Effective Professional Development

Summary of recommendations

1
When designing and selecting PD, focus on the mechanisms.

- High quality teaching improves student outcomes, and effective PD offers a crucial tool to develop teaching quality and enhance students' outcomes in the classroom.
- To improve student outcomes, careful attention should be paid to how PD is designed. In particular, those who design and select PD should focus on mechanisms.
- Mechanisms are the core building blocks of PD. They are observable, can be replicated, and could not be removed without making PD less effective. Crucially, they are supported by evidence from research on human behaviour—they have been found, in contexts beyond teaching, to change practice.
- Examples of mechanisms include revisiting prior learning, goal setting, providing feedback, and action planning.
- Those who select PD should look for mechanisms in prospective programs; those who design PD should include mechanisms in their design.
- Careful consideration is also required to ensure that PD is evidence-based, and that content is drawn from trusted sources.

2
Ensure that PD effectively builds knowledge, motivates staff, develops teaching techniques, and embeds practice.

- The mechanisms that make up effective PD can be split into four groups, each of which fulfils a different role.
- PD may aspire to include a mechanism from each of these groups:

  A. **Build knowledge**
     – Managing cognitive load
     – Revisiting prior learning

  B. **Motivate staff**
     – Setting and agreeing on goals
     – Presenting information from a credible source
     – Providing affirmation and reinforcement after progress

  C. **Develop teaching techniques**
     – Instruction
     – Social support
     – Modelling
     – Monitoring and feedback
     – Rehearsal

  D. **Embed practice**
     – Providing prompts and cues
     – Prompting action planning
     – Encouraging monitoring
     – Prompting context specific repetition

3
Implement PD programs with care, taking into consideration the context and needs of the school.

- Provide guidance on how participants can adapt PD. Program developers should signal to those selecting and delivering PD programs where adaptations can be made, ensuring that the mechanisms are protected and prioritised.
- Ensure that PD aligns with the needs of the school and is supported by school leadership. Gaining ongoing leadership buy-in can facilitate successful implementation.
- Recognise the time constraints faced by teachers and adapt PD accordingly. Those designing and selecting PD should critically assess how a PD program will fit in with the school routine.