

## Comments Draft Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders

*Note: The organisational background sought in the questionnaire is included at Appendix 1. AAMT chooses at this time to make this written submission rather than complete the rest of the survey.*

### **Background and introduction**

The Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers Inc. has registered its dismay at the process used to develop this document in a letter to the AITSL CEO in November 2011, shortly after the draft was released. The lack of consultation with professional associations in the development of the draft was described by then AAMT President as “an affront to the many thousands of teachers who work with and through their professional associations.” He also said

“That (national professional associations’) perspectives have been completely ignored in the formative stages of developing a national statement of consensus and commitment around teacher professional learning beggars belief.”

The Association is now bemused by the fact that six months later, we have been asked to provide consultative input on this draft on a very short timeframe (16 days).

These comments are therefore provided in haste by the Council of the AAMT, without significant input from the wider membership.

### **Positive aspects of the ‘Charter’**

The lists under the sub-headings “Relevant learning”, “Collaborative learning”, “Futures focused learning” and “Sustained learning” in the section “Characteristics of effective professional learning” are, with a couple of exceptions discussed later, reasonable and helpful. However, the other parts of these sections generally do not add much to the paper and could be omitted.

The lists under the heading “Professional learning activities and experiences that work” are helpful and give a good scope (some suggestions for improvements below). However, it is also true that all of these activities and experiences can be examples of things that **do not** work. These activities and experiences can be seen as necessary but not sufficient to ensure successful professional learning outcomes. It is the quality of their implementation in terms of the characteristics in the previous section that determines those outcomes.

### **Structural and wording clarifications needed and changes that would help improve the document**

P2, line 19: “change and improvement” – of what?

P2, line 25: “Researchers are unambiguous” – this could perhaps be toned down.

P2, line 27: The heading “Relevant learning” is not a sensible stem as it is acontextual. It would be better as “Relevant professional learning”. This change should be applied to the headings of this kind that follow.

P2, line 42: Suggest changing “learner” to “teacher or school leader” to keep the statement connected to professional learning.

P3, line 14: “professional learning communities” occurs here as an undefined term – it is a much abused term that should not be used as a throw away line in this context.

P3, lines 18-20: The paragraph beginning “Globalisation...” is not about professional learning itself being “Futures focused”, it refers to influences on access to professional learning and relevant technologies. It is probably worth saying somewhere, but not here when the point is about futures focused professional learning

P3, lines 32-34: The paragraph beginning “When there is...” presents sustainability as external to the people and the social setting. Is this intentional?

P3, line 36: These people should do more than “find resources...”; they should “apply resources...”.

P4, lines 14, and 27: These two are examples of structures for professional learning, not means for professional learning per se.

P4, line 22: “reading and responding” can also be effective “On the job” so it should be repeated in both sections.

P4, lines 38-44: This whole section makes a worthwhile point, but it is more about “Professional learning activities and experiences that work” – hence it belongs in the section above. It would need to be simplified to something like “engaging with data on student achievement”

P4, lines 2-18: The whole section on “Evaluation of professional learning” is uninformative and unconvincing. The topic is important, and so probably should be included in this document, but given that it is an area in which Australian education has consistently not done well (our association included) a clearer, stronger statement is needed.

P5, line 21: What does “positioning and repositioning” mean?

P5, lines 34-37: The “Compact” is presumably meant to be a ‘call to arms’. This last section about sectors and systems means that it finishes with barely a whimper. Given what AAMT sees as the evidence of systems’ abrogation of responsibilities for effective and purposeful professional development for teachers of mathematics over many years – the effects of which have been recently identified in the report on science and mathematics education by the Chief Scientist – finishing the paper with a suggestion that sector and system people will play a major positive role could very well generate cynical responses from teachers and school leaders.

### ***Negative aspects of the ‘Charter’***

It is hard to see the document fitting any of the accepted definitions of the term “Charter”. It is more an attempt at a statement of principles, often expressed in imprecise and ‘motherhood’ language.

There is no mention of professional associations. This is perhaps unsurprising given the genesis of the draft. However, given that the purpose of the Compact is as a call to arms, the omission of mention of professional associations in this section is particularly notable.

In fact, the lack of recognition of professional associations is symptomatic of an important flaw in the document. Statements like:

“Effective professional learning is aligned and integrated with broader school and system improvement strategies.” (P2, line 21) and “is aligned with school, sector and system goals and reform initiatives” (P3, line 43)

suggest a design for professional learning that is directly convergent to the needs and directions of the education systems. Professional learning can and should also challenge this status quo, and some other parts of the paper suggest this – “enables enquiry into, and solutions to be found to, real challenges” [P2, line 40], “generates different responses to existing challenges” [P3, line 26] and “encourages and supports innovation and adaptability” [P3, line 30] all give licence to teachers and

school leaders, through their professional learning, to develop practices that may put them at odds with the orthodoxies of systems. This is what professionals do.

This is not to say that professional associations are hotbeds of anarchy. Far from it – professional associations are among the strongest supporters of good systemic policy and programs. However it is noticeable that the generic term for organizations like AAMT is ‘*professional associations*’. Questioning the status quo from a *professional* basis is a characteristic of professions, and is an important feature of *professional learning*.

#### ***Implications of the Charter for AAMT***

At the AAMT Council meeting at which the request for consultative input on the draft Charter was discussed, the Council endorsed drafting an AAMT Position Paper on Professional Learning, and established a process for this. It may be that the group drafting that position paper will draw from the draft Charter, but the expectation is for a much more targeted and useful document.

#### ***Possible national tools, strategies and resources***

The emergence and commitment to advancing the ‘national agenda’ is a major development in Australian education. AAMT sees this as presenting great opportunities for the national key players – ACARA, ESA, AITSL and national professional associations including AAMT – to work together nationally in the interests of teachers and students across the country. Hence we would welcome working with AITSL to work toward identifying, developing and piloting tools, strategies and resources that support professional learning of teachers and school leaders.

The data gathering in the questionnaire may elicit some interesting suggestions – AAMT looks forward to hearing AITSL’s plans to collaborate with the other key players in the national agenda to take this matter forward.

## Appendix 1 – Organisational background

**1. Name of your organisation (please note: responses to the survey will be cited anonymously)**

Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers Inc.

**2. Which of the following best describes the structure of your organisation?**

- National body representing individual members
- National body representing related state/territory organisations
- State/Territory body representing individual members
- National body representing other constituent organisations
- Other (please specify)

**3. How many individuals does your organisation represent (approximately)? If you are an umbrella national body representing state/territory affiliates, please respond in terms of the total state/territory membership.**

- Less than 1000 members
- 1001 to 5000 members
- More than 5001 members

**4. Which of the following types of professional learning platforms does your organisation provide for members?**

- Annual conference
- Regular meetings/networking opportunities at local level
- Journal or other periodicals
- Standalone workshops, seminars, lectures
- Courses linked to academic qualifications
- Online resources
- Online networking
- Study tours
- Action research projects

- Funded projects that have accountability requirements, e.g. QTP projects
- Other (please specify)

**5. To what extent has your organisation already engaged with the Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders ("the Charter")?**

- Not at all
- Little extent - individual office holders/staff are aware of the Charter and may have read it
- Some extent - office holders/staff are aware of the Charter and have discussed how it may apply to the organisation
- Moderate extent - the organisation has discussed and endorsed the Charter and committed to the Compact
- Great extent - the organisation has changed the way it plans, delivers or evaluates its professional learning to align more closely with the Charter