



NEW ZEALAND POST PRIMARY
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
TE WEHENGARUA

www.ppta.org.nz

PLD Research Report (Part 2) 2014

Background

This report should be read in conjunction with PPTA's 2013 Research Report on Professional Learning and Development¹. It does not delve into the background details that were explored last year and it takes as read a reasonable level of understanding of the state of PLD at present, both in terms of delivery and content.

Introduction

In June 2014 PPTA sought the views of its membership on PLD provision in the short term and in particular what PLD they thought government should fund for next year. There appears to be a great deal of consensus among teachers about what PLD they value most highly. This has serious implications for both policy development and system development. There are also some subtle differences between deciles that show a marked difference in experience between teachers in Decile 1-2 schools and teachers in Decile 8-10 schools. This is consistent with information about the reach and targeting of PLD that has led government funded PLD to be used more extensively in low decile schools while leaving high decile schools at the whims of the market model.

The Survey

The 2014 survey asked 11 questions in total, although question logic meant teachers responded only to the relevant questions. A final question was an 'any other comments' catch all to give teachers space to write about anything they felt needed further emphasis. 1,109 teachers out of a total response of 3,673 chose to do this which shows the importance of this issue of PLD provision to a large number of teachers in our schools.

The survey was sent out on 13 June 2014 and a reminder was sent on 27 June. The survey closed on 4 July 2014.

¹ <http://www.ppta.org.nz/resources/publication-list/2770-past-ppta-ann-conf-papers>

There were 3,673 responses from a total sample of 11,810, or 31% of the sample. The fact that this was a higher response rate than received for last year's survey shows that this issue is growing in importance for teachers. This is statistically a very good response rate, giving highly reliable findings.

15% of those sampled worked in Decile 1-2 schools, 65% in Decile 3-8 schools and 20% in Decile 9-10 schools.

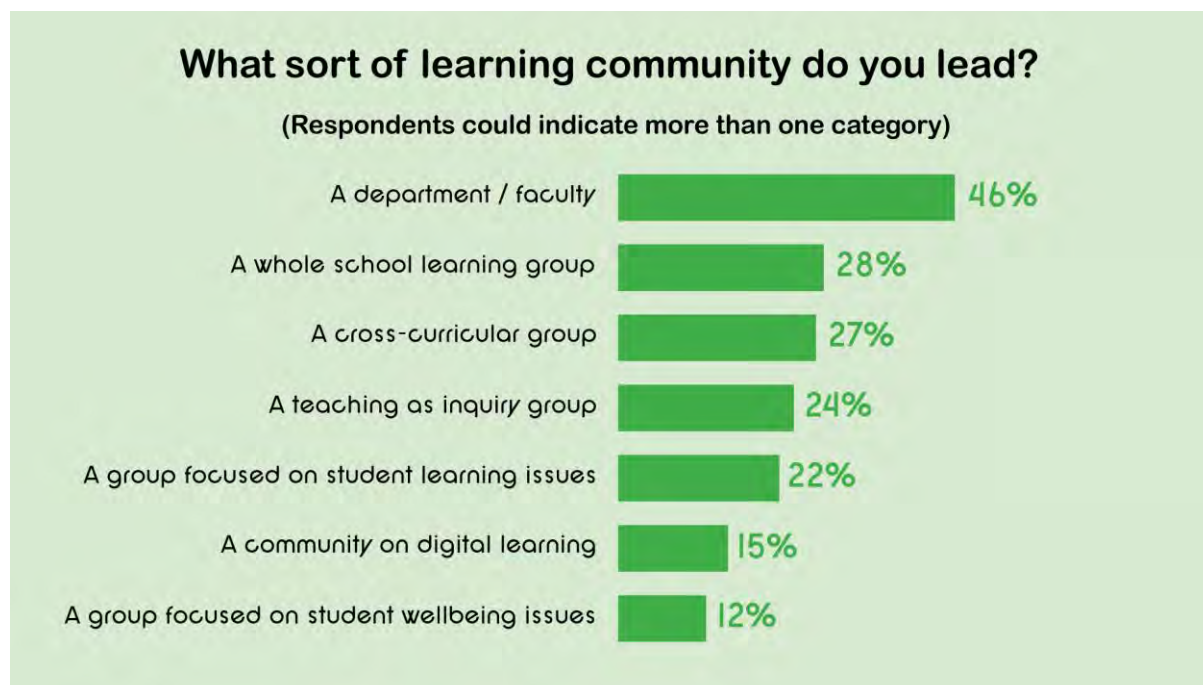
37% of those who responded were classroom teachers, 43% were middle leaders, 9% were senior leaders and 11% described themselves as 'other'. The largest single learning area represented was English with 14% of respondents, followed by Technology at 13%.

The findings

The analysis done in this report looks at overall figures as well as the difference between deciles, which throws up some interesting nuances. Experience of PLD in a Decile 1-2 school is markedly different to experience in a Decile 9-10.

Questions 4-7 Professional Learning Communities

These questions were focused around the level of experience respondents had in leading professional learning communities and revealed some interesting facts. 28% of the sample led some form of learning community. The groups that are being led were well spread and showed the range of PLD going on in schools.

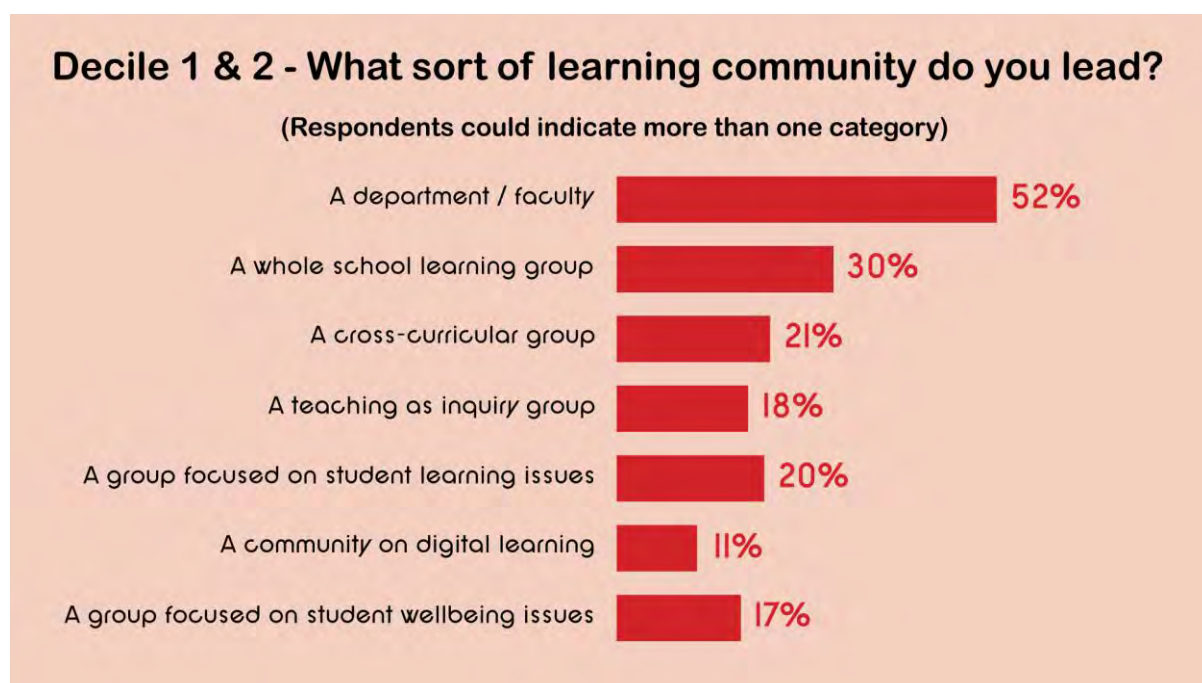


While faculties/ departments remain the dominant learning community, teaching as inquiry and cross curricular groups are also common. Whole school learning also plays a significant role.

The next two questions were even more revealing. Of the respondents who led professional learning communities, 69% accessed some sort of external expertise, so teachers are following the Teacher Professional Learning & Development Best

Evidence (TPL&D BES) Synthesis advice about this. That is, that external expertise is necessary but not sufficient². The range of sources of this external expertise was unexpected. 41% use a university provider, 42% use a private provider, 39% use a government agency and 60% use other teachers. (Numbers total above 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer.)

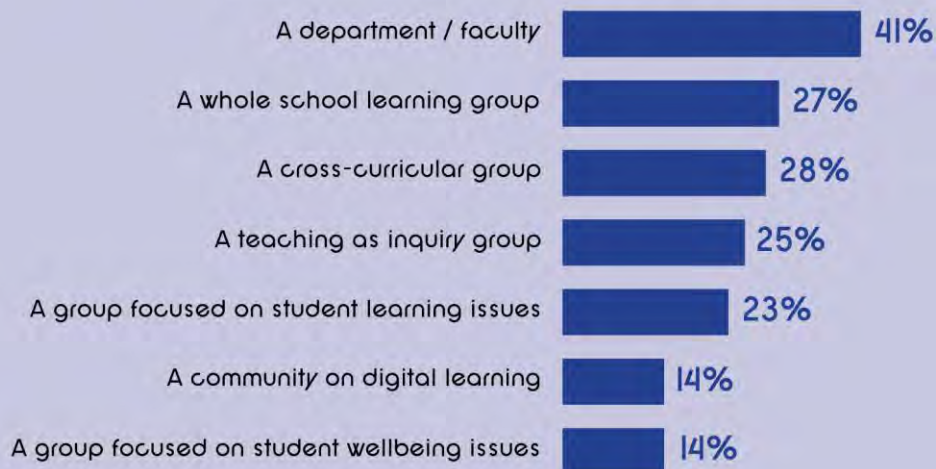
Some decile differences are also evident. In Decile 1-2 schools, respondents were most likely to be leading department/faculty groups and whole school learning groups, whereas in Decile 9-10 schools there was a much more even spread across the type of groups. In Decile 1-2 schools, 20% of the groups being led were on cross-curricular learning, whereas 28% of the groups in Decile 9-10 schools were on this. In Decile 1-2 schools 18% of the groups being led were on teaching as inquiry whereas 25% of the groups in Decile 9-10 were on this



² Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung, 2007, *Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]*, Ministry of Education, New Zealand. (p xxvii)

Decile 9 & 10 - What sort of learning community do you lead?

(Respondents could indicate more than one category)



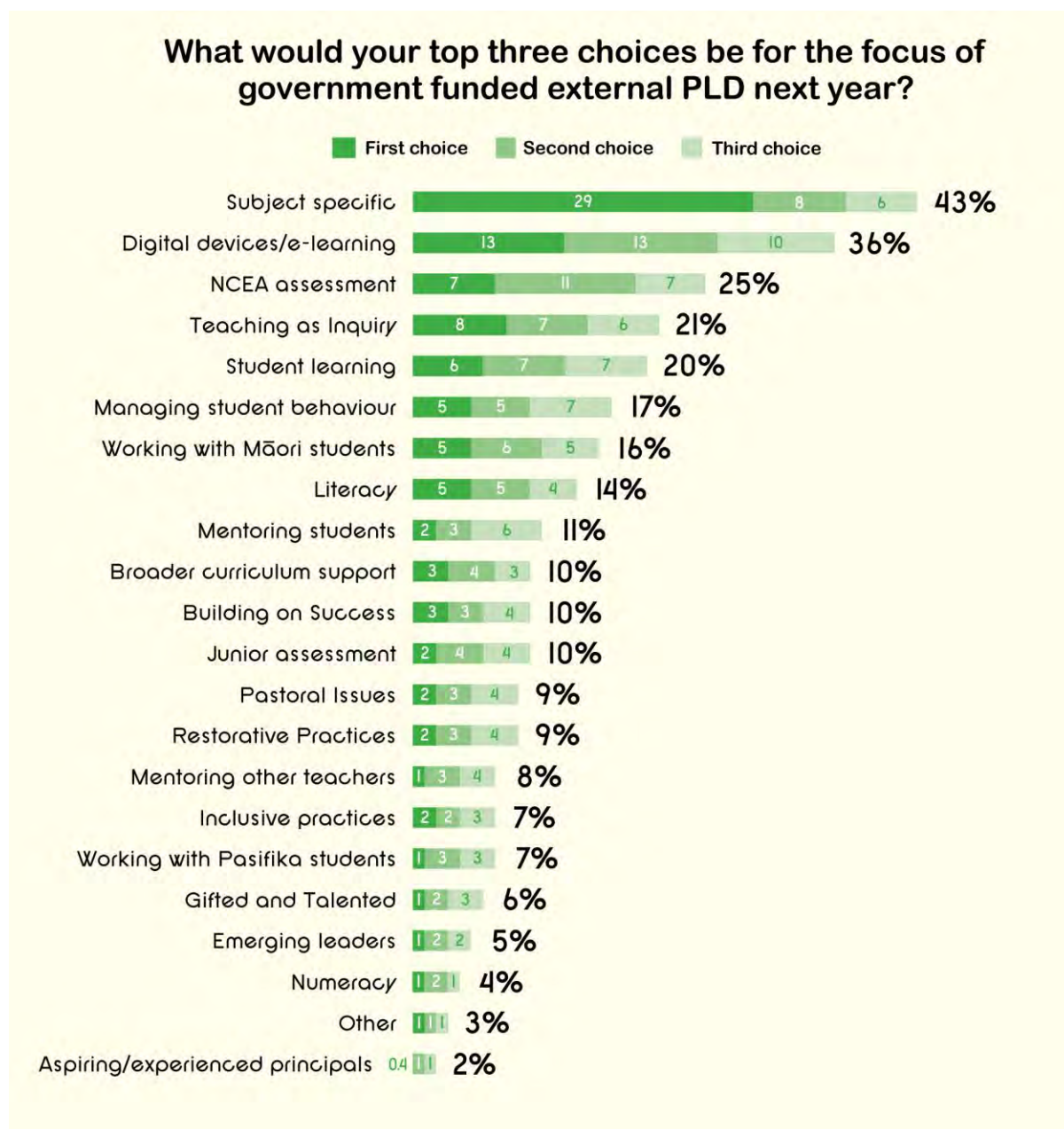
The differences in use of external expertise are large too. Learning community leaders in Decile 1-2 schools use this 72% of the time, whereas learning community leaders in Decile 9-10 schools use it somewhat less, 63% of the time. In Decile 1-2 schools, the external expertise used, in descending order, is other teachers 54%, university providers 49%, government agencies 46%, and private providers 36%. In Decile 9-10 schools, the external expertise used is other teachers 61%, private providers 50%, government agencies 35%, and university providers 28%. This suggests that higher decile schools are quite a lot less likely to be able to access the government-funded contracts that are delivered by university providers – although the fact that some PLD contracts are delivered by consortia containing a mix of university and private providers confuses this picture somewhat. Under the contracts, PLD is targeted at the schools that have the highest proportion of priority learners. That is, in the main, low decile schools.

PLD experience is different depending on the school's decile. When looking only at the sort of learning communities schools in the two decile bands use, the dominance of Department / Faculty and whole school learning groups can be seen clearly in Decile 1 and 2 schools, whereas Decile 9 and 10 schools have a wider spread of types learning communities. The focus of PLD at the lower decile end with more traditional structures operating is also concerning in that it is not moving with developments in inquiry learning and cross curricular groups. These are of course harder to sustain when teaching is a much bigger challenge.

Question 8: What would your top 3 choices be for the focus of government funded PLD next year?

This question was focused on the most pressing PLD requirements generally, whereas the next few questions dealt with one-off PLD. It wasn't called 'in depth' PLD as teachers do not use this term, but following on from our last survey, focused in this area. The purpose of this question was to establish, over the range of PLD teachers might be doing, what their priorities were for next year.

By identifying the choices most commonly in respondents' top three, it is clear what the priorities should be for PLD next year. There are decile differences which are significant, but first we will look at the overall figures.



The table shows that the overwhelming favourite for secondary teachers is subject specific PLD. This is followed by e-learning, NCEA assessment, then teaching as inquiry.

When the sample is analysed by decile groupings, the top choices are similar, but after that some divergence appears. Teachers in Decile 1 and 2 schools are more likely to choose NCEA, Literacy, working with Māori students and managing student behaviour in that order as their next choices. Teachers in Decile 9 and 10 schools, however, are more likely to choose student learning, NCEA assessment, Literacy and working with Māori students in that order. The fact that student learning comes fourth for Decile 9 and 10 schools and that managing student behaviour appears on the list for Decile 1 and 2 schools may reflect the different reality of teaching and learning in different parts of the school system. It is specious to say all schools are

the same, but the similarities of teacher requirements whatever the school are also much greater than the differences.

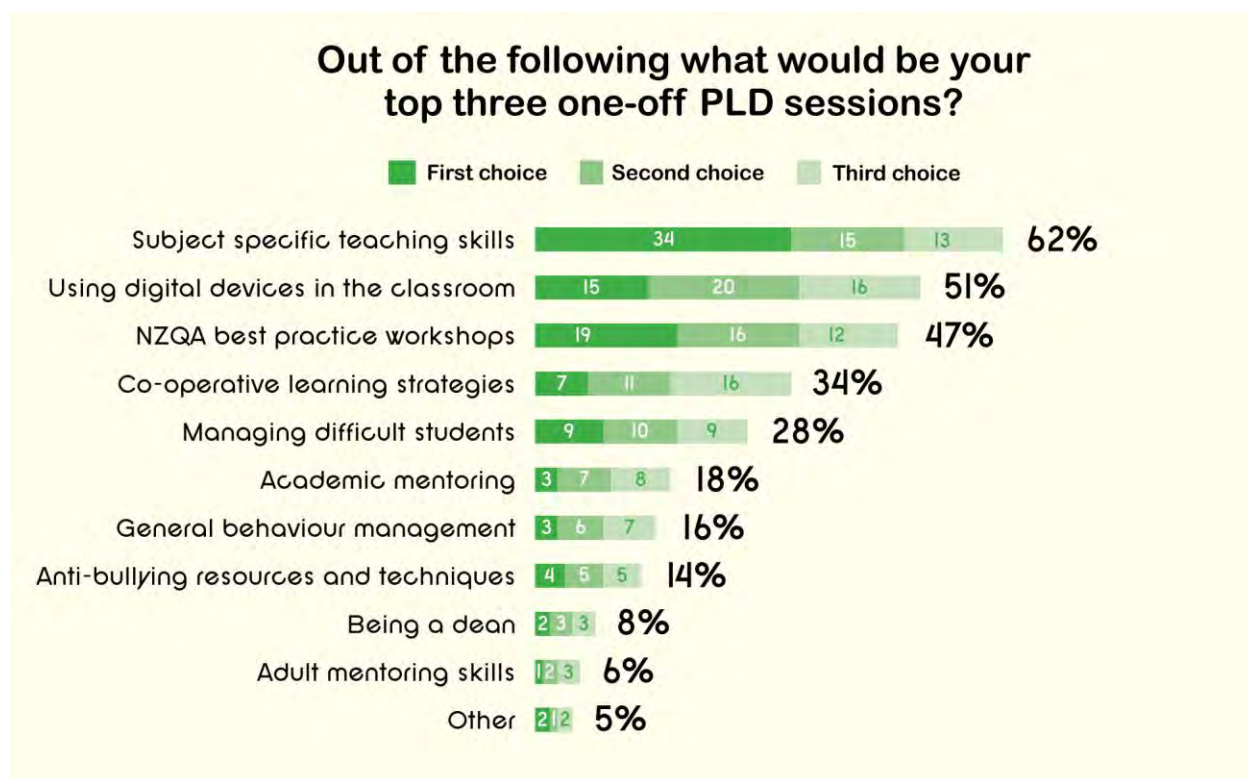
It is noticeable that some of the Ministry’s current key initiatives do not rate highly for our respondents. Choices such as mentoring other teachers, emerging leaders, and aspiring and experienced principals were rated low. Building on Success also failed to rate very high, but it is in its early stages so it probably had low recognition. On the other hand teachers are clearly keen to learn more about working with Māori students.

Teachers are also keen for help with managing difficult behaviours.

Literacy also appears in that next group and retains a degree of popularity, and noticeably more so than numeracy. The other notable area is NCEA assessment which suggests that best practice workshops should be continued for the purposes of sustainability and teacher need.

One-off PLD: Questions 9 and 10

Respondents were asked the question “Is there still a need for one-off PLD?” 75% said yes, and 16% chose “Don’t know”. All of these respondents were taken to a further question, ‘Out of the following, what would be your top three one-off PLD sessions?’ for which they were able to choose a first, second and third choice, as with the earlier question on PLD more generally. The top three responses here, when first second and third choices are totalled, were subject specific teaching skills at 62%, using digital devices in the classroom at 51% and NZQA best practice workshops at 47%. Well below that were co-operative learning strategies at 34% and managing difficult students at 28%, with all the other options far below these.



It is important to note that teachers still highly value one-off PLD. While it is not the ideal form of professional development it does give teachers the chance to work

together, share their knowledge and skills and try out new ideas. For this reason and because so many teachers believe some form of one-off PLD is useful we believe it needs to play an important part in the PLD landscape. It is good to see co-operative learning coming out at number 4 as this can help with skills development. There are other innovative ways that PLD, one-off and in-depth, can be used to cover what teachers are asking for. One-off PLD can lead teachers into an inquiry frame of mind that improves their disposition to in depth PLD and links them to ako. Teachers need both one-off and in depth PLD to maintain learning growth.

Messages from these findings

The data gives clear indications from teachers as to their greatest PLD needs. Teachers will expect these to be delivered. With astute targeting unnecessary foci such as generic student assessment or mentoring can be subsumed into more pressing and broader areas such as subject specific PLD or inquiry based PLD. Leadership would perhaps make a better focus for those leading inquiry groups and could be tailored to specific skill sets and contextualised appropriately. The findings do present a number of dilemmas for the ministry.

The overwhelming importance of subject specific support for secondary teachers cannot be underestimated. Teachers want support with the content and then through e-learning and teaching as inquiry they can also get support with the pedagogy.

Teachers also want to do better in their work with Māori students, yet Building on Success is too early in its development for teachers to be sure whether it will be more like Te Kotahitanga (which they liked) or He Kākano (which they didn't). Numeracy came extremely low down the list, with literacy retaining a more solid level of support. Is it worthy of continued focus or would it be better to put this funding into supporting Maths teachers?

There also remain in the sector memories of ICT clusters that were supportive, pedagogically focused and allowed teachers to focus both on their own practice and to work with colleagues from other schools. Investing in Educational Success potentially provides another opportunity to do this sort of work, but will be less effective if it is not supported by the right sort of external expertise that good quality PLD provides.

The system continues to be seen as unresponsive and not fit for purpose. The need for an overhaul has been taken up by the Minister's PLD review group, but this group has been slow to reach consensus. So far the principles and vision developed by that group are largely reworking of ideas already presented in the TPL&D BES3. There remains a need for an overarching PLD infra-structure, such as an Institute of Teaching, to co-ordinate and lead PLD nationally. PPTA believes that this PLD should be provided by a network of universities. The current model of contracting a range of consortia involving a mix of universities and private providers is again shown to be seriously deficient in providing support for teachers. The other notable

³ Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung, 2007, *Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]*, Ministry of Education, New Zealand. (p xxvii)

factor at work is that other teachers are the dominant element of external expertise used by schools.

Conclusion

This survey was undertaken to give the Ministry of Education clear and irrefutable data about what teachers need from their PLD. It is clear from their response rate that they see this as a burning issue and that teachers have very clear ideas about the PLD that works for them. They want locally accessible, trusted PLD providers to work with them around subject specific knowledge, e-learning, NCEA and teaching as inquiry. Teachers want a balance between knowledge, that comes first, and skills that give teachers the tools to overcome blocks to student learning.

There is a range of second tier PLD needs that teachers are not opposed to, but are not their first priority. The Ministry will need to unravel which of these it continues to insist on and which they let go. The PLD landscape has become cluttered, unresponsive and geographically removed. As a result teachers are losing patience and are filling the void by teaching each other. While Investing in Educational Success will provide opportunities to build on this, they must be supported by good quality, well managed PLD that belongs in a national state infrastructure. Teachers and students deserve it.