



Submission

to the

**Education and Training
Committee, Parliament of Victoria**

**Inquiry into Effective
Strategies for Teacher
Professional Learning**

1.0 Preamble

- 1.1 The Victorian Independent Education Union is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teaching Professional Learning.
- 1.2 The Victorian Independent Union (VIEU) represents staff in Catholic and non-Catholic independent schools, including Principals, Deputies, Teachers and support staff.

2.0 General Issues

- 2.1 The significant, and many would argue, central role of quality teacher professional learning in ensuring a high quality and responsive education for students is not disputed by education researchers, education authorities, governments nor, very importantly, the teaching profession itself. This consensus of opinion has existed uncontested for many years. In 1997 Elmore and Burney wrote that *"there is a growing consensus among educational reformers that professional development for teachers and administrators lies at the centre of all educational reform and instructional improvement"* (1997) (1). Education writers Gusky and Haberman went further by stating that *"never before in education has there been greater recognition of the need for ongoing [teacher] professional development.... Regardless of how schools are formed and reformed, structured or restructured, the renewal of staff members' professional skills is fundamental to improvement"* (1995) (2).
- 2.2 These sentiments are repeated continually in current education research writing and in the policy positions of school authorities, education unions, other teacher professional associations, and education and training ministries of government.
- 2.3 Despite this consensus on the vital role of teacher professional learning, the resourcing of equitable provision of professional learning opportunities for teachers, as individuals and as collegial teams, falls far short of what is needed to make a significant degree of difference. New state curriculum and assessment implementation, the VELs for example, is unaccompanied by adequate government resources for additional and timely professional development, most particularly in the non-government school sector.
- 2.4 The quality and relevance of professional learning opportunities remains a significant concern for many teachers and school leaders. There has been a move to devolve the provision of professional learning activities closer to the local school level in Catholic schools, for example. This has not meant that there has been a marked corresponding increase in the relevance and quality of professional learning opportunities available for teachers. Much of schools' budgets currently are being spent on rare opportunities for teachers to re-write curriculum and implement new assessment and reporting programs. While there is obviously a plethora of new information for teachers to incorporate and understand, the availability of accompanying expert input and adequate time for appropriate collegial learning is low.

- 2.5 There is currently a significant emphasis on the need for teachers to develop very refined and “cutting edge” pedagogical skills, particularly in relation to diagnostic testing and individualised learning plans. The rapidly evolving nature of ICT continues to place pressure on teachers to grapple with new technological skills and knowledge.
- 2.6 Many larger well-resourced independent schools place a very high value on professional learning and allocate reasonably adequate budgets to professional learning at all levels, that is, individual teacher, team and whole school. The independent school sector is, however, very diverse and many of the less well resourced schools serving students from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds, allocate few school resources to teacher professional learning opportunities other than the very limited funding available through Commonwealth government programs such as the Australian Government Quality Teaching program (AGQTP).
- 2.7 Catholic schools also rely heavily on this funding. For Catholic primary schools in particular, school closure days are relied on heavily to provide professional learning activities and curriculum planning work. Generally primary schools have 4 school closure days per year.
- 2.8 The growing need for quality and relevant professional learning for school principals and other leadership staff is placing a greater strain on the professional development budget of schools and systems. There is a plethora of research currently being undertaken around leadership standards/competencies and increasing expectations by systems and government that school leaders will be involved in continual professional learning.
- 2.9 There has been an enormous increase in the expectation on teachers to undertake professional collegial activities, most particularly in mentoring programs for beginning teachers. The Victorian Institute of Teaching registration process undertaken by beginning teachers is firmly reliant on quality mentoring by experienced teachers on staff. The union is strongly of the belief that high quality and well resourced induction programs for beginning teachers are essential to ensuring quality teaching and learning, and for the retention and ongoing development of new teaching staff. However, there is a serious under-resourcing of mentor programs. While beginning teachers have some small deduction in their teaching load for the first 12 months, Mentor teachers have no inbuilt release from their teaching load and spend significant periods of time working with the beginning teacher to whom they are the mentor.
- 2.10 The supervision of student teacher practicum can provide for opportunities for professional learning in the interaction with the student teacher and the academic staff of universities. However, the increasingly heavy workload experienced by teachers, coupled with the inadequate payment for practicum supervision has meant that teachers and schools, particularly at the secondary school level, are more and more reluctant to take on practicum supervision. With budget challenges at the university level, academic staff are less able to meet with supervising teachers. This lack of contact with and support from university staff is a key element in the increased workload involved in student practicum supervision.

2.11 Finally, VIEU notes that the terms of reference of the Education and Training Committee Inquiry do not include the many other professionals and other non-teaching staff who work in schools. Many of these work in teams with teachers and play a significant part in the overall provision of quality education for students. VIEU believes that the Inquiry should not ignore the collegial nature of the work of school staff. The interconnectedness of this work should be acknowledged in the Inquiry.

3.0 VIEU activity in identifying factors important in meeting teachers' professional learning needs

3.1 VIEU has undertaken a range of activities involving identifying the professional learning needs of teachers in the non-government sector and examining the key factors that ensure quality of opportunity and adequate and equitable access to these opportunities. Included in this work is a 2002 survey of teachers' professional development needs and experiences and the development of a comprehensive policy on meeting teachers' professional development needs.

3.2 VIEU takes the opportunity in this submission to share the key findings of the survey and to outline the comprehensive position of the union on effective strategies for teacher professional learning.

3.3 VIEU represents its members in many professional forums and offers a wide range of professional learning opportunities for its teacher, Principal and School Officer members through the provision of conferences and seminars, including through its PD company, The Teacher Learning Network (TLN). The TLN is jointly owned by VIEU and AEU (VIC Branch).

4.0 VIEU Survey of Teacher Professional Development Needs

4.1 A summary of the information from the survey relevant to the Inquiry is attached (Attachment 1) for the Committee's information. It provides information on the following aspects:

- attitudes towards the importance of professional development in their working life
- format/mode of delivery of PD experienced
- format/mode of delivery of PD by preference
- who chooses PD activities undertaken by teacher
- factors limiting participation
- factors which ensure effective PD (most frequently identified)

5.0 The provision of effective professional learning for teachers

In the development of its policy on professional development, VIEU built on the findings of the 2002 survey and undertook extensive consultation with its

members at school sub-branch level, VIEU Council and ultimately VIEU Annual Conference. The full policy was adopted at the November 2002 Annual Conference. The policy provides a comprehensive outline of the major elements of the provision of effective professional development and this submission includes below those key elements.

5.1 The current context of professional learning

5.1.1 In a context of constant change and pressure to meet growing social and economic expectations, schools generally, and teachers and other education staff specifically, need to be equipped professionally to provide quality educational experiences for the students in their care. One of the key factors in ensuring the quality of education provision is the maintenance of a highly skilled teaching force.

5.1.2 Teachers are constantly engaged in a wide variety of professional learning activities, including professional reading, collegial discussion and team work, professional reflection on students' learning, assessment and reporting, conference participation, staff presentations, inservice seminars, action research projects, and formal university studies, etc.

5.1.3 VIEU believes that inservice training and professional development are the cornerstones of innovation in any organisation. Schools, as organisations, must place significant budgetary and policy importance on the provision of high quality training and professional development. This should include the appointment of a Professional Development Co-ordinator in every school. In addition, schools must actively develop the culture of learning communities in order to support the professional learning of staff in an ongoing way.

5.1.4 VIEU endorses the importance of professional development as essential:

- to ensure that teachers can respond professionally to economic, social, cultural, technological and scientific change through the development of personal and intellectual qualities;
- to respond to the demand for increased quality of educational outcomes by improving teachers' classroom capabilities, knowledge base and professional judgements;
- to support teachers in meeting their responsibilities for learning in schools through their own pursuit of learning and excellence;
- to provide enabling conditions for teachers, employing authorities and other agencies to initiate creative approaches to emerging educational issues;
- to recognise the professional status of teachers and the consequent career long nature of the professional development process;
- to sustain the motivation, commitment and enthusiasm of teachers and to enhance their self-esteem and sense of control over their professional lives by providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on, analyse and improve their own performance; and

- to allow teachers to develop new competencies and skills as they move from classroom positions to administrative or specialist positions, or to new environments.
(Teachers Learning - Improving Australia's Schools Through Inservice Teacher Training and Development 1988 pp 7-8)

5.2 Provision of Professional Development

- 5.2.1 School employing authorities need to ensure access to quality professional development by all teachers through equitable and transparent processes. The range of professional development opportunities that can be accessed should be both clearly identified and publicised.
- 5.2.2 All teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities each year, and these opportunities should be designed to meet both the specific needs of the individual teacher, as well as needs which may arise through school, system and government priorities.
- 5.2.3 Professional development opportunities should be made available during ordinary hours of work.
- 5.2.4 Teachers in regional and rural locations need to have access to quality professional development opportunities, which, as far as possible, should be delivered in their geographical area. The employer should provide a suitable replacement teacher and time for the teacher to travel, if necessary, for professional development purposes, as well as fund accommodation, child care and out of pocket expenses on a reasonable basis.
- 5.2.5 School employers should provide adequate support for teachers involved in formal university study, including at least 5 days paid study leave each year plus paid leave to attend all examinations and a significant contribution to the payment of HECS. Where a teacher is required by the employer to gain a particular credential, the teacher must have paid leave to attend all classes and the school must pay the full costs of the course.
- 5.2.6 State and federal governments need to adequately resource teacher professional development programs. In particular, the state government must include funded professional development for both government and non-government teachers in the implementation of any government education initiatives.

5.3 The Role and Responsibility of the School

- 5.3.1 The school as employer has a range of responsibilities in relation to providing access to quality professional development for staff. Specifically :
- the school should ensure a mix of self-initiated professional development with "external" requirements (i.e. school, system, state);

- inservice provision should avoid "one-off" opportunities, and should be organised in appropriately spaced, sequential modules which allow for input, reflective practice, and further development and refinement;
- all schools need to allocate sufficient flexible time within the school year timetable for professional development so that opportunities can occur in ways most appropriate to meet the needs of teachers (i.e. allow for team approaches, sequential modules, action research approaches, teacher exchanges/school visits, etc). This approach would clearly indicate (and support) the view that professional development is a significant and integral part of the school yearly plan;
- schools should be committed to providing, over a given cycle (e.g. three year period), sufficient professional development opportunities so that all teachers and administrators experience a number of inservice opportunities adequate to both their needs and that of the school/system. This would allow for a more systematic, yet flexible, approach to models of provision (e.g. block, team, etc);
- inservice/professional development opportunities should be in school time (but may be augmented by additional personal time, as appropriate);
- schools and individual teachers should be able to plan their own professional development programs over a year or cyclical period, having regard for a mix of personal, school and system needs.
- schools should ensure that the co-ordination of the provision of professional development opportunities is carried out in an adequately resourced manner. For example, the position of Professional Development Co-ordinator should be allocated sufficient time to assist staff in identifying their professional development needs and to locate sources of relevant quality PD providers and opportunities.

5.4 Access to Effective Professional Development

Teachers are entitled to have access to quality professional development opportunities. Professional development activities should be guided by best practice elements of effective adult learning, including :

- participation is voluntary;
- content has been negotiated in the planning stages by course implementers with prospective participants;
- builds on individual's skills and experiences;
- encourages "learner collaboration";
- recognises the interdependence of individuals and their institutional settings;
- starts with work-a-day experiences and perceptions of individuals;
- addresses "social" as well as "material" realities;
- includes adequate follow-up and support to participants at the end of the course;

- course allows participants to proceed at their own pace;
- people in leadership positions within schools also participate;
- the desirability of a “buddy system” so that one has the support of at least one colleague on staff.

5.5 Access to a Variety of Models of Effective Provision

Teachers’ professional development should not be delivered via one model only. Teachers benefit from experiencing a variety of models of professional development, and schools need to ensure that their teaching staff are able to access a range of professional development modes including :

- individual skill and knowledge development, in conjunction with a reflective model of adult learning.
- school-focussed - i.e. job-embedded and institutional specific learning activities (individual or team approach);
- teacher action research - small scale intervention by teachers in their own classrooms or schools;
- school-based collaborative action research;
- school cluster approaches which maximise resources and knowledge and which allow for broader reflection;

5.6. Access to a Variety of Content for Professional Development

5.6.1 It is widely acknowledged that teachers’ ongoing professional development plans should contain a variety of focus areas. The focus of school-provided professional development should be identified by the individual teacher in discussion with the school’s professional development co-ordinator.

5.7 Credentiailling of Professional Development Activities

5.7.1 Employers should ensure as far as possible that professional development activities provided carry credit for university courses. Such credit transfer arrangements help to ensure the quality of provision and facilitate ongoing participation in further training by teaching staff.

5.7.2 Universities must become more flexible in recognising all forms of teachers’ professional learning including professional reading, participation in mentoring programs, conference presentations, etc.

6.0 Who should pay for teachers’ professional development?

6.1 One of the vexing questions sometimes raised in relation to teacher professional learning is who pays?

6.2 In his comprehensive report on the mapping of school teacher professional development, entitled PD 2000, author David McRae (3) makes a very important statement, which is endorsed by VIEU.

In his introduction to the report, David McRae states:

“The ongoing inservice training and professional development of school teachers has a history of raising vexing questions, and frequently the same questions.

Many of these questions arise from the nature of the profession and its unique placement in the larger social and economic context. If teaching is a profession, it could be argued, then teachers should be responsible for their own professional development both in the design and choice of paths to follow – and in the meeting of its costs. But teachers are not self-employed and thus the choices they have are constrained by the priorities of their employers, and as a current overarching theme, by the directions and requirements of governments in their interpretations of the general wishes of the communities which elect them. This being the case, it is argued, the employer should provide and pay for participation in professional development activities.”

References

- (1) Elmore, R.F. and Burnley, D. (1997) *Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff development and Instructional Improvement in Community American School District #2*, New York City New York : National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future and the Consortium for Policy in Education.
- (2) Gusky, T. and Huberman, M. (eds) (1995) *Professional Development in Education; New Paradigms and Practices* New York : Teachers College Press.
- (3) McRae, D. et al (June 2000) *PD 2000 Australia: A National Mapping of School Teacher Professional Development*, for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Appendix 1

VIEU SAMPLE SURVEY 2002 - MEETING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

1.0 Respondents

800 surveys were returned with approx 650 being included in the database. (Those excluded were significantly incomplete)

Primary teacher returns	57%	(indep prims 9% of total prims)
Secondary teacher returns	39%	(indep secs 39% of total secs)

Rural returns	12%
Regional returns	18%
Metro	69%

Females	76%
Males	24%

2.0 Attitude Towards the Importance of Professional Development in Your Working Life

Very high importance	38.5%	} 78%
High	40%	
Low	18%	

3.0 Format/Mode of Delivery Experienced

(i) Number of respondents indicating one type of format as above 50% of their PD experiences

centrally offered	21% of respondents
one-off sessions	25%
sequential	18%

(ii) Number of respondents indicating one type of format as above 80% of their PD experiences

One off sessions	11%
Centrally offered	9%
Sequential	7%

4.0 Format/Mode of Delivery by Preference (High/Medium/Low)

Format	High	Med	Combined
Sequential	55%	34%	85%
School-based	55%	31%	81%

Centrally offered	29%	48%	77%
One off	25%	47%	72%

5.0 Who chooses PD Activities

School required for 50% or more of the PD done	45% of respondents
School required for 80% or more of the PD done	22%
Own choice for 50% or more	39%
Own choice for less than 20% of the PD done	24%
Own choice for less than 10%	20%

6.0 Factors Limiting Participation

High	-	ranked 1 or 2
Medium	-	ranked 3 / 4, 5 / 6
Low	-	ranked 7/8

Factor	Rank	% of respondents
Workload	High	63%
Inadequate time	High	49%
Lack of availability	Med (3/4)	54%
Lack of relevance	Med (3/4)	48%
Lack of Quality	Med (4/5)	54%
Family reasons	Low (6/7)	54%
Health	Low (7/8)	88%
Other	Low (8)	56%

7.0 Three Essential Factors which they believe Ensure Effective PD (most frequently identified)

Factor	No of Respondents	%
Relevance	369	59%
Presenter Quality (engaging, knew what they were talking about, classroom practitioner)	253	40.3%
Practical (skills-based, classroom-based hands on)	208	33%

Good design (interactive, materials to implement innovative)	178	28%
Follow up (sequential)	144	23%
Not after school	101	16%
PD done as a team from School	88	14%
Location (not requiring much travel)	60	9.5%
Own choice (not just school's)	57	9%
Up to date info	39	6%
Facilitates Professional Growth	30	5%
Supportive Principal	26	4%
Being made aware of PD	25	4%
Able to report back to staff	25	4%
Good venue (treated as professional, equipment etc)	24	4%
Participation in course design	21	4%
Flexibility in attending (offered on different days etc)	18	3%
No cost to individual	15	2%
Equitable access across Staff	14	2%
Courses with credit to Uni courses	13	2%