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## **NATIONAL GRADUATE TEACHER STANDARDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE POLICY AND PRACTICE**

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### **Abstract**

In 2009, Australian teacher education finally sees a series of graduate teacher standards that is designed as national benchmarking for those completing initial teacher education. The draft standards represent considerable negotiation and discourse by the various jurisdictions. They are being fine tuned in readiness for adoption across Australia as statements of quality and professionalism in teacher preparation course outcomes. Graduate teacher standards are integral components of a national system and form a basis for the accreditation judgments about teacher education to be made by local jurisdictional teacher regulatory authorities.

This paper positions the development of national graduate teacher standards into the overall framework of teacher preparation in Australia, placing emphasis on what constitutes benefit for effective pre-service and graduate teacher learning. At the same time it acknowledges the tension that exists when the requirements of independent education authorities strive to agree on common ground to determine such ends. The paper seeks specific understanding of the impact that the implementation of national graduate teacher standards has on the policies and practices surrounding preservice teacher learning and university-school partnerships evident in the professional experience component of teacher education.

To obtain this understanding, a review of the relevant literature surrounding national standards was undertaken with an emphasis on professional experience. Representatives of stakeholder groups were then consulted in focus group and individual interviews. Stakeholders were asked to consider how the adoption of the national graduate teacher standards would affect their particular relationship with the professional experience program. In summary, a range of modifications to professional experience policy, curriculum links, administrative and learning practices, resources and professional learning in partnerships were disclosed as priorities dependent on the stakeholder needs. While action in different jurisdictions would vary depending on what was currently in place, the adoption of the standards necessitates considerable modifications in order to ensure developmental continuity within courses, alignment with local requirements, and the informing of those in the teacher education partnership who would use the standards as learning and assessment markers of progress. Common to all of these modifications is the need for shared understandings of what constitutes evidence to demonstrate the achievement of graduate standards.

The adoption of national graduate standards as shared benchmarks is as a catalyst to reviewing current practice. There is a renewed opportunity to work collaboratively as a profession to enhance learning outcomes and the quality of the teaching profession.

### **Key words**

Graduate teacher standards; professional experience; partnerships; quality learning outcomes; evidence of achievement.

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the 2000s the debate surrounding teacher professional standards has been prominent in the Australian educational context. While standards have received varying levels of emphasis in different educational jurisdictions across the country, the publishing of the Commonwealth Government Report, *Top of the Class* in 2007 highlighted the development of nationally shared teacher professional standards as significant in ensuring quality in teacher education. This report encompassed preservice and in-service teacher learning and specifically noted the pertinent challenges for the professional experience components of teacher education.

Of particular interest to the initial teacher education providers are the graduate teacher level of professional standards as they influence the accreditation of courses, the employability of graduates, and therefore the curriculum and professional experience elements in course design. Separate jurisdictions requiring adherence to their individual interpretations of graduate quality is a challenge for teacher education providers. The on-going debate encompassing ‘mutual recognition’, ‘national standards’, ‘national accreditation authorities’ and the like needs to be resolved to provide consistency and stability for preservice teachers, teacher education providers and the profession generally.

The recent Commonwealth agreement with State and Territory governments, the *National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality*, provides a positive direction for the future practice, although the processes, responsibilities and final shared agreement have not yet been fully negotiated. The implications for the policies, curriculum and practice surrounding preservice teacher learning, particularly as it related to professional experience are of interest to the discussion in this paper. Importantly these implications are integrally linked with the profession through university-school partnerships.

The dynamic teacher education landscape provides many opportunities for evaluating existing practice. The imperative to align with a national set of graduate standards that demonstrate graduates’ ability to achieve the entry standards into the profession suggests not only how will an individual institution’s courses comply, but how might the quality of its courses, its graduates and its professional relationships be enhanced. It is suggested here that many benefits are likely through such an alignment, but there are also a number of insufficiently explored questions for rigorously implementing the inevitable changes. The focus of this discussion is identifying the implications for the professional experience component of teacher preparation courses. It is recognised though, that professional experience does not stand alone in the teacher preparation curriculum but is an interrelated and unifying component.

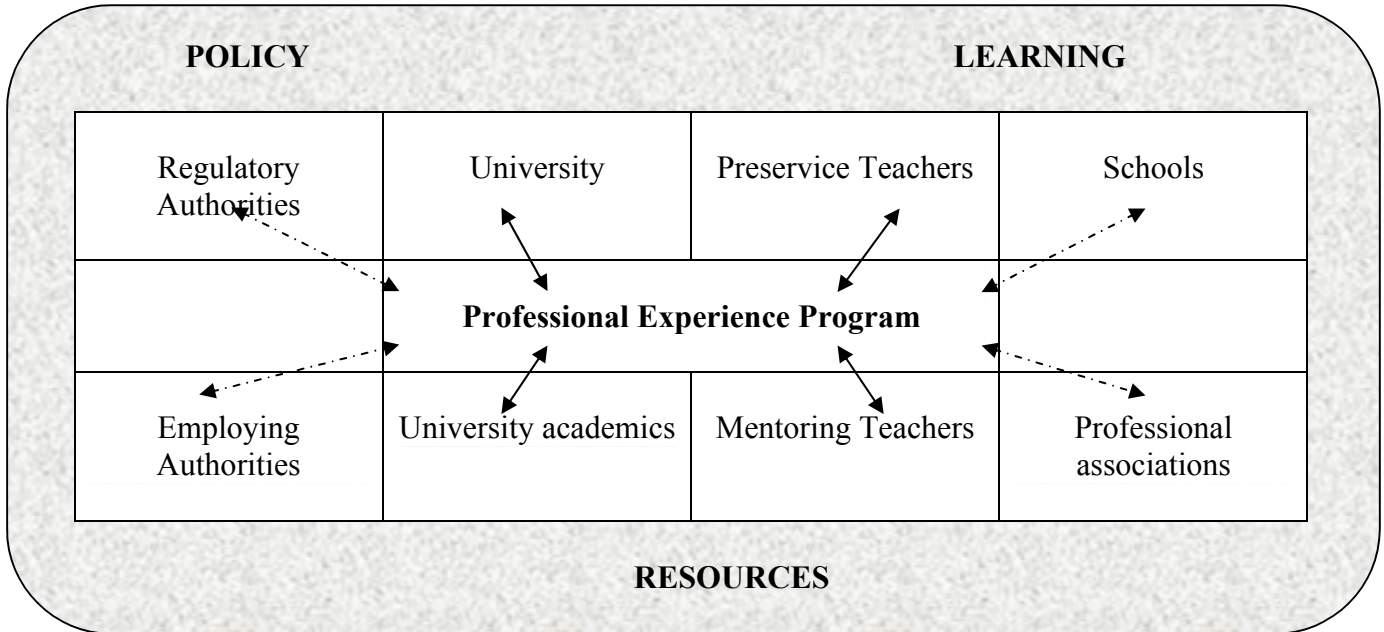
## A framework for discussion

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is a jurisdiction that currently does not have its own institute of teachers (or similar body) and therefore the University of Canberra (UC) finds itself in the position of negotiating with other jurisdictions for the accreditation of its courses. While the ACT education sector constitutes the major employing context for its graduates, the UC has for some time been confronted by conflicting requirements and loyalties when seeking to offer widely accepted teacher qualifications. The development of national professional standards in this context is therefore preferable to those that are independently devised by separate jurisdictions as it is in the best interest of this institution to ensure that its courses are appropriately accredited and its graduates widely registrable.

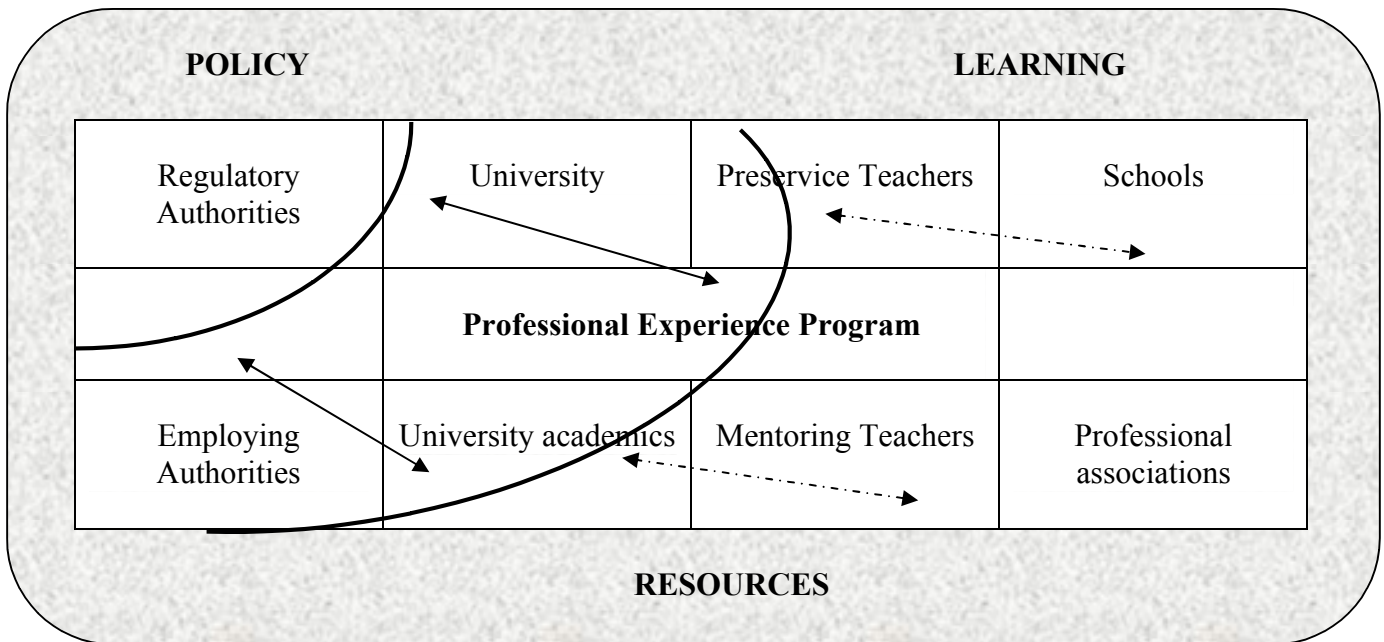
Pragmatically, the curriculum, practice, administration and policy of professional experience programs are a balance of a number of stakeholder requirements. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic view of the connections and relationships between stakeholders that are integral to an effective program. The balance of needs and requirements is essential. The relationships are established

through negotiation and are under regular scrutiny through evaluation by the participants and partnerships.

The introduction of a significant change to one or more of the interrelated factors causes ‘ripples’ throughout the existing framework (Figure 2). Any modification has implications for adjusting the balance across all other elements. In this discussion, the adoption of national graduate professional standards by the regulatory authorities modifying the graduates’ requirements has wide ranging effects on the other factors.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework of professional experience program relationships.** Other relationships exist between the various factors and are multidirectional.



**Figure 2: Conceptual framework of professional experience program relationships.** The complexity of relationships means that any significant change in one factor (eg mandating graduate teacher standards) can have a ‘ripple’ or tsunami’ effect on other factors.

### **National standards in teacher education**

To situate the discussion and to clarify the implications for specific teacher education institutions, it is worthwhile to briefly contextualise the development of graduate teacher professional standards in the Australian environment. It should be noted that this is not exclusively an Australian situation, nor just a recent focus of interest for all Australian jurisdictions. However the emphasis in the last decade indicates a major direction both professionally and politically in Australian education. In the last year or so, the emphasis on teacher quality has been placed squarely at the centre of this discussion.

As a principal researcher for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Lawrence Ingvarson has chronicled many aspects of professional standard development (Ingvarson, 2002; Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2003; Ingvarson, Elliott, Kleinhenz, & McKenzie, 2006). He states that there can be no denying that those responsible for professional education programs should be accountable for ensuring that graduates meet the performance standards required by government/registration boards (Ingvarson, 2002). ‘Additionally standards also act as a benchmark for accreditation bodies to use in assessing how well teacher education courses are preparing their students’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007, p. 24).

In all reports related to the recent discussion of teacher professional standards in Australia varying levels have been articulated – for leadership, advanced teachers etc – and there have been explicit statements about the impact upon preservice teacher education and the implications for professional experience through the provision of a graduate level of teacher standards. These standards, sometimes described as ‘entry to the professional’ level standards, articulate the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected. Other statements about teacher education course accreditation expand upon the standards to include expectations of courses incorporating some minimum requirements such as minimum hours on professional experience and required related subject content.

Recent notable influence is the *National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality* developed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in late 2008. The State and Territory governments that are party to this agreement with the Commonwealth government ‘recognise that they have a mutual interest and shared responsibility in improving educational outcomes in the area of principal, teacher and school leader quality and supporting reforms to achieve those outcomes’ (2008, p.4). The agreement seeks a range of outputs that include new professional standards, recognition and reward for teachers, national accreditation and a framework of teacher professional learning that results in national consistency and enhanced quality.

The continuing challenge for each jurisdiction is to evaluate its current context, identify its particular priorities and to agree upon how it will address reform according to the national parameters. The debate about the precise nature of the wording of the standards and the locus of responsibility for the implementation of the standards in their various areas of influence has yet to reach resolution. The tension between the loyalty of state-based jurisdictions and a national perspective continues as implementation and decisions are negotiated.

It is not the place here to enter into the debate about the pros and cons of professional standards. It is accepted that this journey has been travelled. This paper accepts that graduate teacher standards are integral for registration of teachers and the accreditation of teacher education courses. Linking

standards to registration of teachers has relevance at various levels in the teacher's career trajectory, but of greatest interest here is that the 'linking of graduate or entry standards to the granting of provisional registration provides clear goals for the design of teacher education programs.' (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007, p 23).

Until national decision-making is finally negotiated, the tensions for teacher education in the ACT as mentioned in the introduction continue. Seeking to have its graduates employable in a range of Australian settings, ACT teacher education experiences not only the inevitable changes that the adoption of graduate standards bring, but also the difficulty in meeting the various 'local' interpretations of standards in other jurisdictions. Making judgements about the suitability of jurisdictional priorities across state and territory borders continues to cause concern.

Another factor that not been noticeably acknowledged within the wider debate, but is an important factor within higher education settings, is the existence of each university's own quality mechanisms. In addition to the discussion of standards attributed to the teaching profession, universities have their own quality measures denoted by their 'graduate attributes' or graduate capabilities'. As all courses must also reflect these, the challenge to meet both institutional and professional requirements requires consideration by all aspects of teacher preparation courses.

Overall, any change will challenge existing practice and can be viewed as an imposition or an opportunity depending on individual points of view. What is certain is that the expertise and attitudes of those involved will be challenged and changed practice will necessarily highlight resource allocation to support change (Walkington, 2002).

### **Indicators of professional learning and performance**

Amongst a number of purposes, standards provide a critical framework for conducting and evaluating professional learning and practitioner performance. The question of evaluating quality teaching and learning outcomes can be linked closely with the notion of measuring, documenting or providing evidence against these standards. In the teacher education environment, there is an onus of 'proof' required to demonstrate graduate quality. There is a need to provide evidence that the standards are indeed being demonstrated by the graduates.

A search of relevant literature and websites shows that much effort has been dedicated to the construction of teacher professional standards. Lesser attention has been given to how teachers gather evidence to demonstrate that standards are being achieved. While the means of demonstrating appropriate levels of teaching and professionalism for the status of advanced teacher or for leadership positions can be found in documentation from various jurisdictional authorities, there is little assistance for those whose focus in graduate teacher standards – those standards indicating appropriate entry level into the profession.

Interestingly the transition from preservice teacher to beginning teacher is receiving attention in terms of what the actual graduate teaching standards are and what registering bodies expect, but the explanation about how these graduate standards should be demonstrated is less clear. For example, the Victorian Institute of Teaching provides supportive characteristics to its eight standards, *This list of characteristics provides a guide to effective teaching practices that all teachers graduating from a course of pre-service teacher education should have opportunities to consider, understand and develop as professional knowledge during their course.*

Similarly the Queensland College of Teachers and the NSW Institute of Teachers provide some elaboration to their standards (NSW – 7 elements; Queensland – 10 standards).

The task for teacher education institutions is to translate these requirements in a meaningful way to construct opportunities for preservice teachers to demonstrate these standards that will be also be

understood in a consistent manner by the potential employment authorities. For teacher educators this is not just at an exit level from the course, but is required in a formative way as preservice teachers learn and grow throughout their course. The challenge is how to assess preservice teacher performance, developing relevant evidence such as professional experience reporting mechanisms that reflect the requirements of the standards. Depending upon the jurisdiction, education institutions that have made local modifications in recent times will require reconsideration under the acceptance of national standards.

As evident in Australian literature, the issue of assessing standards in other countries is based predominantly around completing probation, seeking advanced and leading teacher status and recognition of how to demonstrate this (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007). The predominant vehicles for supplying this evidence are through peer review and the professional portfolio. In preservice teaching in Australia most universities are reliant upon professional experience reports to support academic transcripts. Portfolios at exit from teacher preparation courses are less emphasised or formalised. The reasons for this are worthy of further research, however the pragmatics of individual university exit documentation and various employing authority's recruitment practices add a layer of complexity.

The search for how best to represent a graduate's achievements of professional standards using reporting mechanisms on professional experience was the impetus for seeking a broader understanding from professional experience stakeholders.

### **Stakeholder perceptions of changes**

The conceptual framework articulated earlier represents the balance required for successful professional experience relationships. The introduction of new regulatory guidelines affects each element in the professional experience relationship to a greater or lesser degree. For the context under discussion specifically in the ACT, the introduction of graduate teacher standards, whether belonging to one jurisdiction or to the nation, requires adjustments in the other elements of the framework for balance to be retained. In other places in Australia, where local regulations have been changing and requiring adjustment, the introduction of national graduate standards will likely continue to prompt on-going adjustments.

In addition to reviewing current literature regarding standards, sources of local data were investigated to better inform local decisions as well as the debate more widely. In late 2008 a full scale evaluation of the local professional experience program was undertaken to establish how well the program was currently meeting stakeholder needs and to collate the participant's ideas for future practice. Over 400 participants representing mentoring teachers, preservice teachers, school coordinators, university liaison staff and recent graduates were surveyed. This provided both a 'snapshot in time' of practice in this context to inform decision making at the university course and administration level as well as the important maintenance of professional partnerships between universities and schools.

To complement the findings of the evaluation and to provide added focus on graduate teacher standards, two groups were identified to supply extra insight. These groups were the academic colleagues in the faculty of education who were asked to consider the course curriculum implications; and the government staff (ACT DET) who oversee recruitment of teachers and the management of teacher professional learning in the Territory. Questions were devised that would ascertain priorities from differing spheres of activity, identify the impact of the introduction of graduate teacher standards, and inform the future direction of aspects of the professional experience program specifically. In terms of the conceptual framework provided earlier for professional experience relationships, the questioning sought to ascertain the impact of the 'ripples of change' across the factors.

The key question for small focus group discussion was *‘how will the adoption of the national graduate teacher standards affect your particular relationship with the professional experience program?’*

University academics were acutely aware of the need to ensure the accreditation of courses and therefore the employment potential for graduates. In general, the responses from University colleagues were focused around evaluating how current course offerings complied with the standards requirements and the making of modifications to preservice teacher course curriculum to ensure that standards were being explicitly addressed. Some of the staff members had already brought about some significant changes during the process of gaining accreditation with another jurisdictional body. While they were comfortable with a number of regulatory requests, they did feel that there had been instances of imposition of their decision-making.

Staff felt that the introduction of national graduate standards was an added opportunity to reflect on the units they offered, but admitted that they could not see themselves making anything more than minimum adjustments in the short term. Maintaining continuity and relevance of the curriculum needs holistic as well as specific consideration. Curriculum change in any substantial way requires time to consider the options, consultation with others and adherence to University deadlines and policies for curriculum changes.

The professional experience assessment practices were considered of high importance because the tangible evidence contained in placement reports would need to be explicitly aligned. Indicators of performance and evidence of achieving benchmarks would require close scrutiny. The professional experience reporting policy and documentation has been in urgent need of review, but has been waiting for the establishment of national standards to do this. There was a belief that the use of national standards for this purpose would make exit documentation in particular more meaningful across a wide range of future employment options for graduates.

It was acknowledged however, that to bring about these changes required a significant dedication of time and resources to do it well. While the final professional experience report is best aligned as closely as possible to the actual graduate standards, there is a need to develop a continuum of progress for preservice teachers as they progress through the course. The major point of discussion was how to articulate performance indicators for the graduate standards; the need to discriminate between formative benchmarks and evidence and that upon course completion. It was generally agreed that clear ideas on the types of evidence required to successfully demonstrate the standards was essential. Additionally significant resources required for the dissemination of change and ‘up-skilling’ of all participants needs serious commitment (Walkington, 2007).

The practitioners/employer group viewed that their connections with the professional experience program focused firstly around recruitment of graduates and how the language and content of standards would impact upon their processes. They recognised the need for consistency and this would require reconsideration of their recruitment documentation, their procedures and the preparation of recruitment teams. This immediate response to change is an initial effect related to the proximity of the business of the employing authorities to the regulatory authorities in the conceptual framework. As the ACT recruits Australia-wide, it was perceived as a very positive step to have a shared set of graduate standards to use (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007). Shared benchmarking would promote common language and a more consistent basis for comparing graduates from various institutions.

Secondly, they were very aware of the need to consider professional learning both for in-service and preservice teachers. In the ACT context, as with most other jurisdictions, a great deal of work has



already been undertaken in the use of standards (or statements of capability) for ‘advanced’ teachers and leaders. They acknowledged the additional requirement to seek consistency in the programs and processes already in place for probationary teachers. A major comment for preservice teacher education was the need to provide professional learning opportunities for mentoring teachers in the use of changed feedback and assessment. Whilst further away from the initial impact of change expressed by the ‘ripple effect’ on the conceptual framework factors, the longer term sustainability of changed practice relies on changes by all the stakeholders and factors. The practitioner group were keen to be part of a collaborative process of change with the university and recognised how employer interests of recruitment, teacher appraisal and teacher professional learning were connected to the initial teacher preparation framework. A number of ideas for the local adoption and integration of graduate teacher standards were discussed.

When priorities of stakeholders are viewed in detail, it becomes obvious from the perspective of a small jurisdiction such as the ACT that a national focus is favourable to enable flexibility and transportability. Whether this means national standards or an agreement to accept mutually recognised benchmarks, a singular approach enables the focus on developing shared understanding of quality outcomes (National Partnerships on Quality Teaching, 2008).

### **Demonstrating evidence to meet graduate standards**

While individual ‘interest groups’ have their own responsibilities, the opportunities in this setting to collaborate in a way that supports the continual growth of the professional partnership between University and the school sector are considered possible and desirable. Initial areas for collaboration were identified as a) the creation of authentic strategies as evidence of meeting graduate standards, b) the design of the report forms for use in the professional experience classrooms; and c) developing meaningful professional learning for school staff that focused not only on changed assessment and reporting circumstances, but also on enhanced teacher knowledge of what constitutes quality learning and evidence of achievement. These areas for consideration unite the aspects of policy, learning and resources that surround factors expressed by the conceptual framework for professional experience relationships.

The philosophy that underpins the professional experience program in the context under discussion strongly endorses the importance of university-school partnerships and the collaborative responsibilities and benefits that are indicative of quality outcomes (University of Canberra, web site). In an environment where obvious benefits are gained from shared activity, a culture of enhanced collaboration is likely to be cultivated. In the collaboration discussed here the responsibility for professional experience placements are seen less as an isolated activity, but more as part of a broader alliance that promotes professional learning (Walkington, 2007). In essence the collaboration surrounding the adoption of graduate national standards represents education renewal along the lines as articulated by American leading authority John Goodlad.

*For schools to get better, they must have better teachers, among other things. To prepare better teachers... universities must have access to schools using the best practice. To have the best practices, schools need access to new ideas and knowledge. This means that universities have a stake in school improvement just as schools have a stake in the education of teachers. (Goodlad, 1985 p.6).*

With specific reference to assessment of the preservice teachers, the ‘Handbook of Guidance’ produced by the Training and Development Agency for Schools in the English context, reinforces the need for collaboration.

*The many different people involved in assessment – school based tutors, class teachers, higher education tutors and the trainees themselves – need to develop a common understanding of what is involved in meeting the standards. (p 7)*

The professional experience settings all exhibit unique characteristics determined by local school and community culture, teachers and students. Therefore the experiences that preservice teachers have will be similarly unique. How individual preservice teachers demonstrate their achievement of standards will always be open to a certain amount of objectivity – as is the nature of assessment in general (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2002). To assist the mentoring teachers make appropriate judgements that are valid across contexts, university policies need to support evidence gathering that not only includes the content of the standard, but also indicates how the performance is to be measured and to what level this evidence is expected (Ingvarson et al., 2006).

The introduction of a set of national standards upon which the professional experience assessment and reporting is to be based is therefore a timely process of change to policy and practice. It is not merely the replacement of existing systems with a new check list of criteria to tick. Valid and reliable methods for assessing performance against the standards must be devised; methods and tasks which promote learner development in a variety of settings. Policies of incorporating self-evaluation and reflective practice provide greater flexibility for ‘cultural’ differences and encourage the learner – the preservice teacher – to take responsibility for achieving the benchmarks in their unique way (Walkington, 2004).

Collaborating with school partners is appropriate in the task of developing exemplars of evidence gathering strategies to meet the standards. It is an opportunity for teachers to contribute authentic examples of preservice teacher practice acknowledging their experience and expertise; capitalising upon that up-to-date expertise that can rarely be supplied by university academics (Walkington, 2006). Acknowledging that the preservice teacher develops ‘competence’ and understanding over time encourages deep investigation of the standards to discover the realistic expectations of learners along the learning continuum towards beginning teacher status. It also highlights the ongoing nature of the teachers’ professional learning continuum throughout their professional lives.

Whether the types of evidence are portfolios, plans, observations, action-research projects, self-reflection or other forms, the adoption of the national standards means an opportunity to evaluate, update and renew what is in place and what could be. In addition to developing continually improved strategies of gathering evidence, such collaboration is a positive activity for strengthening the relationships in the professional experience partnership. Reporting forms are perhaps the most obvious manifestation of recording professional experience learning for the preservice teachers themselves, the university academics and the potential employers. Whilst devices such as portfolios offer greater flexibility and unique demonstration of practice, report forms provide a tangible link between practice and achievement of the standards.

Currently some jurisdictional regulatory authorities are very specific about what report forms should contain (NSWIT) where others are less so. The policies of individual professional experience programs will likely change in this way under national standard regulations. Until the debate surrounding responsibility at a national level is resolved, the lack of surety for universities will remain. Importantly, the local policy and practice will need to provide flexibility for local uniqueness yet wider consistency for transferability.

As mentioned above, report forms that are most meaningful in an array of settings and are at the same time rigorous and valid, need to make standards clear with regards to the content, how performance is to be measured and to what level performance is expected. Designing report forms it is particularly challenging when expectations at different levels of preservice teacher development are to be articulated. Mapping backward from the graduate teachers standards at the final placement is one strategy. Realistically matching expectations of professional experience with growth and learning in other aspects of the teacher preparation course is an added challenge.

A review across the professional experience reports from various universities in Australia sees that the most common practice is to have relatively similar criteria across all report forms (eg from first to fourth year of an undergraduate course). However the request for greater detailed reporting comment increases with the ensuing placements. Another strategy is to begin in the first placements with only a small number of the criteria on which to focus. These are gradually added to over the following placements until all criteria for beginning teachers are evident at final placement. The individual designs of report forms are based on local curricula and philosophical reasons however the need to consider both formative and summative reporting must not be discarded. The professional experience placements, after all, are about learning.

For teacher educators graduate teacher standards are viewed in a formative way, not merely as a summative point of graduation and recruitment. Strategies and ideas will emerge through changed practice. The precise nature of the standards aside, there is an interesting notion worthy of consideration in documentation produced by the NSW Department of Education and Training (2008). Links between NSWIT standards and the Quality Teaching Model (QTM) which underpins the NSW DET curriculum framework provide thought for creating report forms which acknowledge the standards as goals, at the same time relating learning directly to practice. For the ACT where the QTM is also curriculum philosophy and practice, this connection will certainly be investigated further.

The implementation of changed reporting practices and documentation is a tangible link between the university and the school practitioners as is any collaboration in the development of these forms. The adoption of graduate teacher standards is not merely a change in the words on paper but also adaptation to practice and thinking. It exemplifies the integrated nature of all factors in the relationships framework. Significant change requires attention to ensuring that all who will be involved in, or come into contact with the changes, required an opportunity to understand and become familiar them. Both teachers in classrooms and those involved with the recruitment of future teachers have a stake in the outcomes.

An important factor in working successfully between the differing cultures of school and university is creating opportunities to increase the quality of mutual outcomes through enhanced shared understanding (Gore & Gitlin, 2004). Professional learning for mentor teachers enables not only the transition to a changed reporting system but also to enhance the quality of the preservice teacher learning. The variability of mentoring quality is a constant concern (Walkington, 2003). Collaborative options to create and share ideas and strategies not only bode well for authentic reporting mechanisms, but the engagement is a positive step towards increased understanding and quality relationships. Strong support for professional learning alliances from the university and employing authorities supports an environment where the standards are likely to be fairly and rigorously evaluated and implemented.

Professional experience is continually evaluated by its university practitioners revealing innovation and evolving improved practice. Maintaining currency can be a further challenge for the school partners in the professional experience relationship. The evolution of philosophy and practice poses on-going questions about quality learning in the preservice teacher environment (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Collaboration around the adoption of national graduate standards may well be a catalyst for addressing other aspects of the program in a timely way.

### **Conclusions: Towards renewal**

The Top of the Class Report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007) documented problems with professional experience (including shortage

of placements, weak links between practicum and theoretical components, quality of supervisors, inadequate funding, rural and remote placements). This encouraged what became the 2008 Pilot projects under the Improving the Practical Component of Teacher Education (IPCTE) grant scheme initiated by the Federal government promoting innovation in professional experience. In addressing the kinds of problems identified by the report, the provision of consistently understood policy and practice of professional experience is integrally linked in discussions about the adoption of graduate teacher standards. The standards can be viewed as a catalyst for review. ‘...standards, accompanied by well constructed means of assessing the degree to which they have been met (the outcomes), can provide for great flexibility, innovation and diversity.’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007. p.20).

It is the reference to assessing the degree to which outcomes have been met which has been central to this discussion. It has been argued here that it is most beneficial for the preservice teachers’ learning, the continuing growth of quality mentoring relationships and the partnerships between schools and universities, that changes associated with the adoption of national standards be a collaborative endeavour. This echoes the concept of shared renewal espoused by John Goodlad (Goodlad, 1994) and the continuous shaping of professional cultures. Teacher education happens in universities and schools and renewal and change in one setting naturally has implications for renewal and change in the other. This implies that with shared renewal and change come shared responsibilities. As change is a resource heavy activity, the responsibility will therefore require sharing also.

As the debate about responsibilities surrounding national teacher standards is resolved, professional experience partners will be better able to adapt policy, curriculum, teaching practice and administrative procedures to suit. It is not simply making modifications however, but the timing is appropriate to evaluate these aspects at all levels to enhance quality learning and professional outcomes.

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