Professional Learning and Development (PLD)

A PAPER FROM THE PPTA NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

1   Introduction

1.1   This paper explores the Professional Learning and Development infrastructure as it stands, considers teachers' and leaders' responses to the way it works, and suggests ways to make it better for the future. There is a growing understanding that the current contracting model pursued by the government since 2011 is failing schools and is in urgent need of improvement. There are also implications in this paper for the way PLD operates within schools.

1.2   Teachers and leaders have slightly different perspectives on PLD reflecting the sometimes competing needs within schools. It is essential that the national infrastructure meets the needs of teachers and leaders in providing a variety of PLD opportunities. These should be gathered around three main types of PLD: whole school, learning communities including departments/faculties, and learning focused on an individual's needs and aspirations.

1.3   The current PLD infrastructure and provision is inadequate, piecemeal and incoherent. This paper argues that, to remedy this, government needs to return to a national, university based PLD service centred on at least four universities. A locally trusted broker of PLD can make all the difference in schools accessing high quality learning for their school.

1.4   School learning communities need more support to increase the efficacy of PLD within schools. The specialist classroom teacher position is ideally placed to do this and should be expanded to meet this need.

1.5   This paper acknowledges the role played by a number of other crucial networks that certainly are part of the PLD picture for teachers but will not be dealt with in this paper. This includes:

- teacher learning groups set up by this union to facilitate learning between teachers across schools;
- the PLD toolkit[1] that provides advice to schools on how to access and administer PLD;

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[1] http://ppta.org.nz/index.php/resources/publication-list/1651-pld-toolkit

- mentoring programmes which focus on teacher leadership;
- digital learning communities on Twitter, Facebook and other social media that allow teachers to share ideas and resources with colleagues; and
- other informal structures which generally encourage collegial and collaborative sharing of ideas.

1.6   This paper is focussed on nationally provided PLD and the implications for this within schools.

2   Background

2.1   The PLD policy framework has been subject to constant review and change for at least two decades. During the 1990s, it was believed that PLD was going to be privatised by government, and at that stage most of the School Support arms of the colleges of education/universities established themselves as separate corporate entities. Full privatisation did not eventuate, and the six regional School Support Services (SSS) continued to have essentially the status of 'preferred provider' of PLD, but with negotiated and monitored outputs with the Ministry of Education. Around the same time, though, a number of private providers of PLD established themselves and began to pick up some government PLD contracts. This trend grew in the following decade.

2.2   As a result of pressure from PPTA, school leaders and others to make PLD fit for purpose and more useful for schools, and to achieve more even quality across the country, the government commissioned, in 2006, a multi-year review of School Support Services which was completed by Meenakshi Shankar and Fleur Chauvel of Martin Jenkins[2]. The purpose of this evaluation was for 'improvement and learning' but still within the context of non-contestable contracts.

2.3   The evaluation did a thorough analysis of current provision, and laid a clear foundation for a high quality professional learning infrastructure into the future. This report asserted that the SSS system was workable and with specific modifications could clearly meet government priorities and goals.

3   Dismantling a trusted model

3.1   The government chose to ignore this report and the advice it contained and instead, in late 2010, began a move to the fully contestable contracting model we have today, with private providers competing with what used to be School Support Services for a whole range of separate contracts. Instead of schools being able to contact their local SSS office for advice as to the best source of the PLD they require, they are expected to discuss this with staff in their

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[2] Sankar, M. & Chauvel, F. Provision of School Support Services — an evaluation. Wellington: Martin, Jenkins & Associates Ltd (2011) http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/provision-of-school-support-services-an-evaluation/executive-summary

regional Ministry of Education. Consortia, with new names, have been established to bid for contracts, resulting in mass confusion.

3.2 It is PPTA's view that this has proved disastrous for schools and for students. This is because of a number of factors, not least of which is the inaccessibility of much of the PLD with contracts centred on particular providers, often a long way from the place where the PLD must be delivered. While this enabled government to sign contracts with the providers they thought were most effective, it dismantled a trusted model of local support.

3.3 There was no need to make such wholesale change. The evaluation had found a clear consensus around the existing university-based School Support Services provision and was seen by the profession as ensuring:

- equity in access to services (particularly for schools in remote rural areas);
- synergy between pre-service and in-service training and consistency in implementation of the national curriculum;
- school development focus rather than the provision of individual in-service experiences to teachers;
- a future focus to assist schools to look beyond the immediate issues and to proactively shape their direction and vision;
- teaching practice informed by evidence, thus forging a closer relationship in which the knowledge base of both researchers and practitioners is valued and shared.[3]

3.4 The Auditor General's report of 2008[4] added to the critique and made a number of recommendations to the Ministry of Education for improving PLD.

Amongst them were:

- to document and publish its approach to PLD, its prioritisation process and its funding and contracting intentions;
- to share its processes on reviewing PLD initiatives;
- to review the range and content of PLD initiatives to see whether it supports an evidence based approach;
- to make better use of the information it collects from all relevant sources to identify emerging professional development trends, needs and issues;
- to make information available on the full range of PLD initiatives in a central repository.

Currently the Ministry of Education is failing in these respects.

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[3] Meenakshi Sankar and Fleur Chauvel: *Provision of School Support Services – an evaluation* p. 13.
[4] http://www.oag.govt.nz/2008/teachers-development

4   The PPTA research

4.1   PPTA undertook research on PLD in Term 2 2013. This was to establish our own evidence base on the gaps left by the ministry's inability to respond in a coherent way to the findings of the Auditor General's report, and to find out from those working in schools what their views were on an evidence based approach to PLD.

4.2   The purpose of PPTA's research was to test assumptions about teachers' and leaders' responses to the changes that have taken place since the SSS infrastructure has been dismantled. Separate surveys for teachers and school leaders were developed in order to identify similarities and differences in their perspectives on PLD.[5] They included questions on a number of themes: time spent on PLD; what teachers and leaders think makes PLD more or less effective; what sorts of PLD schools are doing; and what sorts of PLD schools want. The findings make interesting reading.

4.3   The surveys show that both teachers and school leaders agree that current PLD provision is inadequate, piecemeal and incoherent. It was estimated by the Auditor General in 2008 that at least $200 million was spent per year on PLD at that time, therefore there is a serious question as to whether this money is being well spent.

4.4   The teacher survey shows that teachers want more PLD opportunities, preferably with colleagues from other schools, led by an expert facilitator with valuable and trusted external expertise. There is clearly a need to ensure that the professional learning that happens in schools challenges teachers to work differently with students to raise their achievement, as 44% of teachers said that only happens sometimes with the current provision of PLD.

4.5   The value that teachers and leaders attach to various providers is instructive. The tendency is still to see the nearest SSS provider as the local provider, despite the fact that they no longer have the 'preferred provider' status they used to have, and there is evidence that teachers want to return to this model of a trusted local PLD provider.

4.6   The type of PLD that both teachers and leaders find most effective is:

- ongoing;
- includes looking at students' achievement data;
- involves reflection time; and
- takes place in a professional learning community, especially with teachers from other schools.

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[5] Two separate surveys were sent out via Survey Monkey and completed between 6 - 24 May 2013. The full report *Professional learning and development (PLD) research report* can be read at
http://ppta.org.nz/index.php/resources/publication-list/2717-pld-research-report

4.7 The least effective PLD is, for many teachers, a whole staff transmission model delivered in-house.

4.8 Teachers want a variety of PLD and while they especially value in-depth professional learning community-based work, they also value the opportunity to go to one-off workshops that enhance their knowledge in particular areas such as the NZQA best practice workshops. This is consistent with the findings of the earlier Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) commissioned by the Ministry itself on Teacher Professional Learning and Development.[6] However the percentage describing whole staff PLD as a negative experience suggests a systemic problem with PLD that requires a closer look at what is happening here.

4.9 Teachers and leaders have subtle differences in their perceptions of PLD and value the work being done in slightly different ways, but agree completely in their desire for locally trusted, officially sanctioned, effective PLD to be made more available to them in the future.

4.10 A deeper analysis of the results indicates that shaping teacher taste for PLD around the findings of the PLD BES is going to require both better provision and more nuanced structural support within schools. One of the ways to do this is to extend and support the specialist classroom teacher role which is focused on in-school teacher mentoring.

4.11 PPTA's proposals, as set out in the recommendations below, provide a coherent way of dealing with these inadequacies. This requires government co-operation and commitment. The suggestions fit perfectly with stated government aims and education targets. Teachers know what makes a difference to students in their schools, but they need the support to ensure they continue to develop professional autonomy and efficacy in a planned and incremental fashion.

5   Best practice PLD in schools

5.1 This section is about how two very different approaches lead to successful outcomes in schools. These are just snapshots, not prescriptions, of how two schools, one provincial and one city school, have dealt with the problem of practice that PLD throws up. Both schools have talked about the lack of good external expertise available and have developed models based mostly within the school itself but drawing when they can on external expertise.

5.2 **Provincial school A**

5.2.1 The entire staff spends 8.00 - 8.45 am on PLD every Friday and this is predominantly owned and run by the departments; it is

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[6] www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341

seldom whole staff PLD. Departments can apply for funding to the PLD Committee to bring an external person in, but generally they run it themselves.

5.2.2   The PLD Committee, which includes the PPTA branch chair, senior manager, Te Kotahitanga facilitator, and School Classroom Teacher, undertakes planning and distributes funds. It has an annual budget of around $30,000, which includes money for teacher relief, for a school of about 800 students. At the end of the year, this group looks at what has come out of teacher appraisal cycles, and uses this to suggest directions for next year.

5.2.3   In 2012 teaching as inquiry was adopted as their basic approach to PLD, following from an ERO report on this. Every teacher has to do 3 cycles of teaching as inquiry, and this feeds into the Friday morning PLD sessions in departments. Appraisal is built around this and each teacher has a workbook to guide this while working with their appraiser. It is a two-way process and there are no bystanders. The types of PLD that occur within this set-up include:

   i.   **Whole staff PLD:** There is some, but it's not the major emphasis. They have three staff meetings a term where there are only 2 agenda items: the first is PLD that has been carefully planned for, and the second is school business. Each speaker has a two minute limit.

   ii.   **Te Kotahitanga** (in their 4th year): Once a term, as part of their regular meeting schedule, they have an after school meeting to focus on elements of this. There is also the regional hui.

   iii. **Individual PLD: T**here are opportunities for teachers to be sent away but they are expected to share what they have learned with others.

   iv.   **Networks of PLD:** These exist across the provincial schools, e.g. Social Sciences, and a very active Māori teachers' network. The principals work together to try to share resources, e.g. there is a move to try to schedule language teaching at times which enable students from other schools to attend, i.e. one offers Japanese and another Spanish, and so on.

   v.   **External provision of PLD:** This is a particular problem in the provincial centre, because of distance. The jumbo days last year struggled and local schools organised the first day but a month beforehand NZQA pulled out because it had blown its budget. They were able to get Team Solutions to

step in and some came for the second day as well, but the schools organised the rest.

5.2.4   This provincial school has responded to the lack of external expertise by developing well-nourished cycles of professional learning, in which developing capacity is the driving force, not accountability. Where external expertise is used, it is in response to the needs revealed by the professional learning cycle, rather than something imposed from the outside. The school has been able to discover and develop its own inner resources.

5.3   City school B

5.3.1   PLD is structured around learning hubs with every teacher part of a syndicate. Teachers only involved with senior classes have a choice between a senior learning hub looking at assessment and a future education inquiry group working with Jane Gilbert[7].

5.3.2   A senior learning hub leads an inquiry into senior assessment and student achievement with the focus on how assessments can be offered more smartly to cover more than one achievement standard from more than one subject.

5.3.3   The future education inquiry group is working with Jane using local knowledge and expertise to explore the question of what does knowledge mean. This is a more philosophical exploration of where education and learning might go and is more strictly research based involving university study. So far the group has thrown up more questions than answers, which is probably typical of this sort of work.

5.3.4   The junior learning hubs have moved from an inquiry selected freely by the teacher to an inquiry focused on a particular junior class driven by data and is focused on raising student achievement. Pastoral information is also analysed to ensure teachers have the broadest possible view of each individual student in order to have a better understanding of how they might learn. Teachers are encouraged to observe one another and to develop an intervention.

5.3.5   The groups give brief feedback (5 minutes, 20 slides) to all staff as a way of developing a collaborative culture. Accountability is strengthened by a weekly reflective journal using My Portfolio to which the Deputy Principal responds as the one in charge of professional learning. The feedback cycle has supported staff

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[7] Jane Gilbert: Swimming out of our depth http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/swimming-out-our-depth-leading-learning-21st-century-schools

engagement with this process. The teachers are encouraged to share their reflections with their appraiser as a way of providing evidence across the Registered Teacher Criteria. This is a by-product rather than a purpose for the reflection, but ample evidence can be provided using this method. The big questions for this school as for all schools are:

- How does the time spent on PLD translate into changes to student achievement?
- How do more research based approaches (like the futures group) help student learning?
- How do you move staff from a learning-to-use mode with technology to a using-to-learn mode?
- How do you encourage and ensure teacher capacity building using PLD in a crowded working day?
- How do you close the gap between appraisal and PLD in non-threatening, agentic manner that respects teacher autonomy and identity?
- How do you access external expertise to help this process?

5.3.6 PLD needs to fit each individual school context and should provide a freshness of perspective that invigorates staff. As the DP said 'The sustainability of the collaborative context-based model is really important'. External expertise should help feed, nourish and sustain this model. Schools have been going it alone for a number of years now so any renewal of external expertise needs to be significant to replace what schools have now.

6 Changes that are needed

6.1 The challenges for the system, schools and individual teachers are not all the same so there is a need to have different types of PLD to meet different needs. A school's focus is largely around the achievement, wellbeing and growth of its students, but individual teachers have career development and personal development PLD needs alongside this. Individual teacher's needs should be met in a way that is consistent with system level improvement at school, regional, and national levels. To achieve this, PLD provision needs both a local and a national infrastructure.

6.2 The local PLD infrastructure should be structured around at least four universities to provide a sufficient geographical spread. The School Support Services infrastructure was capable, according to the ministry's own evaluation, of meeting the needs of PLD but the current model fails. Considerable investment has already gone into the current contracts but many personnel would be capable of moving into the next phase of PLD provision.

6.3 As the principal of our provincial school points out 'change teams' dispatched from local ministry offices can't and won't change schools; solutions to student achievement need to come from within teachers stimulated by them acting as learners, drawing on external and internal expertise. This lines up well with what the teachers say in the research about the efficacy of their work with colleagues.

6.4 There is a need to listen to what teachers say about working with colleagues from other schools. PLD providers should have more responsibility in developing and supporting professional learning communities (PLCs) across schools so that teachers can learn from their colleagues who have different students and different approaches to them. Teaching is after all a collaborative business.

7   Conclusion

7.1 PLD provision is currently inadequate, piecemeal and incoherent. There is an overwhelming need to change the current arrangements and provide a national infrastructure that works. There is an opportunity to draw on what we know and on the views of the profession to develop a national PLD service to meet the needs of schools. Current successful providers could continue to offer PLD brokered by local universities and directed to schools as required.

7.2 PLD is not an optional extra or want-to-have, but a necessary system lever for improving the experience of teachers learning on the job in schools. These observations are based on evidence and directed at a better use of the $200 million plus PLD spend that is currently wasted on a patchwork quilt of contestable contracts that fail to keep the profession warm.

8   Recommendations

1. ~~That the report be received.~~

2. ~~PPTA asserts that all types of Professional Learning and Development are important and that schools should be able to access PLD that is:~~

    i. ~~whole school focused (around vision and values, Maori student achievement etc.);~~
    ii. ~~cross school or within school curriculum focused or skills development focused PLD done through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs);~~
    iii. ~~based on individual choice and an individual's learning interests and needs.~~

3. ~~PPTA asserts that every teacher has a right to access to PLD that is:~~
   - ~~accessible;~~
   - ~~officially sanctioned;~~
   - ~~local and trusted;~~
   - ~~fully funded;~~
   - ~~in depth and one off;~~
   - ~~that relates directly to specialist areas of curriculum knowledge and assessment;~~
   - ~~has a positive impact on student outcomes;~~
   - ~~is timely, and~~
   - ~~often combines teachers with colleagues from other schools.~~

4. ~~That PPTA lobbies government to return to a national PLD infrastructure that uses at least four universities to act as local and trusted providers and brokers of fully funded PLD.~~

5. ~~That PPTA lobbies to ensure local providers have a specific contractual responsibility to further develop PLCs across schools.~~

6. ~~That PPTA lobbies government to extend successful models of in-school teacher mentoring through specialist positions.~~

7. ~~That PPTA lobbies government to provide funding to subject associations so that they have a broader reach.~~

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Carried recommendations from Annual Conference Minutes 2013

1.   THAT the report be received; and

2.   THAT PPTA asserts that all types of Professional Learning and Development are important and that schools should be able to access relevant PLD such as that which is:

i. based on individual choice and an individual's learning interests and needs.
ii.   cross school or within school curriculum focused or skills development focused PLD done through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs);
iii.   whole school focused (around vision and values, Maori student achievement and other such initiatives); and

3.	THAT PPTA asserts that every teacher has a right to access to PLD that is:

• accessible;
• endorsed by NZQA and/or MOE;
• based on best evidence;
• local and trusted;
• fully funded;
• in depth and one off;
• that relates directly to specialist areas of curriculum knowledge and assessment;
• has a positive impact on student outcomes;
• is timely, and;
• often combines teachers with colleagues from other schools; and

4.	THAT PPTA lobbies to ensure providers have a specific contractual responsibility to further develop PLCs across schools; and

5.	THAT PPTA lobbies government to extend successful models of in-school teacher mentoring through specialist positions.

6.	THAT PPTA lobbies government to return to a national PLD infrastructure that uses at least six universities and the waananga Aotearoa and Awanuiārangi to act as local and trusted providers and brokers of fully funded PLD.

7.	THAT PPTA lobbies government to provide funding to subject associations so that they can also provide fully funded PLD.