as well as personal, social and economic well-being. The key drivers for the state education plan include current educational outcomes data and an educational evidence base that highlights the critical role of teachers and educational leaders in driving continuous improvement, as articulated in the state's strategic plan:

“ Research provides evidence that a quality teacher is the most important factor in student success in learning. Improving teacher standards will position NSW as the Australian leader and improve our standing internationally. ”

In each state, much of the focus of policy attention is on teachers, teaching quality, and school leadership.

### Recruitment

In general, there is an adequate supply of teachers in NSW and Victoria, although population increases in Melbourne and Sydney are anticipated over the coming decade. The present surplus of teachers may be attributed to two factors. Firstly, salaries for beginning teachers are competitive with those of other professions. Starting salaries in 2013 for four-year trained teachers in NSW were comparable to those for new engineering graduates. However, teaching in Australia tends to reach a salary ceiling after as little as eleven years, after which experienced teachers may seek to move into more highly paid roles, such as principal. New policy in NSW from 2016 provides a salary increase for teachers certified at the Highly Accomplished or Lead levels of the professional teaching standards.

Secondly, teacher education is heavily subsidized, and the Australian government also provides grants and loans to cover tuition fees and study expenses, allowing graduates to repay them through taxation once employed. Together with the uncapping of the number of university places in 2009, these policies have increased the number of admissions to higher education in many fields, including education, as well as making teaching careers accessible to a wider section of society. The increase in admission numbers has stimulated new federal policy initiatives to assure the quality of teaching graduates.

**The desired key capabilities for teacher candidates include: motivation to teach, willingness to learn, strong interpersonal and communication skills, resilience and self-efficacy, conscientiousness, and organizational and planning skills.**

The distribution of teachers in Australia represents an ongoing challenge. Teacher shortages are experienced in rural and remote areas, and in secondary subjects such as mathematics, science, and second languages. There are also shortages of teachers from an indigenous background. Several states have initiated incentive schemes to attract teachers to fill shortage areas. In NSW, for example, up to 300 Teacher Education scholarships were made available for students to train as teachers in secondary mathematics, science, technological and applied studies, English, and special education; 80 of these scholarships were available exclusively for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates. These scholarships are designed to support work in hard-to-fill public schools, and recipients are required to work full-time in the school for a minimum of three years.

### *Admission to initial teacher education*

Initial teacher education in Australia takes place predominantly in federally-funded research universities, but is also offered by a small number of private colleges. Beyond defined minimum levels of secondary school achievement, each university or institute may determine its own cut-off marks or entrance requirements to teacher education programs. While these have often varied significantly between institutions and campuses, new initiatives through AITSL aim to increase consistency in selection into initial teacher education.

Academic performance has traditionally been the main admissions criterion. Teacher candidates are expected to be among the top 30 percent of the population in terms of ability in English literacy and numeracy, and this is among the criteria for state accreditation of teacher education programs. Applicants for graduate entry programs must have completed an undergraduate degree that includes discipline-specific content relevant to the curriculum area or areas in which they intend to teach.

National guidelines now require that non-academic qualities also inform selection. Universities and institutes will be required to use evidence-based and transparent methods for assessing candidates' qualities for programs to be accredited. The desired key capabilities include: motivation to teach, willingness to learn, strong interpersonal and communication skills, resilience and self-efficacy, conscientiousness, and organizational and planning skills.

Some universities have already implemented new selection methods. For example, the University of Melbourne uses the purpose-designed "Teacher Selector Tool" to supplement its Master of Teaching admissions criteria. It asks candidates a series of questions that range from literacy and numeracy skills and spatial reasoning, to communication style, cultural sensitivity, and ethics, and rates prospective teachers on dimensions that include conscientiousness, agreeability, openness and persistence.

## Initial Teacher Education

Teachers in Australia must have studied a minimum of four years in an accredited teacher education program. This occurs through one of three pathways:

- a four-year Bachelor of Education degree
- a combined or double degree; e.g., Bachelor of Science/Bachelor of Teaching.
- a three-year Bachelor degree plus teacher education training, such as a Graduate Diploma or Master of Education degree

Although the majority of total teacher education degree completions are presently at the undergraduate level (58 percent), there is an increasing trend towards graduate-level qualifications. Newly strengthened accreditation procedures require that graduate courses be at least two years in length, and many universities have already phased out one-year diploma programs.

Although each university or provider can determine the content of initial teacher education programs, each must be accredited against the national professional standards by a state authority. That has helped ensure that teacher education reflects the progressive vision of teaching outlined in the national standards, and has led to an increasing alignment of curricula among providers.

A typical teacher education program will include rigorous intellectual preparation with strong subject discipline knowledge, as well as knowledge and skills in the key elements of teaching practice. All teacher education degrees must include detailed instruction in identified priority areas: classroom and behavior management, literacy, technology, Aboriginal education, special education, and education for students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. There is a strong focus on developing teacher expertise to interpret student assessment data, to evaluate student learning and to modify teaching practice.

Primary school teachers are trained as “generalists,” typically teaching all but “specialist” subjects such as languages other than English, music, and physical education. Recent federal policy requires that teacher education programs offer a specialization, such as mathematics, a science, or an additional language. The intent is that deeper disciplinary knowledge will enable teachers to share that expertise with colleagues.

All teacher education programs require professional experience placements to develop and apply their knowledge and skills to real classroom situations. Teacher-candidates move progressively from classroom observation, to joint teaching, and to full class teaching by the final year. The extent and timing of this transition is negotiated between the teacher-candidate and supervising teacher during the professional placement, which must be at least 60 days in graduate programs and 80 days in undergraduate programs.



Recently, federal and state policies have been adopted to strengthen professional placements. New federal policy will require universities and schools to use consistent agreements for the supervision of professional placements. States such as NSW and Victoria have also developed initiatives to strengthen the links between schools and universities to improve the preparation of teacher candidates. In Victoria, twelve Teaching Academies of Professional Practice create clusters of schools with a partner university to build schools' capacity to provide professional placement experiences for candidates and support the professional learning of established teachers. In NSW, hub schools, in partnership with a university, support collaborative school networks in the provision of strong classroom focused professional learning for training teachers, early career teachers and experienced teachers.

In addition to the state-wide initiatives, several universities have developed innovative models to link theory and practice that are attracting attention throughout Australia. For example, the University of Melbourne's Master of Teaching program integrates graduate-level academic study with practical work in collaborating partnership schools. Teacher-candidates spend two days a week in the partner school, and work with university-based "clinical specialists" and school-based "teaching fellows" who together support practice and professional seminars. A similar program is offered at the University of Sydney in NSW.

### *Accreditation of initial teacher education programs*

Initial teacher education programs are accredited against the national professional teaching standards by state authorities. The process seeks to reinforce and enhance teacher professionalization through engagement with sector representatives. Accreditation committees may be comprised of representatives from universities, primary schools, secondary colleges, the independent and Catholic school sectors, and government ministries. Accreditation provides both public assurance of the quality of teachers, and facilitates the portability of teaching qualifications across states and systems.

Accredited providers must demonstrate that their graduates are provided with the necessary training to meet the seven standards and 37 descriptors at the Graduate Teacher level of the professional teaching standards. As of 2015, there were 406 accredited programs across 48 providers in Australia; the majority of these in NSW and Victoria. From 2016, all graduates will also need to pass a test in literacy and mathematics to become registered.

### **Induction, Mentoring and Teacher Registration**

NSW and Victoria also have well-developed induction programs to ensure that teachers can make a smooth transition into their initial teaching assignment after graduation. NSW's teacher mentor program began in 2003, employing 50 teacher mentors who work across 90 to 100 schools that have a significant number of new

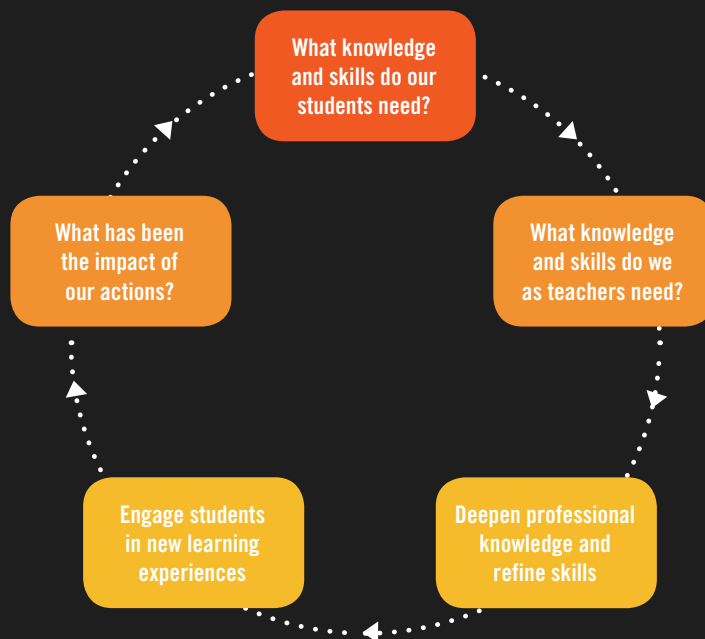


teachers, supporting around 60 percent of the total number of newly appointed teachers. Since 2003, Victoria has required all schools to have standards-aligned induction and mentoring for teachers new to the school. In 2016, all state education ministers agreed to a nationally-consistent approach to induction focusing on professional practices, professional identity, well-being, and orientation.

Induction in NSW and Victoria is also tied to full certification as a teacher (known as “registration” in Victoria and “accreditation” in NSW). On completion of initial teacher education, new teachers begin on the Graduate level of the national professional standards, and apply for provisional certification to teach. They then have between one and three years, depending on the state and school system, to apply for full certification, which requires evidence of observed practice and the recommendation from school leadership. Teachers must provide evidence that they have progressed to meet the Proficient level of the standards, and evidence of professional conversations with a mentor.

The certification process connects new teachers with a mentor, increases familiarization with the professional teaching standards, and inducts teachers into a cycle of reflective inquiry focused on student learning. In Victoria, new teachers are encouraged to use the cycle of teacher inquiry and knowledge building as framed in the national standards. (See Figure 2.) It asks the teacher to identify students’ needs, develop an area of teaching practice necessary to meet those student needs, implement the new teaching practice in an action plan over a period of four to six weeks, and assess the effectiveness of the approach. This helps scaffold teacher induction into

**Figure 2: Timperley Cycle of Teacher Inquiry and Knowledge Building**



Source: VIT (2013),  
Evidence of Professional  
Practice for Full Registration

a cycle of professional learning, and provides a common language for discussing practice.

Mentor training is also provided in some states. Strong programs operate in both NSW and Victoria. For example, the Victoria Institute of Teaching provides training to mentors around the knowledge and skills of mentorship; the two-day program, offered in the first semester of each year, has reached some 12,000 teachers over the past decade.

In recent years, states have moved to provide more time for teacher collaboration, thus making mentoring more productive. In both Victoria and NSW, beginning teachers typically use this additional time to observe an experienced teacher's class, gather evidence of their teaching practice as part of their registration/accreditation process, hold professional conversations with their school-based mentor, or collaboratively plan lessons and assess student work. In Victoria, new teachers have a reduced work load of at least 5 percent, equivalent to one or two hours a week.

NSW also has expanded teacher collaboration time, funding two hours each week for all teachers – and four hours for beginning teachers – to enable collaborative planning, lesson preparation and assessment. As then-Secretary of the NSW Department of Education and Communities, Michele Bruniges, noted:

“Collaboration within the profession is absolutely fundamental to teacher development and continuing learning. Supported by government, we put in release time for the first two years for our beginning teachers. We wanted certain conditions to be met within the schools for that to happen: having a mentor in place where that would be consistent over a period of time... It's very, very critical that we support teacher collaboration and teacher professional learning throughout the cycle.”

There is evidence to suggest that the mentor process has positively influenced the classroom practices of beginning teachers and helped develop their teaching knowledge. In addition, mentorship and induction is associated with an increased retention rate for new teachers.

### **Professional Learning**

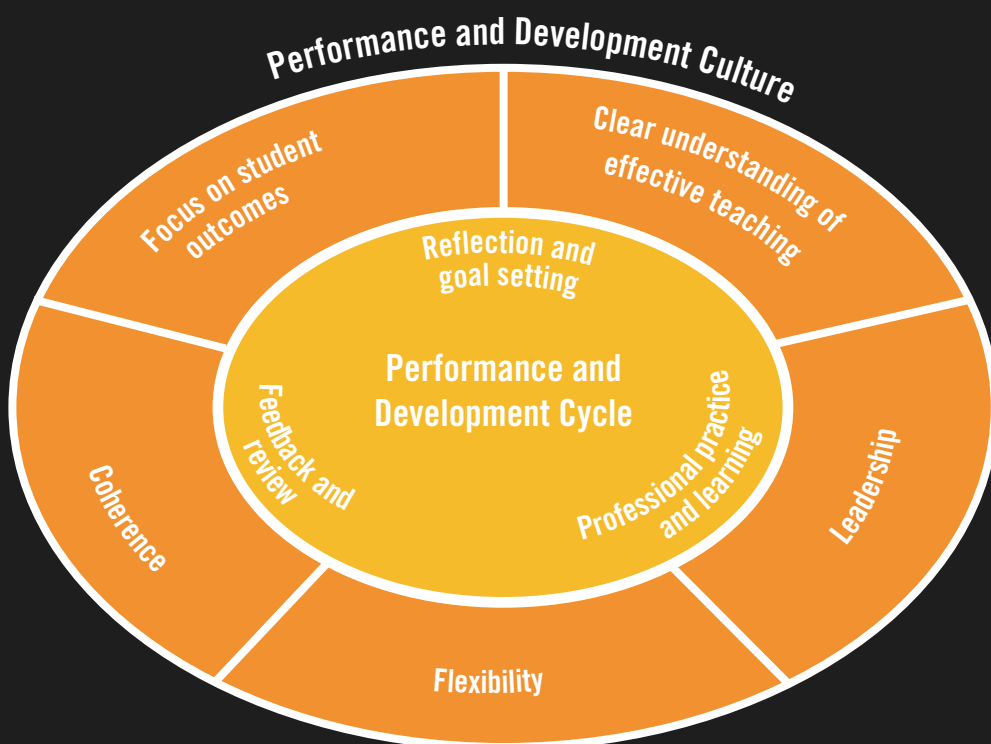
Australia has long provided incentives and support for teachers to continue their professional learning throughout their careers. To maintain their professional certification, all teachers in Australia must show evidence of professional learning: 20 hours annually in Victoria; and in NSW, 100 hours over five years, at least half of which must be state-approved professional learning. Teachers must show evidence that their professional learning addresses the teaching standards and informs professional growth. Teachers are encouraged to take control of their own professional learning and determine the form that meets their needs, by reflecting both on their students' and their own learning using the above cycle.

Professional learning is regarded as a key school improvement strategy in Australia. For this reason, a significant proportion of collaborative professional learning takes place within schools among colleagues, or within school networks. This may take the form of class observation and subsequent professional conversations to identify problems and improve practice. This move from a “my class, my rules” approach towards more open classrooms represents a significant change in teaching and professional learning in Australia over the past 15 years.

### Appraisal and Feedback

Teacher appraisal, commonly known in Australia as performance and development, also supports the continued learning and development of teachers. Appraisal is the responsibility of each state; however, national guidelines frame the appraisal process, and there is increasing alignment of policies across states. The approach to teacher appraisal is developmental, and centered on student learning. The key principles of the performance and development cycle – captured in Figure 3 – involve establishing regularly reviewed goals, and measuring progress towards them; collecting evidence from multiple sources, including classroom observation, to reflect on performance; opportunities for high-quality professional learning; and regular formal and informal feedback on performance that feeds into further goal-setting. The framework is predicated on the idea that all teachers – not just school leaders – have a role in creating a school culture that supports observation, feedback, and ongoing learning for all teachers.

Figure 3. Australian Performance and Development Framework



In practice, performance and development takes place at the school level. But states have taken steps over the past decade to address previously large variations in practice between schools, and to draw the process into alignment with the professional teaching standards. As one senior teacher explained:

“ [Previously] it was well-known that it really depended on who you got for the interview. All things involving teacher evaluation and teacher performance are much tighter now than they were in those times... Schools have to be much more accountable now. It’s very much evidence-based. ”

In NSW, the annual Performance and Development Plan is guided by the state’s reform blueprint, known as *Great Teachers, Inspired Learning*. The Performance and Development policy documents a concise set of three to five professional goals that are explicitly linked to teachers’ performance and development needs and the professional standards. There is an expectation that the goals should align to the school plan and systemic strategic directions, and establish a standards-aligned pathway for each teacher, recognizing existing expertise while also identifying areas for professional growth.

Teachers collect evidence of their professional learning and progress against the standards-aligned goals; this is the same evidence they may use to maintain their teacher certification. They conduct a self-assessment, and principals or their designees are responsible for conferencing with the teacher and observing and documenting performance.

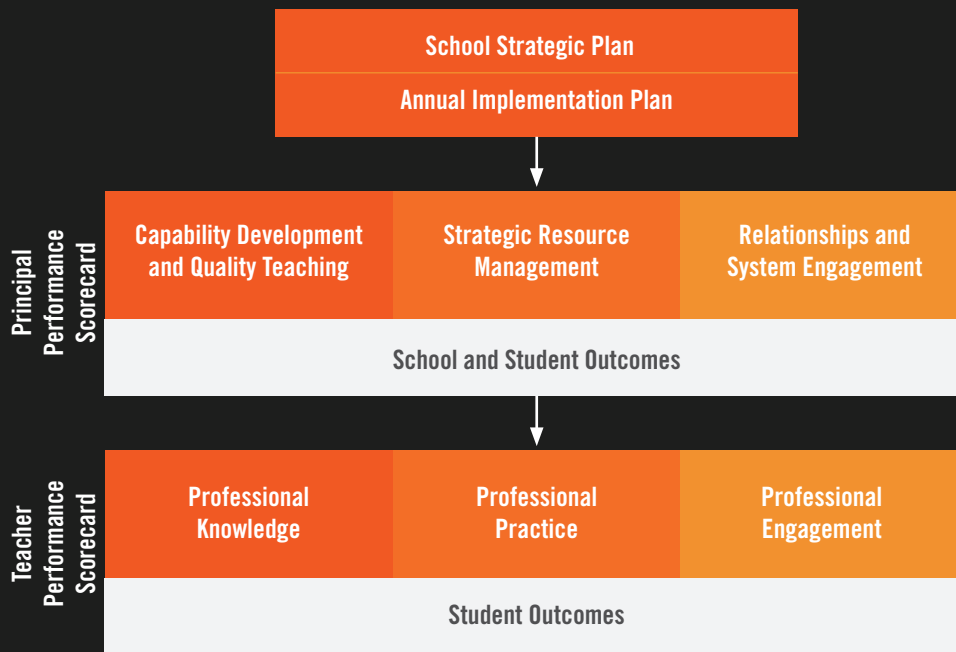
In Victoria, the teacher performance and development process is also linked to school improvement and student learning. Individual performance and development plans are informed by school strategic plans, as another senior teacher described:

“ As a staff, we look at whole-school data a lot, and we look at trends. Collectively, we’re accountable as a school. We set new goals for our strategic plan and our annual implementation plan from looking at the previous year’s data. What realistically can we improve for the following year? That’s where our (performance and development plan) goals are coming from. ”

Under the state’s *Performance and Development Culture* policy framework, schools should align teacher performance and development plans with team and school goals. This is intended to foster collaborative practice among staff, and to promote collective accountability.

Victoria uses a “balanced scorecard” approach that provides measures of teacher performance along the three domains of the standards – professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement – as well as student outcomes.

**Figure 4: Example of a Balanced Scorecard Approach**



Source: DEECD, 2013b, p. 15

Teachers and principals together discuss and set goals in the four domains. (Victoria is transitioning to a similarly structured “whole-of-practice” framework for appraisal.)

The focus of the teacher appraisal process in Australia is teacher growth. Each state follows a cycle of planning and goal-setting, ongoing feedback, and annual review, which feeds into the next cycle of professional learning. While some states have experimented with merit pay for teachers, this has generally not become embedded. In Victoria, trials with merit pay failed to yield improvements in performance, and after significant pushback from teachers and school leaders, these initiatives were dropped. In NSW, teacher performance pay is linked to professional growth and evidence of collaborative practice.

### Career Development and Progression

The national professional standards for teachers help frame career development for teachers. The standards set out four stages of career development—Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead Teacher. States increasingly are using these guidelines to provide teachers with opportunities to take on additional responsibilities and earn higher pay without leaving teaching.

In NSW, teachers who achieve the two higher levels of professional accreditation are recognized and are rewarded with higher salary. Teachers receive significant increases in pay when they are fully accredited at the Proficient Standard, and can receive a salary in excess of A\$100,000 when they achieve the Highly Accomplished or Lead Standards. That level is comparable to the base pay for an assistant principal, providing an avenue for highly skilled and experienced teachers to remain in the classroom. Further career progression is supported by a continuum of professional

learning including a Principal Credential to prepare excellent teachers for school leadership as well as renewing current school leaders.

In Victoria, state policy sets out three career stages for teachers. Classroom Teachers in Band 1 are expected to focus on developing their skills to become effective teachers, while teachers in Band 2 are expected to take on further roles, such as team- or grade-level leadership. Leading Teachers may be asked to manage whole-school improvement initiatives, lead professional learning, model teaching practices, or support other areas related to curriculum and learning within the school. The state government also operates the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership to identify emerging leaders, and prepare them for school leadership roles.

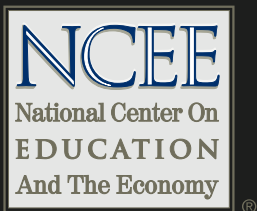
### **Conclusion: Toward a National System**

Like educators and policymakers in other nations, Australians have been focused on both international and national data to identify areas where educational improvement is needed. This focus has been conducted within the context of the Melbourne declaration, in which all states and territories confirmed a commitment to both excellence and equity in educational performance. As a result, Australia has taken steps to reform policy and practice, moving towards a national system in a country with a high degree of decentralized decision-making in education.

One of the most significant steps has been the development of national standards for teaching and school leadership, informing the accreditation of teacher-education programs, and increasingly used to guide teacher appraisal, professional development, and career advancement.

A consequence of the movement to a national framework for teaching standards has been the development of a shared discourse around teaching quality. This language is shared among principals and teachers, mentors and novice teachers, between government and non-government schooling sectors, and between teachers in different states.

The standards emerged through consultation with the teaching profession, including teacher leaders and educators, and giving them tremendous buy-in. While they represent a significant step in the development of the teacher profession in Australia, the standards are not yet fully implemented across all states. States continue to have wide discretion in how they use them to set salaries and career ladders. However, they are part of a movement towards creating a national policy system to support high-quality teaching across all phases of the teaching career.



2121 K Street, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-379-1800

[www.ncee.org](http://www.ncee.org)  
Follow us on Twitter: [@CtrEdEcon](https://twitter.com/CtrEdEcon)  
Find us on Facebook: [facebook.com/theNCEE](https://facebook.com/theNCEE)