SUBMISSION

REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS



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Teachers need professional learning they can trust. Ethical screening of external providers and protection against misinformation should be explicit in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and their supporting guidance.

Comms Declare asks AITSL to strengthen *Standard 6, Engage in professional learning*, by explicitly addressing the credibility, scientific accuracy and independence of professional learning and accompanying classroom resources. This should be supported by guidance linked to Standard 7's professional ethics requirements.

Education systems and regulatory authorities should support teachers to meet these expectations through transparent ethical screening of external providers, disclosure of funding and conflicts of interest, and conflicts of interest. Where concerns are raised about potentially misleading content, they should arrange independent review by experts with relevant subject knowledge, publish the findings and any required corrections or withdrawal notices, and share these with affected teachers and relevant state and territory education bodies.

Fossil fuel influence and misinformation risks in teacher training

Burning coal, oil and gas is the largest contributor to climate change and a major source of air pollution. UNICEF's 2026 report documents threats to children's health, education and survival and calls for an urgent fossil fuel phase-out, a just transition to renewable energy and investment in climate education. Children need independent, scientifically accurate information about what is driving warming and how to limit it. Teachers need training that equips them to explain the evidence and scrutinise claims about proposed solutions. United Nations · WHO · UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Report 2026

Australia's international commitments and workforce needs reinforce the importance of trustworthy climate education. Article 12 of the Paris Agreement requires parties, including Australia, to cooperate in taking appropriate measures to enhance climate change education, training and public awareness. There are also significant skills shortages across occupations critical to the clean energy transition and a need to strengthen education and training pathways. Equipping teachers with accurate, independent information can help students understand this transition and the opportunities it creates. Professional learning should support that understanding, with safeguards against commercial interests distorting the evidence or narrowing students' view of their future.

Yet fossil fuel industry funding of teacher training and resources, documented in Comms Declare's research, creates potential conflicts of interest that put these educational goals at risk. These funding relationships raise concerns about commercial influence over how climate change and the energy transition are presented, and the potential for misleading material to reach classrooms through professional learning.

Case study: Teacher Earth Science Education Programme (TESEP)

The Teacher Earth Science Education Programme (TESEP) delivers teacher professional development and classroom resources on earth and environmental science across Australia. Comms Declare's *From Cradle to Career* report documents TESEP's publicly listed financial relationships with fossil fuel companies, including Glencore Coal, Yancoal, Bengalla Mining Company, MACH Energy and EnergyAustralia.

Professional learning can give industry-supported materials a reach extending beyond the teachers who attend. TESEP has described this multiplier effect in its own publications. It reported training more than 1,100 teachers between 2008 and 2012 and later projected that its programs could reach up to 2.1 million students over five years. These figures were TESEP's estimates of potential downstream reach, rather than independently verified student participation.

The report also documents TESEP's *Greening Coal* professional development and classroom resources, which discuss carbon capture and storage and other technologies as pathways for continued coal use. The inclusion of these topics does not itself establish inaccuracy. It does illustrate why review should consider how evidence is selected and presented, including the treatment of technologies' limitations, alongside the provider's funding relationships.

From Cradle to Career documents these relationships and materials; it does not determine their educational appropriateness or make findings about TESEP's intentions or integrity.

Making information integrity a foundation of teacher professional learning

Strengthening the Teacher Standards and their supporting guidance can help teachers exercise informed professional judgement about courses and resources within the time and resource constraints they face.

A teacher taking a course to build expertise in climate science may need that very expertise to spot when material gives disproportionate weight to natural variability, casts doubt on established findings about human-caused warming or presents continued reliance on fossil fuels as inevitable. The selection and emphasis of accurate individual statements can still create a misleading impression. Clear ethical safeguards would support teachers to make informed choices without expecting them to investigate funding relationships or verify specialist scientific claims themselves - tasks that add to their large workload and take valuable time away from teaching and preparation.

AITSL's discussion paper does recognise that climate anxiety and misinformation among the pressures on schools and observes that policy reforms have added to educators' workload. In its discussion of digital technology and AI, it records stakeholders' concerns about relying on teacher judgement alone without clear frameworks.

The same principle applies here, especially given the politicisation of climate change and documented interventions from fossil fuel companies in Australia's education settings. These companies have a commercial stake in continued fossil fuel use, creating a conflict of interest when they intervene in education about climate change and the clean energy transition. Safeguards are needed against material that casts doubt on established climate science or presents a slower transition as necessary or inevitable.

Making information integrity a foundation of teacher professional learning

The NSW provider recognition arrangements illustrate why institutional safeguards matter. The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) lists providers after basic checks and requires at least one active course aligned with the Teacher Standards. Teachers may reasonably interpret an official listing as assurance that course content and conflicts of interest have been assessed. Ready-made, low-cost resources can then move quickly from professional learning into classrooms. Without explicit checks on funding and conflicts of interest, and a clear pathway for expert assessment of content where concerns arise, provider recognition risks lending institutional credibility to industry-funded material whose accuracy and independence have not been established.

School sponsorship policies already recognise that some industries are unsuitable partners in education. Victoria's school sponsorship policy excludes tobacco companies, gaming venues and businesses selling or promoting alcohol or firearms, as well as companies encouraging unhealthy food choices among young people. NSW's sponsorship procedures similarly identify organisations promoting unhealthy food, tobacco or vapes, alcohol, gambling or weapons manufacturing as unsuitable sponsors. These policies provide a precedent for protecting education from harmful commercial interests. Our proposal extends this protective approach consistently to the organisations that provide or fund teacher professional learning and classroom resources, including through intermediaries, and explicitly includes the fossil fuel industry.

Recommended safeguards

AITSL's discussion paper records that written responses called for "clearer language, practical examples and greater guidance" (p. 56). To address this need, AITSL should develop supporting guidance for Standards 6 and 7 that sets out the following responsibilities for education systems and regulatory authorities, with practical examples of their application.

The following safeguards would also advance Recommendation 10 of the Senate report The Integrity Gap, which calls for stronger oversight and disclosure of corporate engagement in school systems through the Education Ministers' Meeting. We therefore recommend that these Professional Standards:

1. **Establish an ethical screen for external professional learning providers and resources.** Exclude organisations involved in tobacco or vaping products, alcohol, gambling, fossil fuels, weapons manufacturing or sales, or the promotion of unhealthy food and drinks, from providing or funding teacher training or resources, directly or through intermediaries. Publish the screening criteria and clearly explain what official recognition covers.
2. **Ensure funding and conflicts of interest are disclosed before enrolment.** Require providers to name funders, including those who contribute through intermediaries, and disclose what they paid for and any role in developing, reviewing, approving or delivering the course or resources. Require disclosure of relevant presenter affiliations and conflicts of interest. Make these disclosures available before enrolment and repeat them in the materials teachers receive.
3. **Where complaints are made or concerns raised, investigate concerns through independent expert review and act on the findings.** Establish a clear, accessible pathway for raising concerns about courses and resources. Where concerns or complaints arise about accuracy or misleading content, require assessment of the full course and accompanying resources by reviewers independent of providers and funders, with relevant subject expertise. For climate-related content, reviewers must have demonstrated expertise in climate science and consider whether omissions or framing could be misleading. Require providers to correct or withdraw misleading material before further delivery or distribution. Publish the findings and any corrections or withdrawal notices on the relevant authority's website, notify affected teachers, and share the findings and action taken with relevant state and territory education bodies.



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CHANGING THE INFORMATION CLIMATE

Comms Declare promotes sustainable communication, and is dedicated to shifting the narrative around climate action. We exist to reduce the social licence of climate polluters and champion those that integrate sustainability into their communications practice.

At our core is our unwavering belief in the power of communications to create cultural change and shape a safer, healthier future for each of us and our planet.

We represent dozens of communications agencies and hundreds more professionals across advertising, marketing and media.

Comms Declare is a registered charity, and members of Climate Action Network Australia (CANA) and Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD).