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Victorian Auditor-General's Office



Professional Learning for School Teachers

February 2019

Independent assurance report to Parliament
2018–19: 15



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Independent assurance report to Parliament

Ordered to be published

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PRINTER

February 2019

PP no 18, Session 2018–19

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ISBN 978 1 925678 39 0

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Victorian Auditor-General's Office

The Hon Shaun Leane MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Melbourne

The Hon Colin Brooks MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my report
Professional Learning for School Teachers.

Yours faithfully



Andrew Greaves
Auditor-General

20 February 2019

Contents

Audit overview	7
Conclusion	8
Findings.....	8
Responses to this report.....	9
1 Audit context.....	11
1.1 What is professional learning?	11
1.2 Roles and responsibilities	12
1.3 Victoria’s reform agenda	15
1.4 Why this audit is important.....	19
1.5 What this audit examined and how	19
1.6 Report structure	19
2 VIT’s responsibilities for professional learning	21
2.1 Conclusion	21
2.2 VIT’s knowledge of professional learning.....	22
3 DET’s knowledge of professional learning	27
3.1 Conclusion	28
3.2 DET’s knowledge of professional learning.....	29
3.3 DET’s knowledge of the professional learning costs incurred by schools	35
3.4 Evaluating the impact of professional learning	39
Appendix A. <i>Audit Act 1994</i> section 16—submissions and comments	49

Acronyms and abbreviations

AIP	annual implementation plan
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APST	Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
Bastow	Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership
CRT	casual relief teacher
DET	Department of Education and Training
ETR Act	<i>Education and Training Reform Act 2006</i>
FISO	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
PDP	performance and development plan
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SEIL	senior education improvement leader
SPOT	Strategic Planning Online Tool
SSP	school strategic plan
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office
VGSA	<i>Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017</i>
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching

Audit overview

Throughout their careers, teachers undertake various formal and informal learning activities to strengthen their practice, known as professional learning. It is important for education systems to invest in professional learning, as teacher quality has a considerable influence on student outcomes. Overall, the benefits of professional learning should extend beyond the individual teacher to the broader school environment. This is because professional learning is most effective when teachers collaborate with one another to challenge their pre-existing beliefs and practices.

Two major entities oversee professional learning in Victorian government schools:

- The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) is an independent statutory authority responsible for regulating the teaching profession. VIT requires teachers to renew their registration each year to demonstrate their continued competence. As part of this process, teachers make legally-binding self-declarations that assert whether they have completed at least 20 hours of professional learning over the preceding 12 months.
- The Department of Education and Training (DET) oversees the provision of primary and secondary schooling in Victoria. DET delivers some professional learning to teachers, but it is neither the major nor the sole provider. Instead, DET's key role is to support schools to create and sustain strong professional learning cultures that encourage collaborative and reflective practices. In 2015, the Victorian Government launched its Education State reform agenda, which committed to enhancing each student's learning outcomes—regardless of their classroom, school, upbringing, or postcode.

VIT and DET are currently implementing widespread change. They are re-evaluating their policies, procedures, and programs with the aim of improving their knowledge of teachers' professional learning needs and practices.

Considering this change, this audit did not examine the efficacy of a specific initiative, rather, we assessed whether VIT and DET have a clear and accurate understanding of the professional learning that occurs in Victorian government schools. As a result, we have not made formal recommendations to either agency, but aim for our observations to influence the development of their professional learning agendas.

Conclusion

Overall, DET's professional learning agenda conforms to best practice principles, as it recognises the importance of student-centred, classroom-based, and teacher-led activities. DET's flagship strategy—the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)—encourages principals and teachers to focus their efforts on the areas known to have the greatest impact on school performance. Importantly, FISO's Improvement Cycle reconceptualises professional learning as a routine, everyday practice that requires thorough planning and review. This Improvement Cycle is critical, as principals and teachers must explicitly prioritise their development to ensure that it occurs amidst their busy schedules.

There are also opportunities for DET and VIT to enhance their support for professional learning through improved data analysis. Addressing current gaps in their knowledge will assist both agencies to better target their efforts and evaluate how well their professional learning initiatives are working.

Findings

DET's central and regional offices have significantly improved their oversight of schools' four-year planning cycles through the development of the Strategic Planning Online Tool (SPOT). SPOT enables principals to document their improvement agenda through their four-year school strategic plans (SSP) and associated annual implementation plans (AIP) in an interactive, centralised repository that facilitates systemwide analysis. These plans include a professional learning and development component, which assists DET to monitor how principals plan for the collective growth of their teachers. Despite these planning documents, DET has minimal insight into how teachers' individual goals align with their schools' improvement priorities. It will be increasingly important for DET to enhance its knowledge in this space, as the success of the Education State reform agenda hinges on teachers' uptake of its key professional learning strategies.

DET has commissioned an extensive evaluation of its Professional Learning Communities (PLC) program. This evaluation represents best practice, as DET's external consultants have triangulated multiple sources of information to paint a comprehensive picture of teaching and learning outcomes. There is potential for DET to overlay its various feedback loops—such as the School Staff Survey and teachers' performance and development processes—to develop a broader and better understanding of teachers' practices, perceptions, and priorities.

We also found that DET lacks a thorough understanding of the costs schools incur to develop and implement robust professional learning programs for teachers. It is critical that DET increases its oversight of this area, as insufficient funding may discourage schools from pursuing high-quality professional learning. Without ongoing exposure to professional learning, there is a risk that teachers' practices will stagnate, hindering their ability to nurture students to reach their full potential. DET, therefore, must assure itself that it understands the recurrent costs associated with embedding high-quality professional learning activities—such as coaching and mentoring programs—into teachers' everyday practices. The information will complement DET's strong understanding of schools' planning processes and is necessary to ensure ongoing support for the Education State reforms.

There is also potential for VIT to increase its value to the system by strengthening its data collection and analysis procedures. VIT occupies a unique position, as it interacts with all practising teachers on an annual basis through the renewal of registration process. While VIT collects information from 1 per cent of the workforce regarding the focus and impact of their professional learning activities, it rarely scrutinises this information to gain insight into teachers' professional learning needs and priorities.

The lack of insight diminishes VIT's ability to inform the Minister for Education about teachers' developmental needs—a legislated requirement under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (ETR Act). DET, as a stakeholder of VIT, is also missing a potential source of information that may help it to plan for professional learning in schools.

Given the extensive reform occurring across the school system, it is now opportune for VIT and DET to undertake improvements that enhance their professional learning knowledge in Victorian government schools.

Responses to this report

We have consulted with DET and VIT and considered their views when reaching our audit conclusions. As required by section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994*, we gave a draft copy of this report to those agencies and asked for their submissions or comments. We also provided a copy of the report to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The following is a summary of those responses. The full responses are included in Appendix A.

DET acknowledged that an enhanced understanding of the cost that schools incur to develop and deliver professional learning programs will strengthen support for the Education State reforms.

VIT plans to implement various actions in response to our findings, including redeveloping its business systems, reviewing its renewal of registration audit, and analysing data to understand teachers' professional learning needs, which it will report onto the Minister for Education and DET.

1

Audit context

1.1 What is professional learning?

Pedagogy explores the concept and practice of teaching, as well as its impact on learning. Teachers use different pedagogical techniques to create effective learning environments that support the unique needs of their students.

Teaching is a profession that requires a highly-specialised and dynamic workforce. To practise in Victoria, prospective teachers must complete an accredited education course that enables them to develop a broad spectrum of skills and knowledge. Among these skills is the ability to understand and apply different pedagogical theories, strategies, and techniques.

Research consistently shows that teacher quality has a significant influence on student outcomes. For example, students taught by ineffective teachers may struggle to keep pace with their peers and bridge critical gaps in their knowledge. This experience may negatively impact a child's perception of school and slow their intellectual development. Helping teachers to continually refine, adapt, and grow their skillsets, therefore, has the potential to improve Victorian students' wellbeing, achievement, and engagement levels.

Throughout their careers, teachers undertake various formal and informal learning activities to strengthen their practice, known as professional learning. According to research, improving teachers' capabilities through professional learning is a sound investment, as other factors that influence student outcomes—such as parental engagement—are far more difficult for schools to control.

What does effective professional learning look like?

Research suggests that traditional professional learning activities, such as conferences and seminars, have limited long-term effectiveness because they passively convey information with minimal follow-up. These once-off, generic events often occur outside the classroom and have limited capacity to explore the diverse needs of every teacher.

Lesson study is a teacher-led professional learning activity that originated in Japan. Teachers work together to research, plan, deliver, and evaluate lessons. This enables them to harness their collective expertise and advance their personal skillsets through critical self-reflection and peer input.

During **peer observation**, teachers watch each other deliver lessons and provide constructive feedback.

In contrast, effective professional learning activities—such as lesson study, mentoring, and peer observation—are student centred, classroom based, and teacher-led. They translate theory into practice through the application and evaluation of different teaching techniques. Teachers who effectively engage with professional learning can assure its relevance by continually assessing its impact on student outcomes. Importantly, high-quality professional learning activities promote collaboration, adaptation, and reflection as the building blocks of effective practice.

Professional learning cultures

Research shows that professional learning can yield sustained and significant change if it is a school-wide priority. This is because best practice professional learning activities require teachers to collaborate with one another, engage in respectful debate, and take collective responsibility for student learning. True collaboration requires teachers to transition their classrooms from private to public spaces, and share their strategies, instructional materials, and queries with one another. Principals, therefore, have an obligation to nurture a strong professional learning culture that emphasises the importance of trust, growth, and self-reflection.

Professional standards for Victorian teachers

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) emphasises the important role that teachers play in preparing children to lead positive and productive lives, and provides guidance to the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments on excellence in education. Importantly, AITSL highlights the significance of professional learning in two major documents:

- The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)*, finalised in 2010—guide teachers' preparation, support, and development, and outline their expected capabilities at four career stages across three domains. The career stages are graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, and lead, and the key domains are professional practice, professional knowledge, and professional engagement.
 - Standard 6 explicitly states that teachers must participate in professional learning to improve their practice.
- *The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (the Charter), published in 2012—this document describes the characteristics of high-quality professional learning and emphasises the importance of a supportive school environment.

All Australian education ministers endorsed the APST in December 2010, and the Charter in August 2012.

1.2 Roles and responsibilities

In Victoria, professional learning is subject to minimal central control. The ETR Act assigns some legislated responsibilities to VIT; however, the practical implementation of professional learning is mostly at the discretion of Victoria's 1 531 government schools.

Victorian Institute of Teaching

In October 2018, the Victorian Parliament passed legislation that amended the ETR Act. This contained a proclamation that VIT must consider the **safety and wellbeing of children**—including by taking into account community expectations—when performing any regulatory function. This shift in focus will inform all VIT’s activities going forward and highlights its critical role in protecting the rights and interests of children.

VIT is an independent statutory authority responsible for regulating the teaching profession. All teachers must register with VIT to practise in independent, Catholic, and government schools across Victoria, the early childhood sector, as well as other workplaces with education officers, such as universities, hospitals, and museums. Registration is one of VIT’s most critical functions, as it assures the community that teachers are highly qualified, proficient, and reputable. All teachers—regardless of their sector—must periodically renew their registration to demonstrate their continued competence. This requirement applied to over 104 000 teachers in 2019.

In 2011, all Australian education ministers endorsed AITSL’s National Framework for Teacher Registration (AITSL’s framework), which brought an element of consistency to each state and territory’s unique approach. According to AITSL’s framework, Australian teachers who want to renew their registration must:

- consent to a national criminal history records check every five years
- submit evidence of at least 100 days of professional practice (teaching) across the previous five years
- submit evidence of at least 100 hours of APST-referenced professional learning activities across the previous five years
- demonstrate their ongoing proficiency against the APST.

As shown in Figure 1A, VIT proportionately implements AITSL’s framework. This means that teachers must submit legally-binding self-declarations that assert whether they have completed at least 20 days of professional practice and 20 hours of professional learning each year. VIT, therefore, engages with its teachers more frequently than most regulatory bodies across Australia. VIT also grants ‘non-practising’ registration to qualified professionals that wish to document their continued suitability to teach but cannot fulfil VIT’s annual requirements.

Figure 1A
Length of registration cycle for each Australian state and territory

Jurisdiction	Length of fixed registration period
Australian Capital Territory	1 year
New South Wales	5 years (or 7 years for part-time and casual teachers)
Northern Territory	5 years
Queensland	5 years (annual update for professional practice and professional learning elements)
South Australia	3 years
Tasmania	5 years
Victoria	1 year
Western Australia	5 years

Source: VAGO, derived from AITSL’s *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia*, prepared for the Council of Australian Governments’ Education Council, September 2018.

Under the ETR Act, VIT has several responsibilities related to professional learning. For example, VIT must:

- develop and maintain a professional learning framework that supports and promotes teachers' ongoing education and development
- advise the Minister for Education regarding matters that concern teachers, including their professional development needs
- facilitate professional development programs that align with its key functions
- conduct and promote research that explores the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices.

Review of the Victorian Institute of Teaching

In 2017, the Minister for Education commissioned an independent review of VIT's management, operations, and governance following serious concerns regarding its decision-making processes. The review made 34 recommendations to VIT, which the Victorian Government largely accepted. VIT is currently addressing these recommendations and is undergoing significant restructure. VIT's Council has recently approved its updated regulatory approach, which directly responds to one of the review's recommendations.

Department of Education and Training

DET's key objective is to foster a smarter, fairer, and more prosperous Victoria. It oversees the provision of primary and secondary schooling in Victoria and employs principals and teachers to deliver high-quality education.

DET's central office is primarily responsible for the development of policy and strategy. It authorises principals to make local decisions for local needs and allocates responsibility to them for their schools' day-to-day operations, including educational, financial, and management issues. In contrast, DET's Regional Services Group provides more tangible, on-the-ground support to schools. The Regional Services Group works out of 17 area offices situated across DET's four regions—North Eastern, North Western, South Eastern, and South Western Victoria.

DET's strategic focus

The *Department of Education and Training 2018–2022 Strategic Plan* articulates DET's vision for a 'high-performing, empowered, valued, and supported' workforce that delivers 'world class outcomes'. To achieve this vision, DET's goal is to build the capacity of principals and teachers by ensuring that every school participates in high-quality professional learning. DET delivers some professional learning to teachers, but it is neither the major nor the sole provider. Instead, DET's key role is to support schools to create and sustain strong professional learning cultures that encourage collaborative and reflective practices.

Responsibilities of principals and teachers

While there are no legislated requirements regarding professional learning, principals and teachers have obligations to continually engage with innovative and emerging research. As a condition of their employment, principals must:

- conduct regular reviews of their school's teaching and learning practices to ensure that they align with robust and up-to-date evidence
- manage the development, implementation and monitoring of their school's professional learning strategy to increase teachers' capacity, knowledge, and skills, and to achieve the school's overarching objectives
- ensure that their staff's performance and development plans (PDP) encourage engagement with high-quality professional learning.

Likewise, to practise in Victorian government schools, teachers must fulfil VIT's registration requirements and engage with DET's performance and development processes.

Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017

The *Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017* (VGSA) applies to all employees of the Victorian teaching service. It has two new provisions that aim to support teachers' professional learning:

- The introduction of the learning specialist position—this enables high-performing teachers to progress their careers while remaining in the classroom. Learning specialists provide ongoing support, guidance, and mentorship to their colleagues by facilitating professional learning activities, such as demonstration lessons.
- The allocation of four professional practice days each year—beginning in 2018, this initiative releases each teacher from their scheduled duties for one day per term to undertake work that strengthens their practice (pro rata for part-time teachers). This work should align with departmental and school priorities, and focus on the following areas: planning, preparation, curriculum development, assessment of student learning, collaboration, relevant professional development, and peer observation. According to the VGSA, each teacher nominates the timing and focus of their professional practice days in consultation with their principal.

1.3 Victoria's reform agenda

The Victorian Government is implementing an extensive reform agenda to ensure that every child has access to high-quality education. It frames professional learning as a critical lever in improving the knowledge and skills of teachers, and thus their ability to meet students' needs.

Education State

In 2015, the Victorian Government committed to enhancing each student's educational outcomes—regardless of their classroom, school, upbringing, or postcode. This initiative—known as Education State—aims to equip Victorian students with a world class, dynamic skillset that meets the needs of Victoria's ever-changing economy.

DET is progressively implementing a range of policies, guidelines, and toolkits to help schools achieve this vision. Its commitment to sustained and significant change encompasses service and funding reform, organisational restructuring, an increased emphasis on partnerships and innovation, and improved workforce strategies. Importantly, the Education State reform agenda not only focuses on enhancing the learning opportunities of Victoria’s students, but its teachers as well. At the school level, this equates to an increased focus on improved training, guidance, and planning for teachers and leadership staff.

The Victorian Government articulates its vision for Education State through 10 targets across four key areas—see Figure 1B. Professional learning is pivotal to achieving these outcomes, as teacher quality is the greatest in-school controllable factor impacting student outcomes.

Figure 1B
The Victorian Government’s vision for Education State

Ambition	Target
Learning for life	
More students excel in reading and mathematics	By 2020 for Year 5, and 2025 for Year 9, 25 per cent more students will be reaching the highest levels of achievement in reading and mathematics.
More students excel in scientific literacy	By 2025, there will be a 33 per cent increase in the proportion of 15-year olds reaching the highest levels of achievement in scientific literacy.
More students excel in the arts	More Victorian students will reach the highest levels of achievement in the arts.
More students develop strong critical and creative thinking skills	By 2025, 25 per cent more Year 10 students will have developed excellent critical and creative thinking skills.
Happy, healthy, and resilient kids	
More students will be resilient	By 2025, Victorian students reporting high resilience will grow by 20 per cent.
More students will be physically active	By 2025, the proportion of students doing physical activity five times a week will increase by 20 per cent.
Breaking the link	
Breaking the link	By 2025, there will be a 15 per cent reduction in the gap in average achievement between disadvantaged and other students in Year 5 and Year 9 reading.
More students stay in education for better pathways	By 2025, the proportion of students leaving education during Years 9 to 12 will halve.
Pride and confidence in our schools	
Raise the levels of community pride and confidence in Victorian government schools	By 2025, 20 per cent more parents will have high levels of pride and confidence in the Victorian government school system.

Note: The ‘Breaking the link’ initiative aims to mitigate the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and lower academic outcomes.

Source: VAGO, derived from DET.

Framework for Improving Student Outcomes

In 2015, DET developed FISO to support the goals of the Education State reform agenda. FISO helps government schools to focus their improvement efforts on the areas known to have the greatest impact on student achievement, engagement, and wellbeing. The framework trickles through each tier of a school's planning architecture—from high-level strategy to day-to-day operations. It provides a 'common language' for principals and teachers to discuss opportunities for improvement, including participation in professional learning activities. Importantly, reconceptualising professional learning as a routine, everyday practice requires thorough planning, as principals and teachers must explicitly prioritise their development to ensure that it occurs amidst their busy schedules.

FISO includes the following key components:

- An Improvement Model—this identifies four statewide priority areas that contain 16 dimensions. DET has identified six of these dimensions as high impact improvement initiatives—see Figure 1C. Using the Improvement Model, each school must identify at least three goals to achieve over a four-year period. The SSP captures these goals and highlights their supporting dimensions. Each year, schools put their SSPs into operation through AIPs that outline their key improvement strategies, targets, actions, and professional learning priorities. We discuss this further in Part 3.
- The *FISO Continua of Practice for School Improvement* (the Continua), first published in 2016 and progressively updated by DET—this document helps schools to self-assess and monitor their improvement by outlining a continuum of achievement for each dimension. The Continua enables schools to pinpoint their status as emerging, evolving, embedding, or excelling, and defines their expected capabilities at each stage.
- An Improvement Cycle—this evidence-based model helps schools to enhance their teaching and learning outcomes by implementing a continuous approach to improvement that enables principals and teachers to regularly review their progress against established targets. It contains four major steps:
 - evaluate and diagnose
 - prioritise and set goals
 - develop and plan
 - implement and monitor.

Figure 1C
FISO’s four priority areas and 16 dimensions

High impact improvement initiatives	Other dimensions
Priority area 1—Excellence in teaching and learning	
Building practice excellence	Evidence-based high impact teaching strategies
Curriculum planning and assessment	Evaluating impact on learning
Priority area 2—Professional leadership	
Building leadership teams	Instructional and shared leadership Strategic resource management Vision, values, and culture
Priority area 3—Positive climate for learning	
Empowering students and building school pride	Health and wellbeing
Setting expectations and promoting inclusion	Intellectual engagement and self-awareness
Priority area 4—Community engagement in learning	
Building communities	Parents and carers as partners Global citizenship Networks with schools, services, and agencies

Source: VAGO, derived from DET.

Critically, one of FISO’s four statewide priority areas is ‘excellence in teaching and learning’. This priority contains four dimensions, including a high impact improvement initiative that explicitly relates to professional learning—building practice excellence. According to the Continua, a school that excels in this area should:

- develop, monitor, and evaluate an evidence-based professional learning plan that supports and aligns the individual and collective development of its teachers with the school’s overarching improvement strategy
- routinely collect, analyse, and overlay data regarding student achievement and different pedagogical practices to determine whether teachers are having the desired impact in the classroom
- trial and assess innovative and effective teaching practices from other jurisdictions and contexts
- establish collaborative teaching teams that thrive on self-reflection and constructive feedback
- foster a trustworthy, supportive environment that respects the value of continuous learning, growth, and inquiry.

1.4 Why this audit is important

Transforming Victoria into the Education State is heavily dependent on the quality of the teaching workforce. VIT and DET, therefore, must have a clear understanding of how teachers perceive, practise, and prioritise professional learning across Victoria's 1 531 government schools.

In 2013, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development conducted the second Teacher and Learning International Survey. The survey expanded on the results of the 2008 edition by asking Australian teachers to reflect on their professional learning opportunities over the preceding 12 months. It found that 85.7 per cent of respondents attended courses and workshops, while only 44.4 per cent engaged in formal mentoring or peer observation sessions. This suggests that Australia is yet to fully embrace the shift towards collaborative teaching and learning practices.

1.5 What this audit examined and how

Because of the system's extensive reform agenda, VIT and DET are currently undergoing widespread change. Both agencies are re-evaluating their policies, procedures, and programs with the aim of improving their knowledge of teachers' professional learning needs and practices. As a result, this audit did not examine the efficacy of a specific initiative, rather, we evaluated whether VIT and DET have a clear and accurate understanding of the professional learning that occurs in government schools, including its planning, cost, and impact.

Considering this change, we have not made formal recommendations to either agency. Instead, we intend for our observations to assist VIT and DET to implement their professional learning agendas to achieve good outcomes for teachers and their students.

We conducted our audit in accordance with section 15 of the *Audit Act 1994* and the Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards. The cost of this audit was \$770 000.

1.6 Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Part 2 examines whether VIT fulfils its key functions and legislated responsibilities regarding professional learning.
- Part 3 examines whether DET effectively oversees the professional learning that occurs in Victorian government schools, including its planning, cost, and impact.

2

VIT's responsibilities for professional learning

As the system's regulatory body, VIT has an obligation to assure the community that teachers maintain the currency of their practice by engaging in regular professional learning. This obligation requires VIT to have clear accountability mechanisms, robust risk management and compliance systems, and access to high-quality data. Understanding teachers' professional learning practices is particularly important in the context of Victoria's extensive reform agenda, as it provides policymakers with a strong evidence base to underpin their decision-making processes and direct their investments.

VIT establishes the requirements for initial and ongoing registration—including the need to participate in professional learning. In this part of the report, we examine whether VIT effectively discharges its responsibilities regarding professional learning for teachers.

2.1 Conclusion

VIT does not routinely collect information from teachers about the focus or impact of their annual professional learning activities—it only scrutinises the number of completed hours as opposed to their quality or effectiveness. This hinders VIT's ability to inform the Minister for Education of teachers' developmental needs—a legislated requirement under the ETR Act.

Each year, VIT requires a random sample of teachers to substantiate their legally binding self-declarations through the submission of evidence. This audit affects one per cent of the workforce and has the potential to provide valuable insight into teachers' professional learning practices. VIT, however, does not comprehensively assess this information to identify any trends. In addition, it lacks robust guidance regarding the threshold for sufficient and appropriate audit evidence, which decreases the reliability of its audit process and creates confusion for teachers about what evidence they need to support their self-declarations.

Critically, VIT's limited analysis of teachers' professional learning practices weakens DET's ability to develop and deliver targeted initiatives, as it is missing a potential source of information. To support the Victorian Government's Education State reform commitments, we encourage VIT to adopt a more proactive role in assessing teachers' professional learning practices, perceptions, and priorities.

2.2 VIT's knowledge of professional learning

Renewal of registration

VIT requires teachers to renew their registration each year to demonstrate their continued competence. As part of this process, teachers make legally binding self-declarations regarding whether they have completed at least 20 hours of professional learning over the preceding 12 months. VIT neither mandates the completion of specific activities, nor does it accredit service providers. Instead, teachers have the autonomy to determine how and when they complete their annual professional learning hours. VIT's only requirement is that teachers undertake activities that align with the APST's three key domains: professional practice, professional knowledge, and professional engagement.

To apply for renewal, teachers submit their legally binding self-declarations through MyVIT—a secure online portal that enables users to manage their registration and related tasks. This process requires teachers to simply affirm or deny that they have met the 20-hour threshold. VIT only captures further information regarding the type, duration, focus, and impact of teachers' professional learning activities through its audit program, which scrutinises 1 per cent of the teaching profession each year. VIT does not thoroughly assess this data, which impairs its ability to inform the Minister for Education of teachers' developmental needs.

VIT occasionally conducts further research into teachers' professional learning practices, perceptions, and priorities. For example, in 2016, VIT proactively surveyed renewing teachers regarding their engagement with professional learning activities that improved their capacity to assist students with special needs—see Figure 2A. Overall, this survey indicates that VIT has the potential to conduct valuable research that may assist DET to develop policies and target its spending. Going forward, we encourage VIT to conduct similar projects to enhance the system's understanding of teachers' professional learning practices.

Figure 2A

VIT's survey of registered teachers to support the Education State reform agenda's Special Needs Plan

In 2016, VIT collected further information from teachers to support the Victorian Government's implementation of its Special Needs Plan. The Special Needs Plan is critical to government's Education State agenda, as it encourages teachers to abandon a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction and consider the diverse needs of every student. During the 2016 renewal of registration process, VIT required teachers to submit an additional declaration regarding their participation in special needs-related professional learning activities. This formed part of the Victorian Government's vision to upskill the workforce and was the first and only time that VIT imposed formal prerequisites on teachers' annual professional learning hours.

VIT used an anonymous survey to determine whether this initiative improved teachers' capacity to assist students with special needs. It collected information from over 38 000 teachers regarding the content, delivery method, and perceived impact of their chosen professional learning activities. The survey found that 62 per cent of respondents focused on teaching students with autism spectrum disorder, while 42 per cent learned about the use of differentiated instructional strategies. Most teachers engaged with professional learning through workshops, seminars, or curriculum days at school. Respondents observed that the initiative improved their teaching practice and had a positive impact on students.

Source: VAGO.

Risk management and compliance systems

As discussed in Part 1, VIT audits a random sample of teachers each year to test the accuracy of their legally binding self-declarations. This audit requires teachers to submit evidence—such as certificates, receipts, written reflections, and employer verifications—that substantiate their professional learning claims. Teachers must also articulate how their professional learning aligns with the APST and positively impacts their practice. VIT notifies teachers selected for audit via letter and expects return of their completed forms within 30 days.

In 2016, VIT audited 1 011 (1 per cent) of the 104 429 teachers eligible to renew their registration, including:

- 1 in 150 teachers practising in any Victorian school
- 1 in 40 teachers not practising in a school-setting
- 1 in 50 early childhood educators.

VIT has not documented what constitutes sufficient and appropriate evidence to support teachers' declarations clearly. This lack of clarity means that VIT may assess teachers' evidence inconsistently, which diminishes the audit's overall impact and reliability. Without clear examples of what constitutes sufficient and appropriate evidence, it is difficult for VIT to discharge its regulatory role in an objective manner. We encourage VIT to formalise its evidence requirements, as this may strengthen teachers' accountability for their annual professional learning activities.

This lack of clarity regarding the threshold for sufficient and appropriate evidence extends to the subjects of VIT's audits—teachers. For example, of the 952 teachers that returned their forms in 2016, 139—or 15 per cent—initially failed to substantiate their self-declarations because they used out-of-date, missing, or incomplete evidence to verify their teaching days and professional learning hours. In an internal review, VIT also identified that there was a misunderstanding among teachers regarding what constitutes APST-referenced professional learning activities. This suggests that VIT should review its guidance regarding teachers' professional learning to ensure that it is clear, concise, and contains relevant examples. VIT has already taken steps to address this issue by updating its *Renewal audit form* to include a mock teacher entry that shows an appropriately referenced professional learning activity and associated reflection.

Analysis of audits

VIT does not evaluate the evidence that arises from its audits of teachers' professional learning claims. Doing so would help it to better understand how teachers interpret their professional learning obligations. For example, while VIT maintains a spreadsheet of teachers that require follow-up due to the use of insufficient or inappropriate evidence, its analysis lacks consistency—see Figure 2B. This inconsistency impairs VIT's ability to identify trends in noncompliance and improve its communication to teachers, as it cannot accurately filter its dataset. To rectify this, we encourage VIT to standardise its assessment terminology. This would facilitate efficient and effective analysis of the data and enable VIT to strengthen its guidance to teachers on persistent issues, thus increasing their accountability.

Figure 2B **Example of the inconsistent terminology used by VIT to catalogue audit concerns**

In 2016, VIT used a variety of terms to describe similar or identical problems with the evidence provided by teachers to demonstrate their compliance with DET's Special Needs Plan (see Figure 2A):

- 1.6 not listed as having been met. No evidence
- Clarification given for 1.6
- 1.6 not listed as having been met
- SN no details
- 1.6 not listed
- 1.6 not listed as having been met. Reflection indicate that it should.
- 1.6 not listed
- Special needs not clear
- SN required clarification

Note: SN refers to special needs.

Source: VAGO, derived from VIT.

Likewise, VIT does not scrutinise the evidence collected through audits to determine the types of professional learning that teachers undertake or prioritise. The lack of scrutiny diminishes VIT's ability to inform the Minister for Education of teachers' developmental needs, which in turn limits DET's knowledge of teachers' professional learning practices. It also weakens DET's ability to develop and deliver targeted initiatives and assess whether teachers' professional learning practices align with best practice principles. Considering the Victorian Government's Education State reform commitments, we encourage VIT to analyse its audits to better understand teachers' professional learning needs and uptake. This analysis will help VIT to fulfil its legislated requirement to brief the Minister for Education and ensure that DET has access to up-to-date intelligence about the professional learning that teachers complete.

Using the MyPD portal

Although VIT provides minimal information to audited teachers regarding what constitutes sufficient and appropriate evidence, it encourages the use of MyPD—an optional component of MyVIT that enables teachers to maintain centralised records of their professional learning activities. MyPD requires teachers to enter the topic of their completed professional learning activities into free-form text fields. For example, of the 75 918 professional learning activities logged by teachers during the 2014, 2015, and 2016 renewal cycles, over 58 per cent have unique titles. Providing the free-text option hinders VIT's ability to identify trends in teachers' professional learning practices, as it cannot easily filter its dataset. To facilitate efficient and effective analysis, we encourage VIT to create a list of consistent keywords or signifiers that teachers can use to catalogue their professional learning activities according to their focus or desired outcome.

In addition, we found that 6 552 or almost 14 per cent of government school teachers logged their engagement with professional learning on MyPD throughout the 2014, 2015, and 2016 renewal cycles, which indicates that VIT could enhance its promotion of the tool. We encourage VIT to further highlight MyPD and use its data to supplement the information obtained from teachers during the audit process. Doing so may enhance VIT's ability to effectively brief the Minister for Education on teachers' professional learning needs and uptake. It also has the potential to help VIT fulfil its legislated requirement to undertake or endorse research that explores effective teaching and learning practices. For example, we found that MyPD users logged an average of 32.8 hours of annual professional learning between 2014 and 2016—over 50 per cent more than the mandated requirement.

From 2018, VIT has required all audited teachers to submit evidence regarding their completed professional learning activities through MyPD. Teachers must then download a copy of the list generated by MyPD and attach it to their applications. This highlights an opportunity for VIT to drive efficiencies by linking its databases, which could improve its ability to undertake further analysis.

Professional learning framework

Under the ETR Act, VIT has a legislated responsibility to develop and maintain a professional learning framework that supports and promotes teachers' ongoing education. In its current form, the framework does not encourage teachers to pursue professional development throughout their careers—it simply outlines the basic requirements of registration.

Critically, VIT's framework is for internal use only and fails to emphasise the importance of a strong professional learning culture. In contrast, the Queensland College of Teachers' *Continuing Professional Development Policy and Framework* (2017) is publicly available and explicitly articulates the value of professional learning and its key principles. This framework embeds professional learning as an important regulatory requirement for teachers and disseminates critical information in a clear and concise manner.

In the context of Victoria's extensive reform agenda, now may be an opportune time for VIT to consider DET's vision for an innovative and collaborative workforce when reviewing its professional learning framework. As part of this review, we encourage VIT to consider collating its information regarding professional learning within a single, publicly available document. Currently, teachers must search through VIT's complex, multipage website to locate the professional learning requirements and related advice. Having the information available in one place may improve their understanding of VIT's expectations.

Review of the Victorian Institute of Teaching

AITSL's specially-appointed Expert Panel undertook a review titled *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Regulation in Australia* on behalf of the Council of Australian Governments' Education Council. It found that regulatory bodies may focus on either compliance or quality at the expense of the other when they can and should 'operate in parallel'.

As discussed in Part 1, this independent review assessed VIT's management, operations, and governance following serious concerns about its decision-making processes. The review recommended that VIT use its influence to better understand the system's needs and challenges. It found that VIT may achieve this by adopting a 'contemporary risk-based approach' grounded in robust intelligence-gathering and data analytics to target its regulatory activities more effectively. This reinforces our suggestion that VIT codify its audit requirements.

The review also found that VIT is 'too narrowly focused on compliance' and that 'there is greater work to be done in lifting the standards of teacher quality.' It states that modern teaching regulators across the world—such as the Queensland College of Teachers—use their platforms to ensure that the profession remains 'informed and inspired' by promoting examples of high-quality teaching. The review recommended that VIT 'showcase' similar material. VIT has recently updated its strategic plan to reflect these recommendations, which shows a positive commitment to change. We encourage VIT to consider our observations when implementing the review's recommendations.

3

DET's knowledge of professional learning

For professional learning to become ingrained in the everyday practices of teachers, education systems must support schools to create and sustain cultures that value continuous improvement. This is critical to DET's vision for a smarter, fairer and more prosperous Victoria, as increasing the effectiveness of teaching is positively correlated with improvements in student outcomes. DET encourages this systemic change through FISO—the Education State agenda's flagship strategy. FISO informs schools' four-year strategic and annual planning cycles—including the development of their SSPs and AIPs—and emphasises the importance of key professional learning principles, such as collaboration, reflection, and inquiry.

Planning is essential to the development of strong professional learning cultures, as principals and teachers must explicitly prioritise their development to ensure that it occurs amidst their busy schedules. The four-year strategic and annual planning cycles contain various milestones, which, if analysed appropriately, may provide DET with critical information regarding the uptake of key professional learning activities in Victorian government schools.

In this part of the report, we assessed whether DET understands:

- the professional learning that teachers practise and prioritise through the four-year strategic and annual planning cycles, and their PDPs
- the cost of professional learning incurred by schools
- the impact of professional learning—including its key initiatives—on teachers' practices.

3.1 Conclusion

The new SPOT highlights DET's commitment to significant structural change. It provides DET with oversight of schools' four-year strategic and annual planning cycles, including their professional learning needs and practices. SPOT reduces schools' administrative burden, as it enables principals to submit information using a central, interactive template. Overall, SPOT is a positive development for the sector, as it shows DET's willingness to engage with schools on a deeper level by capturing vital information about the barriers and enablers to their success.

The Continua, as well as DET's four-year strategic and annual planning cycles, emphasise the importance of best practice professional learning principles, such as collaboration, adaptation, and reflection. Despite this focus, DET has minimal insight into how each school's improvement priorities align with the goals of their individual teachers. This is because the targets outlined in schools' SSPs and AIPs do not prepopulate in teachers' PDPs, and DET does not conduct any aggregate analysis of the latter's content. DET also lacks assurance that principals conduct teachers' performance and development cycles in a manner that encourages ongoing discussion and collaboration. It is critical for DET to address this gap in its oversight, as the success of the Education State reform agenda hinges on teachers' uptake of its key professional learning strategies.

DET lacks guidance that helps schools to accurately record the cost of their professional learning. As a result, it is unlikely that schools consistently use the correct codes to catalogue their expenditure, which diminishes DET's understanding of the costs schools incur to support on-site and off-site professional learning. This lack of information about costs also means it is difficult to demonstrate the extent to which schools' Student Resource Package allocations sufficiently cover the cost of professional learning—a factor which could discourage principals and teachers from participating in best practice activities.

DET's program-specific evaluations regarding the impact of professional learning have a robust methodology, as they draw on multiple data sources to paint a comprehensive picture of performance and outcomes. DET, however, could investigate additional opportunities to use the data collected through its annual School Staff Survey, which provides valuable information regarding teachers' attitudes to professional learning and the broader school environment.

3.2 DET's knowledge of professional learning

Professional learning at the school level

DET supports government schools to participate in four-year strategic and annual planning cycles composed of various milestones, including a pre-review self-evaluation, a formal review, and the development, implementation, and analysis of their SSP and AIPs. Schools must create a professional learning and development plan as part of their AIPs. This helps schools to identify their professional learning priorities for the following 12 months. As discussed in Part 1, FISO's Improvement Model outlines six high-impact initiatives for schools to enact during this cycle, including the obligation to 'build practice excellence'. This obligation requires schools to establish collaborative teaching teams that thrive on self-reflection and constructive feedback.

DET's management of schools' four-year strategic and annual planning cycles

In late 2017, DET transitioned schools from a static, offline planning system to SPOT—a more robust, interactive platform. SPOT is a comprehensive, web-based repository that enables schools to manage their pre-review self-evaluation, SSP, and AIPs in a single location. DET's previous system increased schools' administrative burden, as it required principals to submit multiple, static files through different software applications, which diminished DET's ability to monitor the contents and completion rates of schools' SSPs and AIPs, as its systems did not support centralised analysis. DET, therefore, had limited assurance that schools effectively engaged with the cycle, used up-to-date templates, or embedded key Education State reform strategies—such as the Continua—into their planning documents.

SPOT, however, provides DET with greater visibility regarding schools' participation in their four-year strategic and annual planning cycles. It requires schools to input their goals, targets, key improvement strategies, and monitoring arrangements in a consistent format. If used effectively, this should enable DET to map schools' needs and preferences regarding professional learning. In addition, SPOT aligns each planning milestone against FISO's Improvement Cycle and requires schools to biannually assess their performance against the objectives outlined in their AIPs, as well as the Continua. As discussed in Part 1, the Continua enables schools to pinpoint their status as either emerging, evolving, embedding, or excelling, and outlines their expected capabilities at each stage. SPOT, therefore, requires schools to engage with FISO and regularly exposes them to best practice principles for school improvement, such as the need to participate in regular professional learning. DET plans to incorporate schools' formal review function into SPOT during Term 2, 2019. This will further ease schools' administrative burden and provide DET with greater oversight of how the recommended key directions from schools' four-year reviews translate into their strategic planning.

Importantly, DET is beginning to leverage the information collected through SPOT to understand how schools progress through FISO's Improvement Cycle. For example, DET has advised that its analysis of SPOT shows that 79 per cent of schools selected 'building practice excellence' as a priority in 2018, demonstrating that principals are targeting enhanced professional learning as a lever for school improvement. According to DET, the data also shows that 91 per cent of schools completed their mid-year monitoring in SPOT, with 74 per cent indicating that their improvement initiatives are either completed or progressing as scheduled. SPOT also has a dashboard functionality, which enables DET to filter the results of schools' self-assessments against the Continua by area and region. Going forward, this type of analysis should enable DET to assist schools in a more targeted and informed manner.

Another aspect of DET's management of schools' planning cycles is through the work of its senior education improvement leaders (SEIL). The Regional Services Group uses SEILs to oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of schools' planning milestones. Each SEIL helps approximately 25 schools to embed FISO—and thus professional learning—within their day-to-day operations. SEILs tailor their support using the Differentiated School Performance Method. This draws on various datasets to determine whether a school's achievement places it in either the transform, recharge, renew, stretch or influence performance group. These groups respectively correlate to low, declining, static, improving, or high performance. This enables SEILs to purposefully target schools that require greater assistance.

We encourage DET to provide SEILs with ongoing guidance that supports them to confidently discharge their duties regarding the four-year strategic and annual planning cycles—particularly their obligation to help schools embed professional learning within their SSPs and AIPs. In 2017–18, DET offered various training sessions to SEILs to enhance their capabilities, which demonstrates a commitment to workforce development. We also advise DET to evaluate whether an average of 25 schools is an appropriate workload for SEILs, as stakeholders conveyed to us that regional staff are becoming increasingly burdened with new responsibilities due to the extensive reform agenda. It is important for DET to address this issue, as its strategic risk register notes that the school review process is critical to enhancing teachers' practices and improving student outcomes.

Figure 3A shows that SEILs are integral to the four-year strategic and annual planning cycles and thus the implementation of professional learning in government schools.

Figure 3A

Key components of schools' four-year strategic and annual planning cycles

What is the process?	Who is involved?	Who oversees this process?
Pre-review self-evaluation		
<p>The pre-review self-evaluation is an in-depth assessment undertaken every four years in the term preceding the school's formal review. To complete the pre-review self-evaluation, the school compiles information from various sources to demonstrate its performance against the objectives of the previous SSP. This involves identifying the barriers to and enablers of success, as well as collaboratively determining the school's proficiency levels against all 16 dimensions of the Continua.</p>	<p>The school's principal and improvement team are responsible for leading the pre-review self-evaluation. They should seek input from the wider school community, including students, parents/carers, and staff.</p>	<p>DET's Regional Services Group directly oversees this process through the SEIL. The SEIL's role is to constructively challenge the evidence put forward by schools, provide feedback, and assist with analysis.</p> <p>Upon completion, the principal, school council president, and the SEIL endorse the pre-review self-evaluation in SPOT.</p>
School review		
<p>Led by the School Review Panel, this multi-week process encompasses a more in-depth, evidence-based evaluation of the school's performance against the previous SSP. The panel builds on the pre-review self-evaluation undertaken in the preceding term and aims to validate the school's proficiency levels against the Continua—particularly regarding the Excellence in Teaching and Learning dimension—through a day of dedicated fieldwork.</p> <p>Reviewers primarily assess the school's teaching practice, whether staff successfully 'amplify' and consider the student voice, the efficacy of leadership, and curriculum content. The panel collects this information through targeted questioning, and undertakes further fieldwork, such as classroom observations and focus groups with members of the school community, including students and staff. At the conclusion of the review, the panel produces a final collaborative assessment of the school's proficiency levels against the Continua, and recommends key directions for the school's new SSP.</p>	<p>The School Review Panel conducts this process. Its core members include an accredited reviewer independently appointed by DET's central office, as well as the SEIL, the principal, and the school council president. The panel also comprises two challenge partners (leading educators or experts in other fields relevant to the school's improvement focus selected by the principal and SEIL) and members of the school community.</p>	<p>DET's central office manages the contract for a panel of independent school reviewers. It provides reviewers, principals, SEILs, and challenge partners with dedicated professional learning to support their involvement in the process.</p> <p>In addition, DET's central office quality assures all reports undertaken by new reviewers, and those produced for schools in the transform performance group (DET's most vulnerable schools). DET has also advised that it randomly assesses a further 20 to 25 per cent of all other reports. These reinforce the quality assurance checks undertaken by SEILs and principals at the completion of each review.</p>
SSP		
<p>Following the review, the school produces a new SSP with support from their SEIL. The SSP is a single-page, high-level document that outlines the school's vision, goals, and targets for the next four years, as well as the key improvement strategies and FISO dimensions that underlie their achievement. As a living document, the school may update its SSP each year.</p>	<p>The principal develops the SSP in conjunction with the school improvement team, school council, SEIL, and wider community.</p>	<p>Upon completion, the principal, school council president, and SEIL endorse the SSP in SPOT. DET's relevant regional director also approves the plan as the Secretary's delegate.</p>

Figure 3A

Key components of schools’ four-year strategic and annual planning cycles—continued

What is the process?	Who is involved?	Who oversees this process?
AIPs		
<p>The AIP outlines 12-month targets that contribute to the achievement of the SSP’s four-year objectives. Schools, therefore, will complete four AIPs over the course of DET’s planning cycle.</p> <p>The AIP articulates the key improvement strategies that school will employ, as well as the actions and resources that underlie them. Schools must also state what success looks like, as well as the evidence they will use to demonstrate its achievement. Importantly, each school must complete a professional learning and development plan to enhance the capability of its workforce.</p>	<p>The principal develops the AIPs in consultation with the school’s improvement team and the wider community.</p>	<p>The principal and SEIL approve the AIP in SPOT, while the school council president endorses its contents.</p> <p>Schools, with the support of their SEILs, have a responsibility to monitor the implementation of their AIPs using the Continua. To complete this, schools must self-evaluate their performance biannually and submit evidence of impact through SPOT for their SEILs to review.</p>

Source: VAGO, derived from DET.

Schools’ professional learning and development plans

Since October 2017, DET has required schools to complete a professional learning and development plan as part of their AIPs, which requires schools to identify up to three professional learning priorities that promote collaborative and inquiry-driven practice. As discussed in Figure 3A, these support the achievement of schools’ key improvement strategies, which breakdown their yearly targets into smaller, incremental actions. Importantly, schools must also define ‘evidence of impact,’ such as the anticipated changes to teachers’ knowledge, mindsets, and skills. Schools record their professional learning priorities in SPOT using an interactive template. This provides DET with assurance that schools input their data in a consistent manner. Against each professional learning priority, schools must specify:

- who will attend the activity
- where and when the activity will occur
- the key professional learning strategies that it will employ, such as peer observation or inquiry-based research
- the organisational structures that will permit the activity to occur, for example, timetabled planning days
- the type of expertise accessed, such as SEILs, in-school experts, or external professional learning providers.

The **70:20:10 model** suggests that employees should derive 70 per cent of their development from on-the-job experiences, 20 per cent from interactions with others (such as coaching), and 10 per cent from formal sessions (such as attendance at conferences, courses, and seminars).

In 2018, DET developed the quality assessment tool to help schools create comprehensive AIPs. The tool reiterates the importance of FISO's Improvement Cycle by echoing its four key stages—evaluate and diagnose; prioritise and set goals; develop and plan; implement and monitor. It describes DET's expectations for each step by outlining a comprehensive suite of criteria. For example, the professional learning and development plan must align to the school's broader 12-month targets, promote collaborative and evidence-based practice, and prioritise classroom-based activities (as per the 70:20:10 model). The latter is important for schools to implement, as they are not presently investing in the most effective forms of professional learning. DET-commissioned research by a private consultancy firm in 2015 shows that most professional learning occurs through formal sessions—75 per cent of surveyed teachers participated in courses and workshops, while 63 per cent attended conferences and seminars. Part 3.3 provides more information about the size of school investment in this type of learning.

SEILs use SPOT to provide each principal with feedback regarding their AIP. This includes whether their school's AIP conforms to the quality assessment tool's criteria. Overall, the quality assessment tool is a positive development, as it should promote consistency across DET's regions.

Monitoring the AIP and the professional learning and development plan

SEILs endorse schools' professional learning and development plans through SPOT as part of the AIP submission process. This provides them with oversight regarding their schools' needs and priorities. DET expects schools to continually monitor their AIPs in short learning cycles of six to eight weeks throughout the year. This encourages schools to practise adaptive and reflective behaviour. Likewise, principals must formally document their mid-year monitoring discussions in SPOT and evaluate their progress at the end of the year against the AIP's goals and targets, as well as the delivery of their key improvement strategies. The latter should occur with the support of their SEILs, who have a professional obligation to ensure that principals establish an on-site, evidence-based professional learning program that embraces collaborative practice.

The VGSA introduced four **professional practice days** for teachers each year. Professional practice days free teachers from their scheduled duties, such as classroom instruction, and enable them to undertake activities that enhance their knowledge and skills.

To ensure its reform agenda is appropriately targeted, we encourage DET to routinely analyse the information that it collects through SPOT about schools' professional learning and development plans. This is important, as internal documentation shows that the four-year strategic and annual planning cycles are DET's chief mechanism to support the implementation of the VGSA's new entitlements, including professional practice days. Despite this, neither the professional learning and development plan nor teachers' individual PDPs contain a section dedicated to the organisation of their professional practice days. DET should consider strengthening the link between the professional learning and development plan and teachers' professional practice days during bargaining for the next enterprise agreement.

Likewise, the Continua states that high-performing schools should develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate their professional learning and development plans using student data. We encourage DET to develop checks to ensure that this occurs in practice. DET should also interrogate the plans of high-performing schools to understand the conditions that led to their success and share these with the broader system. This will encourage schools to learn from one another, reducing duplication of effort.

Professional learning at the teacher level

In systems that value continuous improvement, there is a strong connection between professional learning and staff performance and development processes. This is because high-performing staff embrace new opportunities, innovative research, and reflective behaviour—all facets of high-quality professional learning. In the context of schools, this means that professional learning is neither a discrete nor isolated practice, rather, it should permeate all aspects of teachers' day-to-day operations.

According to DET's Performance and Development Guidelines for the Teacher Class (2018), principals must support teachers to engage in collaborative practices such as mentoring and inquiry-based research. The guidelines also note that teachers' PDPs should explicitly link to the activities and milestones outlined in their schools' SSPs and AIPs. The link between individual and group priorities is pivotal to the Education State's reform agenda, as firmly embedding professional learning into schools' day-to-day routines requires a concentrated, collective effort from DET, principals, and teachers.

The development of teachers' PDPs

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound. According to research, it is important for teachers to set detailed goals with a clear starting point. This concentrates their actions and increases the likelihood of their achievement.

In 2017, DET implemented an online PDP system for teachers to use from 2018. To initiate their performance and development cycles, teachers meet with their reviewers to reflect on the previous year and discuss their aspirations. Teachers describe their learning intentions through four SMART goals that align with their schools' overarching improvement strategies, as well as with AITSL's key domains—professional knowledge, professional practice, professional engagement—and student outcomes. Teachers then identify the strategies that will enable them to achieve these goals and the evidence they will use to underpin their achievement. According to AITSL's *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework*, published in 2012, the latter should encompass—at a minimum—data that shows a tangible impact on student outcomes, evidence of collaboration with colleagues, and information derived from peer observation sessions. We encourage DET to develop checks to ensure that these activities occur in practice.

In addition, teachers have a mid-cycle discussion with their reviewers to discuss any barriers to or enablers of success, and a formal review at the end of the year. DET expects teachers to engage in regular, informal discussions with their reviewers over the course of the cycle.

Analysing the data captured in teachers' PDPs

According to its guidelines, DET will only ever scrutinise PDP data at the aggregate-level. It will never assess this information for individual teachers or schools. This means that DET has limited assurance that the goals outlined in teachers' PDPs align with their schools' SSPs and AIPs. We encourage DET to develop a robust accountability mechanism that maintains the privacy of its teachers. This mechanism should not be punitive, but simply aim to ensure that DET's strategic planning cycle functions as intended.

In addition, we saw no evidence that DET uses its online system to assess the integrity of teachers' PDPs—such as their completeness, accuracy, or timeliness—or that it conducts any of the aforementioned aggregate-level analysis. In future strategic planning cycles, we encourage DET to assess this data to produce high-level insights regarding teachers' professional learning practices, as well as the barriers and enablers to their success. This will provide information about the value of the performance and development process to teachers, as well as the use and impact of their professional practice days.

Link between teachers' PDPs and their schools' professional learning and development plans

DET's new PDP process is separate to the SPOT platform and forms part of its eduPay system, which covers human resources and payroll. As a result, the goals and targets outlined in schools' SSPs, AIPs, and professional learning and development plans do not prepopulate in teachers' PDPs, which limits DET's assurance that teachers' PDPs reflect their schools' overarching improvement strategies. To bridge this gap, DET released a factsheet that helps teachers to link the SSP and AIP to their individual aspirations. It also enables teachers to articulate how their goals relate to FISO. While this factsheet is a good prompt, it is a non-compulsory element of teachers' PDPs, as DET has not embedded it within the online template. We encourage DET to consider ways to further align its systems and strategies to ensure that it formally includes the importance of collaborative professional learning in the PDP process.

3.3 DET's knowledge of the professional learning costs incurred by schools

In addition to the strategic insight discussed in the previous section, DET needs accurate information regarding the cost of on-site and off-site professional learning to ensure that schools have sufficient funds to budget for these activities. This information should improve the uptake of DET's reform agenda, as to implement their professional learning and development plans, schools may require funds to release teachers from their regular classroom duties.

The Grattan Institute's 2014 report, *Making time for great teaching*, observes that professional learning programs often fail due to insufficient resourcing, so governments must thoroughly understand the true cost of professional learning, as well as the time required for its effective implementation.

Funding arrangements for Victorian government schools

Since 2005, DET has funded Victorian government schools through the Student Resource Package. The Student Resource Package determines each school's unique budget by assessing their complexities against 49 reference points. These reference points consider the school's operating environment—such as its size and location—as well as the needs of its cohort, including the number of students with a disability. The amount of funding that schools spend on professional learning will vary, as DET's central office empowers principals to make local decisions for local needs. DET, however, has no guidance regarding the expected cost of professional learning for different school types, nor does it conduct any overarching analysis.

Budgeting for professional learning

Principals—in conjunction with their school councils—develop an annual budget that operationalises the goals and targets of their SSPs and AIPs. Ideally, this budget should reflect the priorities outlined in their professional learning and development plans. According to the *Student Resource Package 2018 Guide (Revised)*, DET expects principals to develop a staff replacement strategy that considers teachers' planned and unplanned absences. Schools must budget for casual relief teachers (CRT) as part of this process. CRTs are a valuable resource, as they cover classes while teachers attend on-site and off-site professional learning activities. It is important for schools to appropriately budget for CRTs, as failure to do so may derail the achievement of their professional learning and development plans.

Reporting the cost of professional learning

Schools use CASES21—DET's standardised administrative system—to manage their budget, including the cost of professional learning. DET requires schools to enter their expenditure using the *Chart of Accounts for Victorian Government Schools* (Chart of Accounts).

The Chart of Accounts groups transactions into programs, sub-programs, and initiatives. DET has a sub-ledger for each school to oversee their individual transactions. This information feeds into DET's general ledger, showing the net transactions across Victorian government schools. The Chart of Accounts contains various reporting codes, as well as their associated descriptions. It is DET's chief mechanism for ensuring that schools enter their financial information in an accurate manner.

When schools record an expense, they must input a general ledger code, followed by a subprogram code. The former categorises the type of expenditure, while the latter provides more specific information regarding its content. DET has one general ledger code that explicitly relates to professional learning—see Figure 3B. Schools then enter the subprogram code '7010—Professional Development' to finalise the expenditure's entry.

Figure 3B
DET's general ledger code for professional learning

Account code	Account title	Account description
86910	Conferences/Courses/ Seminars	Incurred for conferences, conventions, lectures, meetings, speeches, Q&A sessions, training sessions

Source: VAGO, derived from the *Chart of Accounts for Victorian Government Schools* (Version 7.5.5 July 2018).

In addition, DET has a general ledger code that enables schools to record their CRT-related expenses—see Figure 3C.

Figure 3C
DET's general ledger code for CRTs

Account code	Account title	Account description
80071	Casual Relief Teaching Staff	Salary paid to a CRT who is employed by the school council for up to and including 30 days

Source: VAGO, derived from the *Chart of Accounts for Victorian Government Schools* (Version 7.5.5 July 2018).

If schools use a CRT to facilitate professional learning activities, they may input the subprogram code '7010—Professional Development'. We requested an extract of this information from CASES21 for the years 2014, 2015, and 2016, but DET advised that it cannot differentiate between the expenditure used to cover the different uses of CRTs (such as illnesses or planned leave).

DET does not provide any guidance to schools regarding the cataloguing of professional learning activities. As a result, it is unlikely that schools consistently use the subprogram code 7010 to attribute the cost of CRTs to the appropriate area. Critically, this means that DET does not understand the true cost of professional learning. DET requires all schools to publish their expenditure relating to conferences, courses, and seminars in their annual reports under the category, 'professional development'. This reporting, however, is inaccurate, as it does not encapsulate the total cost associated with implementing in-school professional learning programs or contracting CRTs to cover teachers' absences. Going forward, we encourage DET to evaluate its internal reporting mechanisms to ensure that schools accurately account for the breadth of their professional learning activities. This will provide DET with better quality information on schools' expenditure and will increase the transparency of its public reporting.

Currently, DET has limited assurance that the budgets provided to schools sufficiently support them to participate in professional learning. It is important for DET to increase its understanding of professional learning costs, as failure to appropriately budget for this activity could compromise the ability of schools to realise DET’s reform objectives. In 2018, DET increased schools’ total student per capita funding by an average of 1.44 per cent to cover the costs associated with implementing the VGSA’s professional practice days. These costs could include the employment of CRTs to ensure continuity for students. However, without an accurate understanding of schools’ use of CRTs to facilitate both on-site and off-site professional learning activities, DET has limited assurance that this is a commensurate funding increase. We encourage DET to capture and analyse this information to ensure that schools’ Student Resource Package allocations incorporate the true cost of undertaking professional learning activities.

Investing in effective professional learning

During 2014, 2015, and 2016, Victorian government schools spent \$107 332 725 on attendance at conferences, courses, and seminars—see Figure 3D.

Figure 3D
Expenditure coded to Conferences/Courses/Seminars, as well as associated hospitality and light refreshments costs

Calendar year	Expenditure
2014	\$ 34 733 125
2015	\$ 34 700 503
2016	\$ 37 899 097
Total	\$ 107 332 725

Source: VAGO, derived from DET.

This expenditure represents a sizable portion of schools’ funding—particularly considering the consensus that attendance at conferences is the least effective form of professional learning. We encourage DET to develop guidance that helps schools to invest in activities known to have the greatest impact on teachers’ practices, such as the development of in-school professional learning programs that are teacher led and classroom based. Although the Continua articulates what high-quality professional learning looks like in schools, DET should assess whether principals and teachers require more information regarding their on-the-ground implementation.

3.4 Evaluating the impact of professional learning

Ineffective professional learning programs waste teachers' valuable time, deplete DET's finite resources, and fail to positively harness students' potential. While there is some evaluation within its four-year strategic and annual planning cycles, DET needs further assurance that its programs improve outcomes for Victoria's teachers and their students. This is because effective evaluation processes use multiple sources of evidence to paint a comprehensive picture of school performance.

In this part of the report, we outline DET's initiatives to support best practice professional learning in schools. We then assess whether DET evaluates their impact on teachers in a routine and systematic manner.

DET's programs to support professional learning for teachers

Research suggests that governments must function as role models to induce practice and behavioural changes in principals and teachers. Historically, DET has not provided teachers with curriculum advice or information about effective pedagogical strategies and techniques. DET has recently entered this space and is developing a suite of guidelines and tools that aim to strengthen teachers' practices, which is a positive development.

Victorian Teaching and Learning Model

In February 2018, DET introduced the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model to translate FISO's improvement strategies into everyday practice. This model helps DET to deliver high-quality teaching to every student in every classroom.

DET has developed three tools to support this vision, which are available for public download on its website:

- *Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*—this document explores nine signature pedagogies that foster high-quality learning for students. DET has collated the pedagogies' underlying evidence and developed a suite of actions and indicators that explicitly outline their best practice implementation.
- *The pedagogical model*—this describes the cyclical nature of effective practice—engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate—and helps teachers to apply the practice principles in their classrooms.
- *High Impact Teaching Strategies*—this document outlines 10 evidence-based instructional practices that reliably increase student learning, such as setting goals and structuring lessons.

DET is currently conducting early analysis of the model, and monitors schools' uptake of these tools through SPOT as a proxy for their impact. It also surveyed principals at Area Forums to better understand the resources that they would need to effectively implement the model.

In Our Classrooms

DET's 'In Our Classrooms' initiative creates an online space for teachers to explore evidence-based strategies and remain abreast of new professional learning opportunities. DET has comprehensively assessed teachers' engagement with the site to increase the specificity and relatability of its content. DET has undertaken this analysis because it is wary of oversaturating teachers with conceptually vague information, inducing 'frequency fatigue'—a hesitancy to engage with updated content due to the perception that it will be time-consuming and difficult to navigate. By analysing the number of hits its webpages receive—as well as the length of time users spend on the webpages—DET has found that teachers favour resources with direct classroom application as opposed to those that require significant interpretation. As a result, DET has made various recommendations for the development of future content, such as a clearer focus on outcomes, reduced repetition, and better signposting. This shows that DET is committed to ensuring that its instructional material is valuable to teachers.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

In June 2018, DET published the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Phase 2: Achieving Excellence and Equity in Literacy and Numeracy* (Literacy and Numeracy Strategy). This succeeded Version 1, which DET released in June 2017. The strategy supports teachers to engage in ongoing professional learning that enhances their practice. The Victorian Government's Education State agenda focuses on these foundational disciplines, as they help students to pursue lifelong learning, participate in the workforce, and contribute to society. The strategy aims to provide teachers and school leaders with access to practical, evidence-based resources that enhance their knowledge of the curriculum, pedagogical research, and different assessment frameworks.

In 2018–19, the Victorian Government allocated \$22.1 million to the strategy's implementation across a four-year period. The strategy helps teachers to strengthen their practice through the following:

- The Victorian Literacy Portal—this includes the Literacy Teaching Toolkit, which contains instructional advice, expert videos, sample lessons, case studies and collated evidence, as well as tailored support for Koorie students.
- The Victorian Numeracy Portal—this includes the Mathematics Curriculum Companion, which assembles online resources and teaching ideas.
- The Insight Assessment Platform—this contains a series of online assessments that teachers can use to better understand the needs of their students.
- The Teacher Reference Group—this provides a critical interface between DET's central office and its teaching workforce to ensure that guidance regarding professional practice is relevant and targeted. In 2018, the Teacher Reference Group met once per term. It consists of 15 teachers with diverse backgrounds sourced from across the state.

- Other professional learning opportunities delivered through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership (Bastow) that target schools' literacy and numeracy leaders.

The Victorian Government allocated an additional \$187 million to the Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Support Initiative in October 2018. The initiative aims to provide intensive, individualised support to students in Years 8 to 10 that are at risk of finishing school without the foundational skills needed for future work or study. From 2019, nominated teachers will receive professional learning through Bastow to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for these students.

DET's evaluation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Similar to its evaluation of the In Our Classrooms initiative, DET has begun to assess how teachers engage with its guidance on school-based professional learning activities:

- the Literacy Teaching Toolkit received 774 012 visits from 1 January to 31 October 2018, making it one of DET's most valued resources for schools—importantly, teachers' use of this tool has increased over time, demonstrating its long-term effectiveness
- the Victorian Literacy Portal has received 33 485 unique visits from 1 January to 31 October 2018, while the Victorian Numeracy Portal had 18 932 visits
- in Term 1 of 2018, DET surveyed 160 schools and found that 77 per cent reported using the Literacy Teaching Toolkit (it received 10 020 homepage visits during March) while 92 per cent referenced DET's *High Impact Teaching Strategies*
- all primary and specialist schools adopted a literacy-focused key improvement strategy as part of their AIPs for 2018, demonstrating the overarching relevance of DET's reform agenda.

DET has performed some basic, preliminary analysis regarding the distribution of its tools and guidance. However, due to the strategy's newness, DET is yet to assess whether it has positively impacted teachers and students. DET advised it has recently developed a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which it will implement from 2019.

Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership

Bastow is DET's key professional learning branch. It supports DET's reform initiatives by delivering a range of programs that aim to strengthen teachers' skills and knowledge. Bastow predominately focuses on leadership initiatives, as its primary objective is to foster a pipeline of aspiring principals. Despite its objective, Bastow also delivers programs that target high-performing classroom teachers, such as learning specialists and literacy leaders. DET subsidises schools' participation in most Bastow programs and offers further financial assistance to small schools, as well as those located in rural and regional areas.

Bastow's support for the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

In 2017, DET required all primary and specialist school principals to nominate literacy leaders—teachers with strong instructional capabilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These teachers managed their schools' overarching literacy strategies and attended Bastow induction workshops to hone their skills. The course helps teachers to understand how FISO relates to their day-to-day practice, plan literacy initiatives to maximise student outcomes, and embed key departmental tools—such as *High Impact Teaching Strategies*—into their work. DET then expected literacy leaders to share their experiences by delivering professional learning activities to their colleagues. Importantly, teachers from 99.7 per cent of primary schools completed the literacy leader induction workshops across 2017 and 2018, with 93 per cent of participants indicating that the course was relevant to their work.

DET further encourages these teachers to build their capabilities through the Leading Literacy for Networks course—Bastow's central Education State initiative. The course encompasses five days of professional learning delivered over a six-month period, and shares up-to-date research, innovative pedagogical strategies, and effective evaluation methods. Master trainers—network-nominated expert teachers—deliver the course, and DET later surveyed them to gauge their reflections. Of the 50 per cent that responded, 100 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed that the course enables them to stimulate professional conversations and self-analysis among their participants. This suggests that master trainers are successfully encouraging teachers to critique their pre-existing practices and perceptions. Qualitative feedback, however, suggests that master trainers require a funded preparatory day to ensure they have a thorough understanding of the course materials. Since July 2018, 1 269 teachers across 59 intakes have participated in the course, with further workshops planned for 2019–22.

By the end of 2018, all primary and specialist school principals must nominate teachers with equivalent responsibility for their schools' numeracy strategies. Secondary school principals must also appoint experts from both disciplines to receive similar training. We also encourage DET to consider offering an organised program of professional learning for regular teaching staff that is similar to its Bastow initiatives for school leaders.

Bastow's support for Learning Specialists

As discussed in Part 1, the VGSA introduced the Learning Specialist classification—a new position that enables high-performing teachers to progress their careers while remaining in the classroom. DET began hiring Learning Specialists in 2017 for commencement in Term 1, 2018. DET fully subsidises Learning Specialists' participation in various Bastow courses to strengthen their skills. DET has collected basic information regarding the initial implementation of this initiative through the School Staff Survey.

Professional Learning Communities

The PLC program is pivotal to DET's Education State ambitions. PLCs are teacher teams that work together to achieve a common goal—improving student outcomes. PLCs aim to enhance teachers' subject matter expertise, curriculum knowledge, and instructional capabilities through structured cycles of inquiry-based research. This requires principals to explicitly allocate resources—such as time and money—to ensure that teachers leave the classroom and collaborate with one another. PLCs often focus on a single topic and undergo fortnightly or monthly cycles of inquiry encompassing four stages, including:

- **assessment**—teacher teams review their school's assessment methods and results to identify areas for improvement
- **examining instruction**—teachers share what is or is not working by observing each other and reviewing their classes' instructional materials
- **developing new practice**—teachers engage with experts, each other, and up-to-date research to refresh their practices
- **planning**—teachers plan new lessons in light of their learnings.

Importantly, the program frames professional learning as a routine, collaborative practice focused on improving student outcomes—it should not be a solitary pursuit that occurs annually through attendance at conferences or seminars.

Pilot of the Professional Learning Communities program

In 2016–17, DET trialled the program in 64 schools across Victoria. It required principals to appoint up to three instructional leaders to head their schools' collaborative teacher teams. Instructional leaders are exemplary classroom teachers with an aptitude for leadership. They support their colleagues to enhance their skills through focused conversations, respectful debate, and practical demonstrations. To help schools adopt the 'PLC mindset' and understand its connection to FISO's Improvement Cycle, DET delivered two concurrent streams of professional learning for:

- school leaders (principals and assistant principals)—four modules of off-site training over four days
- instructional leaders—five modules of off-site training over five days plus three modules of school-based activities over three days.

DET fully subsidised the cost of attending these training sessions and provided schools with access to further support, including a facilitator-coach. It also installed a full-time PLC manager in each of its four regions to guide schools in the program's implementation.

Due to the success of the pilot, DET allocated \$32.3 million in 2017–18 to implement the initiative across 800 government schools by 2021.

Evaluation of the Professional Learning Communities pilot

Throughout the pilot, schools completed a comprehensive suite of evaluation activities. DET commissioned external consultants to conduct this analysis, which included surveying schools, regional staff, and PLC managers to understand their existing beliefs, knowledge, and practices. These surveys occurred in Term 1 of the school year to establish a baseline for future assessments. The evaluators collated the surveys' results into dashboards, which they distributed to schools and regions. These empowered PLCs to adapt their methodologies using up-to-date evidence.

The school-level survey had 1 255 responses, including 876 teachers. This included participants from 84 per cent of the pilot schools. The survey returned 'fairly positive' results, demonstrating that teachers, instructional leaders, and principals believe in the program's potential to improve student outcomes. Importantly, it found that while schools are working to embed PLCs, they require further time and support to transition beyond shallow, 'surface-level' collaboration to more intensive learning that challenges the status quo. This was an expected outcome, as significant changes to teachers' knowledge and skills require multiple iterations of the inquiry cycle.

DET addressed this feedback by making several early alterations to the program. This included redesigning the professional learning modules to improve their impact and delivery, incorporating SEILs into the PLC support model, and trialling an interschool network in Wodonga to facilitate knowledge-sharing amongst leadership teams. Importantly, the program's first intake of schools following the pilot responded positively to the updated professional learning modules, reinforcing the importance of regular review.

In Term 4, the evaluators compiled various sources of evidence to assess the pilot's impact on students, school staff, and regional leaders. This included an evaluation of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores of pilot and non-pilot schools. While analysis of NAPLAN scores found no statistically significant differences, the testing occurred in the pilot's early stages and thus does not capture the program's overall impact. Timing also affected the evaluators' analysis of the School Staff Survey results, which showed no discernible change between pilot and non-pilot schools. Despite the absence of findings, undertaking this type of analysis is indicative of best practice, as it emphasises that high-quality professional learning should measurably improve student outcomes.

The evaluators also conducted various surveys to assess the level of change inspired by PLCs. This built on the baseline data collected in the initial surveys. Importantly, the school-level survey found that pilot schools maintained their confidence in the program's efficacy and that their understanding of the inquiry cycle improved over time. The survey also emphasised that teacher teams meet regularly (around twice per month) demonstrating that schools are effectively embedding the foundational elements of PLCs, such as timetabled sessions. Despite this, only 33 per cent of teachers reported receiving 'useful' feedback from their school and instructional leaders. This suggests that most schools lack a strong culture of trust and reflection. Other indicators of openness, however, showed a marked improvement. For example, 61 per cent of teachers indicated that their school timetable supports peer observation—an increase of 9 per cent from the baseline survey. While there is still a lot to achieve, this demonstrates that the program is inducing positive structural change in schools.

Teachers also reported that they spend most of their time in the assessment phase of the inquiry cycle instead of examining their actions or developing new strategies. Remedying this issue is critical to the program's long-term success, as teachers must interrogate and improve their practices to catalyse changes in student outcomes.

DET's commissioned evaluation of the pilot is indicative of best practice, as it used information from multiple sources to paint a comprehensive picture of PLCs in Victorian schools. Importantly, DET has begun to address some of the consultants' concerns by developing new professional learning modules that clarify the program's approach and intent, as well as its relationship with FISO. DET has also hired additional regional managers to ensure that schools are thoroughly resourced. The consultants will continue to assess the program during its rollout, and we encourage DET to actively evaluate and implement their suggestions.

[Funding for pilot and non-pilot schools to implement the Professional Learning Communities program](#)

DET provided the 64 pilot schools with a once-off grant of \$60 000 because the schools had limited time to budget for the release of instructional leaders from their regular classroom duties. Considering the program's progressive roll-out, DET anticipates that other schools will not encounter this barrier, as they will have ample time to undertake the necessary planning. As such, these schools will not receive the once-off grant of \$60 000. To assess the impact of this restricted funding, the consultants investigated whether instructional leaders in pilot schools received similar time release to those involved in the first official intake (155 schools). The consultants observed only minor variances and noted that some pilot schools did not spend the \$60 000 as intended, but used it to support other improvement activities, such as the development of feedback and observation programs. Critically, pilot schools noted that the grant advanced the implementation of their PLCs faster than otherwise possible. It is important for DET to monitor the differences in pilot and non-pilot schools over time, as the grant—or lack thereof—may impact how schools embed PLCs in the short and long term.

DET's contention that schools should plan for the time release of instructional leaders within their existing budgets operates on the assumption that existing levels of funding are appropriate. As discussed in Part 3.3, we encourage DET to undertake research that investigates the true cost of best practice professional learning activities, as it is currently unable to track the expenditure associated with CRTs. We advise DET to incorporate this information into its funding methodology and share any findings with schools.

Additional tools that evaluate the uptake of DET's professional learning programs and ethos in schools

School Staff Survey

The School Staff Survey is DET's primary feedback mechanism. It allows principals, teachers, and education support staff to reflect on factors that influence student outcomes. DET requires all schools to participate in the survey each year, however, it is not compulsory for individual staff members. To complete the survey, participants respond to a series of statements using a Likert scale. DET then posts the results—including basic benchmarking data—on the School Information Portal for principals to share with their staff. The School Staff Survey is a valuable tool, as it has the potential to measure changes in teachers' knowledge and beliefs, as well as the broader school environment.

The survey has a standardised format. It is comprised of one core module and four optional modules. Schools must respond to the core material every year, and principals may select additional modules for their staff to complete. This enables principals to gather information regarding areas of local interest. DET upgrades at least one of the optional modules to mandatory status each year on a rotational cycle. As shown in Figure 3E, three modules were compulsory in 2018. These contributed to DET's internal statewide reporting.

Figure 3E
Content assessed in the School Staff Survey in 2018

Modules	Compulsory in 2018
School Climate	Yes—core
School Leadership	Yes
Professional Learning	No
Staff Safety and Wellbeing	No
Teaching and Learning	Yes

Note: Only the Instructional Leadership component of the School Leadership module was mandatory.

Source: VAGO, derived from DET.

The Professional Learning module

The Professional Learning module enables teachers to provide honest, anonymous feedback regarding their schools' professional learning cultures, which may assist both DET and principals to identify areas for improvement.

The module was last compulsory for schools to complete in 2014. DET planned to rotate it back into the survey in 2018, however, due to competing priorities, it remained optional. Despite this decision, DET advised that 58 per cent of schools opted to complete the Professional Learning module, demonstrating its value to principals.

Given the Education State reform agenda's pronounced focus on improving the quality of teachers, we encourage DET to consider the benefits of upgrading the optional Professional Learning module to 'core' status. Most of DET's key reforms, such as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, frame professional learning as a critical lever for improving the knowledge of teachers and thus their ability to meet students' needs. Reclassifying this module will enable DET to routinely collect system-wide information regarding the efficacy of schools' professional learning cultures, which may strengthen its program-level evaluations.

Panorama reports use information from multiple sources, including students' test results, to paint a comprehensive picture of school-level performance.

DET's analysis of the School Staff Survey

DET regularly assesses the School Staff Survey's results at the local-, regional-, and system-levels. It aggregates each school's individual results, and breaks down the percentage of positive, neutral, and negative responses. DET conveys this information to schools through Panorama reports, which SEILs use to target their improvement efforts.

DET also discusses the survey's results at its Regional Performance Reviews. Regional Performance Reviews facilitate 'deep and structured' performance conversations between senior leaders from DET's central office and each of its four regions. These biannual forums use purpose-built dashboards to identify and address issues of local concern with the aim of improving student outcomes.

The School Staff Survey and the VGSA

In 2018, DET used the survey to collect demographic information from staff, such as years of service, as well as the use, occurrence, and value of teachers' professional practice days. The survey also sought feedback regarding teachers' perceptions of the learning specialist position. This information will form part of DET's evaluation of the VGSA's new provisions for teachers. It is currently unclear how DET plans to use this information, however, we encourage DET to interrogate it closely in conjunction with other sources of data.

Student Attitudes to School Survey

Each year, DET surveys all Victorian government school students from Years 4 to 12 to understand their attitudes to the school environment, including the efficacy of classroom instruction. This survey may provide valuable information regarding improvements to teachers' practices. We therefore encourage DET to consider to what extent this tool may contribute to its evaluations of professional learning initiatives.

Appendix A

Audit Act 1994 section 16— submissions and comments

We have consulted with VIT and DET, and we considered their views when reaching our audit conclusions. As required by section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994*, we gave a draft copy of this report, or relevant extracts, to those agencies and asked for their submissions and comments. We also provided a copy of the report to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

Responses were received as follows:

DET	50
VIT.....	51

RESPONSE provided by the Acting Secretary, DET



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BRI023990

Andrew Greaves
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 31, 35 Collins Street
MELBOURNE 3000

Dear Mr Greaves

Proposed report: Professional Learning for School Teachers

Thank you for your letter of 25 January 2019 and the opportunity to comment on the proposed report for this performance audit.


The Department of Education and Training is committed to supporting schools to sustain a professional learning culture of supportive and reflective practice, and is proud of its investment in initiatives that enhance teacher quality and improve student outcomes.

The Department has reviewed the report and welcomes the positive overall conclusion that its professional learning agenda conforms to best practice principles. It is also pleasing that many of the observations in the report are positive, highlighting the significant improvements to the Department's oversight of school planning (which includes planning for professional learning and development) and the extensive evaluation of the Professional Learning Communities program that represents best practice.

The Department acknowledges VAGO's suggestion that an enhanced understanding of the costs incurred when establishing and implementing a robust professional learning program for teachers, complemented by the Department's strong understanding of schools' planning processes, will strengthen support for its Education State Reforms.

Should you wish to discuss the Department's response, please contact Jonathan Kaplan, Executive Director, Integrity and Assurance Division, via telephone on: (03) 7022 0119 or by email: kaplan.jonathan@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely


Jenny Afza
Acting Secretary
8/2/2019



RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, VIT



11 February 2019

Mr Andrew Greaves
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 31, 35 Collins Street
MELBOURNE 3000

Dear Mr Greaves,

RE: Professional Learning for School Teachers, Victorian Auditor-General's Report (VAGO)
File No: 32786

Thank you for your letter of 25 January 2019, and the opportunity to comment on the proposed report of the *Professional Learning for School Teachers* performance audit.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching has reviewed the report and accepts that the findings provide significant observations about teacher professional learning that can be incorporated into the current plan for transformation of the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

The Review of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) conducted by Penny Armytage recommends that the VIT expands its activities beyond a narrow focus on compliance, towards actively working with the profession to educate teachers and the community about teacher quality. Your report reinforces the importance of this approach to regulation in relation to teacher professional learning.

The VIT Council has developed the Strategic Plan 2018-2020. Within that plan is the strategic objective to enable quality teaching and the best educational outcomes. This includes showcasing best teaching practices and using data proactively to identify improvement opportunities, which are key findings in your report.

The following actions will be implemented in relation to the observations contained within the report:

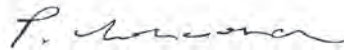
- Business system redevelopment to provide greater facility in data capture, analysis and reporting in relation to teacher professional learning.
- Policy and process review for renewal of registration audit, including the establishment of thresholds of sufficient and appropriate evidence of professional learning. Education of teachers about thresholds and the development of resources and best practice examples to support compliance.
- Utilising business intelligence to analyse data on professional learning within a broader professional environment to understand teacher professional learning needs. Reporting this to the Minister for Education and stakeholders such as the Department of Education and Training.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching is committed to reform that develop its understanding of how teachers and early childhood teachers perceive, practice, and prioritise professional learning across Victoria; and how best to support teachers in this endeavour.

RESPONSE provided by the Chief Executive Officer, VIT—continued

Should you wish to discuss the VIT's response, please contact Fran Cosgrove, A/Director Teacher Engagement & Registration; Conduct & Compliance, on 8601 6123 or by email on fran.cosgrove@vit.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Peter Corcoran
Chief Executive Officer

Auditor-General's reports tabled during 2018–19

Report title	Date tabled
Local Government Insurance Risks (2018–19:1)	July 2018
Managing the Municipal and Industrial Landfill Levy (2018–19:2)	July 2018
School Councils in Government Schools (2018–19:3)	July 2018
Managing Rehabilitation Services in Youth Detention (2018–19:4)	August 2018
Police Management of Property and Exhibits (2018–19:5)	September 2018
Crime Data (2018–19:6)	September 2018
Follow up of Oversight and Accountability of Committees of Management (2018–19:7)	September 2018
Delivering Local Government Services (2018–19:8)	September 2018
Security and Privacy of Surveillance Technologies in Public Places (2018–19:9)	September 2018
Managing the Environmental Impacts of Domestic Wastewater (2018–19:10)	September 2018
Contract Management Capability in DHHS: Service Agreements (2018–19:11)	September 2018
State Purchase Contracts (2018–19:12)	September 2018
Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2017–18 (2018–19:13)	October 2018
Results of 2017–18 Audits: Local Government (2018–19:14)	December 2018

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