

Supporting relief teachers' access to professional learning

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With evidence that Australian school students may be spending a year of their total schooling with a Casual or Relief Teacher (CRT), a new evidence summary released by AITSL calls for more support specifically targeted to these teachers.

The AITSL report *Spotlight: Professional Learning for Relief Teachers*, highlights that CRTs need more support to access quality professional growth opportunities so that they can build and develop their teaching expertise.

The report finds that CRTs across Australia may be undertaking less professional learning and, due to challenges of being a CRT, prioritising compliance and affordability over teacher and student need when compared to their full-time counterparts. Undertaking professional learning is a requirement for all teachers (20 hours a year in all states and territories except Tasmania). Yet more than half of the CRTs surveyed said they had undertaken less than 16 hours of professional learning in the past 12 months.

While three-quarters of CRTs usually work at the same school regularly, the results show that nearly 60 per cent were never invited to undertake professional learning with their colleagues.

According to the report, the considerations ranked as important or very important for CRTs undertaking professional learning are cost (86 per cent), the need to meet registration requirements (80 per cent), meeting an identified need in their teaching practice (76 per cent), or an identified need for their students (69 per cent).

AITSL CEO Mark Grant said: "We know that there are barriers for casual and relief teachers accessing professional learning including cost, time, and ensuring the relevance of learning opportunities. When in-school professional learning is available to CRTs, it not only provides a high-quality learning experience but also helps reduce cost and travel barriers."

"It is disappointing that only 40 per cent of the CRT teachers surveyed by AITSL had taken part in-school professional learning at the schools they work in, despite an overwhelming majority of teachers wanting to be included (75 per cent)."

"The report finds that where CRTs had accessed in-school professional learning, most respondents worked directly with one school. That experience suggests that building stronger relationships with CRTs within schools can make a big difference."

Recommendations proposed in the report include:

- Education systems and sectors consider the barriers to their in-school learning opportunities for CRTs and make time for CRTs to engage in professional learning that is relevant to their individual context.
- Systems could help by providing CRTs with a school or system email address and by linking professional learning opportunities into employment agencies that have large education networks.
- While some teacher regulatory authorities (TRAs) support professional learning by linking in with casual teacher networks, these services vary by jurisdiction. Having a consistent approach to supporting CRTs across all TRAs could help increase access to professional learning.

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- Schools use Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALTs) to support CRTs to access professional learning while ensuring there are development opportunities for CRTs at the beginning of their career through induction and mentoring.
- Schools create an 'ethic of care' where the knowledge and experience of CRTs is respected and grown. This ethic could include sharing information about upcoming professional learning opportunities and providing opportunities to observe teachers from within the school.

The AITSL Professional Learning for Relief Teachers Spotlight can be found on the [AITSL website](#).

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Notes for Editors - *The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides national leadership for the Australian, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. AITSL is funded by the Australian Government.*