Case Study

Australia - Country Overview

Australia is a federal parliamentary democracy and the sixth-largest country in the world by area. Australia as a political entity comprises the mainland portion of the continent of Australia (i.e. excluding New Guinea), the island of Tasmania and also a number of smaller islands. Australia has a population of around 23 million people, of whom around 650,000 (2.8%) are Indigenous Australians. These peoples have lived in Australia for about 50,000 years (Veth et al. 2017), whereas British colonisation dates from 1770. Australian independence from the United Kingdom came in 1901, although its Head of State remains the UK Monarch.

Australia performs reasonably well in international comparisons of education performance (OECD 2018b): more-or-less stable performance over multiple PISA cycles is obscured by the rise of East-Asian city states (Dinham 2013). Responsibility for education has historically been located at the level of the regional rather than federal state. However, in the last ten years, a number of increasingly important federal institutions have been created with overarching national responsibilities and remits. Savage (2015) summarises the effect of these changes:

On the positive side, these organisations are driving the formation of new policy networks and forms of collaboration, which are leading to productive dialogue and sharing of ideas across states.

On the downside, some state policy makers believe the national standardisation of policy is undermining diversity and the capacities of states to govern autonomously. (Savage, 2015, unpaged)

Entry standards to teaching in Australia are variable and occasionally low, with some universities reaching financial targets through admitting low-attaining students to initial-teacher-education programmes (Dinham 2013). Whilst teacher shortages exist in key subjects including languages, technology, secondary mathematics and science, there is an oversupply of primary teachers and ‘long waiting lists for employment more generally’ (Dinham 2013, p. 100).

Australia - Professional Development

The responsibility for framing professional development in Australia is centralised under the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which was established in 2010. Professional development is tightly structured around a framework constituted of four key policy documents. These are:

- The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, or APST (AITSL 2011);
- The Australian Professional Standard for Principals, or APSP (AITSL 2015);
- The Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework, or ATPDF (AITSL 2012b);
- The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders, or ACPLTSL (AITSL 2012a).

The way in which these documents are understood by policy-makers to fit together can be seen in McSporran (2018), in her policy discourse analysis of these documents, their meaning and relationship, shows how all four have objectives that are located firmly in the improvement of student outcomes. She identifies an assumed linear, causal relationship between this objective, the raising of the quality of teachers/teaching (e.g. through the ATPDF), and teachers’ and leaders’ professional learning (e.g. through the ACPLTSL).
This depiction can be seen in Figure 1 of the assumed, or constructed close relationship between explicit professional standards for both teachers and principals, career progression for practitioners, statutory frameworks underpinning both teacher performance and professional development, high-quality professional practice, and excellent outcomes for students.

Other significant professional-development policies remain at regional state level. For instance, sabbaticals (or study leave) are not a federal entitlement, but are offered by individual states. One example is Victoria, where an Education Department employee may undertake a ‘work period’ of between one and four years where his/her salary is reduced by 20%. This funds the period of ‘sabbatical leave’, which must be taken immediately afterwards (Victoria State Government Education and Training 2018).

**Australia - Teachers’ Career Pathways**

Borrowing from an earlier model in England (Teacher Development Agency 2007; see McSporran 2018) and a contemporary model in the USA (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2018), the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are arranged such that greater competence or higher skill is aligned with higher status. These statuses are formalised into four discrete teacher categories: Graduate; Proficient; Highly Accomplished and Lead. Each of the two-to-four standards within the seven overarching standards therefore has four iterations corresponding to the four levels of teacher. Below is a worked example adapted from the standards (AITSL 2011, p. 12):

**Standard 3: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning**

**Focus area 3.1: Establish challenging learning goals**

**Graduate:** Set learning goals that provide achievable challenges for students of varying abilities and characteristics.

**Proficient:** Set explicit, challenging and achievable learning goals for all students.
**Highly accomplished:** Develop a culture of high expectations for all students by modelling and setting challenging learning goals.

**Lead:** Demonstrate exemplary practice and high expectations and lead colleagues to encourage students to pursue challenging goals in all aspects of their education.

Progress through the levels is determined through certification: McSporran (2018) reports projections that 'about 10,000 teachers each year will apply for ‘Highly Accomplished’ or ‘Lead’ certification', and that 'the teaching population will eventually comprise 10% ‘Graduate', 40% ‘Proficient', 30% ‘Highly Accomplished', and 20% ‘Lead' teachers’ (p. 27). That these are projections underlines how the system is not yet established: indeed, McSporran (2018) has pointed out that the states of Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales 'have continued to use their own systems well after the launch of the APST [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers]' (p. 31). Furthermore, progress up the levels is not consistently linked to salary progression, with Dinham (2013) writing of 'the need to integrate the new Australian standards for teachers with authentic, efficient assessment and accreditation processes and with industrial awards, to provide incentive, guidance, reward and recognition to teachers who continue their professional learning and improve their performance’ (p. 102). McSporran’s (2018) research supports this claim of sporadic take-up and application, particularly when responsibility to fund salary increases was transferred from the Australian to the State-Government level. It must be noted that at present, the APST is not linked to performance-related pay in Australia.

McSporran’s (2018) research participants reported that the standards and different categorisations of teacher do not yet constitute clear career pathways because of the way the policy is being enacted (or not enacted), but that they expect this to happen more in future.

**Australia - Leaders’ Career Pathways**

School principals’ professional development is located within the wider, holistic structure discussed above that also incorporates classroom teachers. Principals in Australia have their own professional standards, developed by the AITSL (2015). This document was updated in 2015 from an earlier iteration to include a new element: ‘Leadership Profiles’. The same principle of progression through competences and skills is evident here that underpins the teacher levels identified above. The Profiles are described as ‘a set of statements validated by the profession that describe the leadership actions of principals as they progress to higher levels of proficiency’ (AITSL 2015, p. 12). Each standards domain has four sets of statements attached, or Profiles, which indicate increasing levels of skill. These four levels are not named or officially categorised at all (see AITSL 2015, p. 30), unlike the teachers’ levels. This means that the Profiles cannot be used or navigated as a defined ‘career pathway’, although only a small presentational adjustment would be necessary to enable this.

The AITSL recommends instead that the Profiles be used in the following ways:

- For self-reflection;
- For professional growth (where the Profiles guide professional-development conversations and activities);
- For use in professional learning programmes (where the Profiles may, for instance, inform skills audits and be used in programme development);
- For use in principal selection and recruitment (where the Profiles may inform job descriptions and interview questions);
- For succession planning (where the Profiles inform the expectations of aspiring principals and may provide the basis for coaching and/or mentoring);
- For performance review.

(Adapted from AITSL 2015, p. 27)

New guidelines have been issued this year which are intended to build on the standards described above in order to further develop school leadership in Australia (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2018): again, these are concerned with tasks and activities that in-role principals should engage in, rather than with differentiating or exceeding the role of principal.