

Professional learning

policy for
schools



State of NSW, Department of Education and Training, Professional Learning Directorate, 2004

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Professional learning

1. Abstract

This document provides the policy of the NSW Department of Education and Training on professional learning for all staff in NSW public schools. The policy draws on knowledge of professional learning practices gained from current research. It recognises that the participation of teams and individuals in workplace learning and in the wider professional context are keys to developing quality professional practice.

The policy outlines the requirements and procedures for professional learning in NSW public schools. Guidelines and support materials are provided to assist in its implementation.

2. Applicability

This policy applies to all teaching and non-teaching staff employed in NSW public schools.

3. Superseded documents

This policy replaces the Department's *Training and Development Policy Statement (1996)* as it relates to teaching and non-teaching staff in NSW public schools.

4. Context

The NSW public education system is committed to providing an education that fully develops the talents and capacities of all students. Professional learning is valued and recognised as a major contributing factor for improving the learning outcomes of students. Teaching and non-teaching staff in schools have a responsibility to undertake ongoing professional learning that develops skills, knowledge and understandings in support of this goal.

Professional learning refers to all training and development opportunities, formal and informal, individual and shared, that provide opportunities for professional discourse, interaction, practice, reflection and analysis. Professional learning can occur face-to-face, online or through other modes of delivery.

5. Policy statement

Professional learning for school staff should contribute to the professional growth of staff and improved student outcomes in NSW public schools. The individual, the school, state office and regions share responsibility for promoting, planning, implementing and evaluating professional learning in schools.

This policy requires that:

- individuals engage in ongoing professional learning throughout their career
- schools include a professional learning component within the endorsed school plan
- schools ensure that the professional learning component takes account of the needs of staff and the school community and the priorities of the school and the Department
- schools establish a professional learning team to plan, implement and evaluate the professional learning component of the endorsed school plan
- state office, regions and schools promote and implement quality professional learning in collaborative and collegial environments

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- state office and regions support the professional learning of staff through the development of policy and the provision of a range of resources and opportunities
- state office, regions and schools evaluate the impact of professional learning to inform and improve future professional learning
- state office, regions and schools are accountable for the expenditure of funds on professional learning.

6. Procedures and standards

6.1 Individuals engage in ongoing professional learning throughout their career

All staff members are responsible for improving their practice by:

- pursuing ongoing professional learning in all aspects of their work
- critically reflecting on their practice and achievements
- contributing to the professional learning of colleagues.

Staff are entitled to seek school-based and systemic support to identify learning needs and develop personal professional learning programs.

Professional learning needs can include the development of knowledge, skills and understandings related to teaching, learning, leadership, management and administration. These can be related to personal professional goals and role specific needs at different career stages.

6.2 Schools include a professional learning component within the endorsed school plan

The professional learning component of the school plan should be developed collaboratively with staff. It should be linked to the priorities articulated in the school plan and outline staff professional learning needs, the professional learning strategies to meet those needs and the anticipated outcomes of the learning.

The School Education Director will endorse the professional learning component as part of the endorsement process for the overall school plan.

Schools can have different ways of developing and describing the professional learning component. School case studies are provided to illustrate the different ways schools incorporate professional learning in their school plans.

6.3 Schools ensure that the professional learning component of the school plan takes account of the needs of staff and the school community and the priorities of the school and the Department

Individuals and groups within the school should be involved in identifying their learning needs and goals for professional growth within the context of the priorities of the school and the Department.

The Department's priorities, strategic directions and commitment to staff learning inform the professional learning component of the school plan. The school plan must reflect the annual priorities of the Department. The Department will provide advice on professional learning opportunities linked to the Department's priorities.

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Schools have a responsibility to support the individual learning needs of all new staff. In particular, new teachers are entitled to individual, structured, long-term, school-based programs of induction. Separate guidelines for schools to support the induction of new teachers are provided.

6.4 Schools establish a professional learning team to plan, implement and evaluate the professional learning component of the endorsed school plan

Under the leadership of the principal (or nominee), and within the context of the school's management structures, the professional learning team can function as a separate group, as a sub-group of the school self-evaluation committee or in collaboration with other schools.

The composition of the professional learning team can vary. It can be structured to reflect the needs, interests and capacities of the school and take account of school size and geographic location. Staff membership on the professional learning team should be representative and determined according to agreed practice within the school.

The professional learning team:

- develops annual outcomes for professional learning, taking account of individual needs and the priorities articulated within the school plan
- designs the professional learning component, identifying strategies to support the achievement of the outcomes
- leads, coordinates, evaluates and reports on the implementation of the professional learning component of the endorsed school plan.

School case studies are provided to illustrate different ways professional learning teams can manage the professional learning component of the endorsed school plan.

6.5 State office, regions and schools promote and implement quality professional learning in collaborative and collegial environments

Planning for professional learning should be developmental and informed by research. Collaboratively negotiated strategies, timeframes and forms of feedback support the achievement of professional learning outcomes for all staff. A strong collaborative professional community and supportive leadership enhance and extend opportunities to learn.

Learning that connects explicitly to the individual's day-to-day work creates opportunities for sustainable change to professional practice.

Professional learning can occur within and beyond the school. Activities beyond the school provide opportunities to network and those within the school provide opportunities to practise. Changing practice requires time to develop skills, knowledge and understandings.

The implementation of professional learning should use strategies that connect theory to practice and encourage collegial discourse, critical reflection and constructive feedback.

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6.6 State office and regions support the professional learning of staff through the development of policy and the provision of a range of resources and opportunities

The Department supports the development of skills, knowledge and understandings that are essential to the introduction of mandatory aspects of curriculum, welfare and organisational change or that assist staff to comply with legislative requirements.

In addition to expertise available in schools, resources to support professional learning for school staff include:

- professional learning funds distributed to all schools
- targeted funds distributed through equity programs and grants for specific purposes
- other school funds as appropriate
- school development days
- advisory, consultancy and program support from regional and state offices
- print-based, electronic and online professional learning materials.

Schools, state office and regions provide professional learning opportunities. In addition schools can select from professional learning opportunities offered through universities, TAFE institutes and colleges and through professional networks and associations. The Department will publish and maintain a web-based list of its professional learning programs and activities with links to these associated providers.

Schools can decide to complement these professional learning opportunities by the use of other external providers. Separate guidelines for using external professional learning providers are provided to assist schools in decision-making and ensure the economical and effective use of professional learning funds.

6.7 State office, regions and schools evaluate the impact of professional learning to inform and improve future professional learning

Systematic evaluation of professional learning in schools identifies the impact on practice and provides information on the extent of the achievement of outcomes and the effectiveness of the strategies employed.

To ensure valid and reliable information, schools will incorporate strategies for monitoring the progress of professional learning and recording the extent to which professional learning outcomes have been achieved.

In monitoring the extent and quality of professional learning available to and accessed by teaching and non-teaching staff, it is essential to keep records of plans, strategies, expenditure and outcomes.

The evaluation of professional learning across the state, regions and within schools identifies trends and needs and informs the planning of future professional learning.

6.8 State office, regions and schools are accountable for the expenditure of funds on professional learning

Professional learning funds can be used to support staff through payments that cover:

- costs associated with participation in professional learning workshops, activities, conferences and courses within and beyond the school
- costs for staff participation in online professional learning opportunities
- purchases of, or subscriptions for, professional resources such as books, journals or electronic publications that support professional learning for staff
- costs for employing external professional learning providers.

Schools will account for the use of professional learning funds through the annual reporting and planning process monitored by the School Education Director and in accordance with financial reporting and audit requirements.

Teacher professional learning funds are allocated as a tied grant. The accountability measures schools must follow for the expenditure of these tied funds are:

- the professional learning component of the school plan must be endorsed by the School Education Director as part of the endorsement process for the overall school plan
- schools must ensure that decisions to use external providers are based on value for money and that they negotiate the nature of the service to be provided in accordance with existing provisions to employ or contract external groups. Separate guidelines are provided for schools for using external professional learning providers
- the use of teacher professional learning funds will be the subject of random school audits each year to monitor the expenditure of funds against designated priority areas of the Department. All schools may be asked to provide separate reports on the expenditure of tied funds for teacher professional learning in nominated priority areas of the Department. Separate guidelines for schools on the use and reporting of teacher professional learning funds are provided.

7. Appendices

Guideline documents include:

Using and reporting on teacher professional learning funds: Guidelines for schools

Using external professional learning providers: Guidelines for schools

Supporting the induction of new teachers: Guidelines for schools

Policy documents, guidelines and resource materials for professional learning can be accessed on the Teacher Professional Learning web site at:

<http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/TeacherProfLearning/>