

# Consultation Information



## What are the Professional Standards and Professional Code and why do we need them?

The Professional Standards and Professional Code need to constantly evolve as the landscape of education and the public's expectations of its professionals are ever changing. There are multiple purposes of the Professional Standards and Professional Code; as a benchmark of conduct and professional competency, to provide a framework for initial teacher education, to support career-long professional growth, to help develop professionalism, to create a shared language for teachers and to ensure and enhance public trust and confidence in the teaching profession.

In Scotland, Professional Standards are values-based and do not solely focus on behaviours but encourage criticality and self-evaluation. They articulate definitions of acceptable practice and aspirations for enhancement and offer activities that should encourage reflective practice.

Teachers' values and beliefs guide their actions, classroom relationships and pedagogy. Inclusion is a universal value which requires all teachers to embrace the diverse needs of every learner and promote equity, equality, respect and compassion.

Using the Professional Standards and the Professional Code as a tool to support professional growth enables the continued development of teachers' identity and identification of appropriate professional learning. Consequently, a suite of Professional Standards can provide a framework for teachers to map out their learning pathway and plot their professional career. They provide a guide to professional learning that is aspirational. The Professional Standards and Professional Code together represent what it means to be a teacher in Scotland.

## Why are we proposing changes?

The current suite of Professional Standards were launched in August 2013 with the substantive content having been written in 2012. At the time of publication, a commitment was given by GTCS that these would be reviewed on a 5-yearly cycle.

In its report, "IMPROVING SCHOOLS IN SCOTLAND: AN OECD PERSPECTIVE" (2015), the OECD (the intergovernmental Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) provided specific commentary on the professional standards as follows (page 126 of the report):

*"The standards are bold and supportive [sic]... However, standards frameworks are much harder to implement effectively than to set in the first place. There is a question of how deeply the GTCS standards have moved from the theory to the practice and become embedded in the professional culture of the Scottish educational system."*

Subsequent to the OECD report, the following developments led GTCS to conclude that it was now appropriate to review the Professional Standards:

- Evaluation of feedback gathered from teachers as Professional Update has been rolled out, implemented and embedded

- Curricular developments
- Developments and changes in education policy, including the empowering schools agenda
- Developments in teacher professionalism and leadership thinking and practice, as reflected in the National Improvement Framework
- Contemporary national and international research

The changes that we have identified in refreshing the Professional Standards and proposing a new Professional Code are the product of collaboration, engagement and consensus building.

The **strategic** and **working groups** that developed the suite of documentation were constituted from all parts of the education system i.e. teachers, head teachers, employer representatives, parental groups and university teacher educators.

The **national conversation** that was conducted together with research that we commissioned from **Children in Scotland**, gave a voice to teachers, parents, children and young people with a view to ensuring that the proposals we are making are relevant and appropriate.

Feedback from teachers and educational stakeholders highlighted the following consistent and central messages:

- The purpose of professional Standards and how they can be used for self-evaluation and professional learning need further clarification
- Some content and language and repetition make the Professional Standards difficult to navigate inaccessibility
- Clarity is required as to what is mandatory and what is aspirational, support resources would also be helpful
- The present structure is unhelpful as it offers no clear career pathway as there is no sense of teacher journey

Feedback from parents and children focused more on the quality of professional relationship teachers have with both the learner and their family. Parents and children indicated that a teacher should be:

- Kind and nurturing
- Highly skilled
- Aware of social context
- Respectful to all
- Committed to equality
- An effective communicator and active listener
- An inspiration to children and love their job
- A life-long learner and have a love of learning
- Learning along with the young people – Seize that teachable moment!
- Forward Thinking Outward Looking and sets out Expectations

Over recent years it has been identified that **COPAC** requires wholesale amendment and review in order to make it contemporary, relevant and fit for purpose. A summary of the key areas of feedback received from teachers and other stakeholders that has prompted and informed our review (alongside the feedback received more widely on the Professional Standards explained above) is set out below.



- There is a lack of coherence and alignment between COPAC and the Professional Standards, especially in respect of the professional values
- The tone of the document is very negative – it does not read well as a support tool/ reference point that is designed to promote teacher professionalism and public trust and confidence in the profession. The document needs to be framed in a more positive way that feels useful and relevant for purposes beyond regulation – it should empower and build confidence, not promote defensive practice
- The document is too vague and far-reaching in parts. It would work better (and be more responsive) to have a short, principle-based Code that was supplemented by a series of professional guidance documents (e.g. on professional boundaries, use of social media etc)
- The document needs to focus on setting a standard of conduct – integrating competence within the document (as at present) is confusing and unnecessary
- The document is too long and is repetitive – a shorter, more concise, easily accessible document that ideally is reflective of (and feels relevant to) a teacher's professional voice is required.

## **What are the proposed changes?**

### Professional Standards

The introduction as well as the diagrams showing the connectivity between and within the Professional Standards, the Professional Values and the Personal Commitment sections have all been removed, updated and placed into a single overarching document (the document entitled *Introduction to the Professional Standards and the Professional Code*). Doing so has allowed these common and introductory parts of the Professional Standards to be updated within a contemporary context while keeping the sections on knowledge and understanding; skills and abilities and professional actions largely unchanged aside from some re-structuring to make them easier to use and to remove any identified duplication. This was considered to be the best approach to keep the integrity of the Standards, as admired by the OECD, but update the context within which they sat.

### Professional Code

The proposed Professional Code reflects a completely fresh and different approach from the present COPAC. Whilst the Code is in many respects entirely unrecognisable from the existing COPAC document, it is important to emphasise that the underlying expectations remain substantively unchanged. In reflecting the feedback received (as summarised earlier), the focus in producing a new Professional Code has been to create a short, principles-based document which is accessible and positively framed. As set out in the proposed Introduction to the Professional Standards and Professional Code documents, the new Professional Code will fit clearly within the suite of Professional Standards and has the Professional Values at its core. The intention is that the Code will be supplemented and supported by a series of relevant and useful guidance documents that can be augmented and adapted over time.

## **When would the proposed changes take effect?**

The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code will be launched in June 2020 together with guidance documents and other materials designed to support and promote their use as an integral part of teachers' everyday practice.

