

# Education and Training Workforce: Schools

## Commissioned Study

Principals Australia



This brief submission is from Principals Australia (PA). It is limited to several key issues relating only to the national workforce of school principals and aspiring school leaders; their current and future supply, deployment and adequacy. Our aim is to highlight issues that can increase productivity and supply, and raise the status of the profession:

- a nationally consistent approach to lifting the quality of school leadership to improve productivity and build school leadership as a profession;
- profession led implementation of the National Principal Standard to create generational change and engage the profession in implementation;
- supporting professional development of principals and aspiring leaders that is quality assured and accredited including access to and building skills in use of appropriate, accurate and timely data that facilitates benchmarking and comparative analysis of performance;
- developing new solutions to supply issues through engagement in best practice national and international approaches supported by a profession- led national taskforce; and
- building school teaching and leadership as a highly esteemed profession in contemporary Australian society.

PA was established in 1993 by the four national peak professional associations representing all principals in Australia; the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), the Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA) and the Catholic Secondary Principals Association (CaSPA).

The national professional associations are members of PA's Board. PA is the profession's own national body. Its mission is to ensure that all current and aspiring school principals have the professional development, knowledge and skills they require to optimise outcomes for their students and school communities. PA fulfills this by providing professional learning, leadership development and resources to practicing and aspiring principals. In terms of both its role and accountabilities PA is different to the new Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). AITSL is a Ministerial-owned company with a Board established through the COAG process, comprised mainly of government officials and employer representatives. The AITSL remit is to drive a national approach to matters of quality teaching and school leadership in Australia. PA is seeking to establish with AITSL similar partnership relationships to those that exist between the medical profession's various colleges such as the Royal

Australian Colleges of GPs and Physicians for example (which take responsibility for their professions' practice standards, and the continuing professional development of their members linked to those standards) and the new [Health Workforce Australia](#) established by the Australian Governments through COAG.

The Productivity Commission's Schools Workforce Issues paper notes on pg. 11 that COAG reforms such as AITSL could have a significant impact on the schools workforce (supply, adequacy in terms of knowledge and skills base, and deployment), and invites comment on "whether the current reform agenda is addressing the right issues". This submission provides comment on the extent to which the structures and processes put in place by AITSL drive a more national approach to quality school leadership. In addition, this submission includes comment on the likely effectiveness of the policy and governance arrangements that have been put in place by Australian governments and some enhancements that we believe are now required.

The points we would make are these.

- 1. It is cost-effective for Australian governments and the Australian community to give a high priority to lifting the quality of school leadership, and to do so in a nationally consistent manner across all jurisdictions and schooling sectors.**

It is the right of all children, young people and parents to receive high quality school leadership regardless of sector or location. The evidence is clear that the quality of school leadership by principals impacts directly on the quality of teaching in their schools which is the most powerful "in-school" influence on learning outcomes. School leadership impacts on the partnerships schools must have with parents, communities, businesses, VET, higher education providers, and other providers of health and community services for improved outcomes for all students.

We should have the same expectation of school leadership that we have our leadership of our hospitals and primary health care services. That is that they are managed by CEOs whose professional practice reflects standards that are based on the best available evidence. This is also essential to Australia's productivity and international competitiveness; both in terms of maximising the potential of our human capital, and the competitiveness of our schooling industry sector in the global market place..

There is significant potential for Australia to improve productivity through schools embracing a culture of innovation; making the changes to their teaching practices and physical form necessary to optimise outcomes and keep children and young people engaged in schooling. Principals have a direct impact on their schools' capabilities in these areas as they are responsible for leading both for the quality of educational instruction in their schools and the cost effective management of significant human, financial and physical resources.

2. **Current strategies to achieve these national policy objectives and the manner in which they have been implemented by AITSL need some reorientation as a matter of urgency. Responsibility for further refining, embedding and maintaining currency of national professional practice standards for the profession of principals should now be transferred from AITSL to the profession. However, AITSL should maintain a strong role in monitoring the implementation of the standards and reporting to Australian governments on the profession's diligence and effectiveness in refining, promulgating and promoting uptake of its national professional practice standards as well as the impact of the standards.**

AITSL is an entity owned and created by government. On behalf of all Australian governments, AITSL acted on the widespread concern that in the twenty-first century the Australian principalship lacked national evidence-based professional practice standards. At the time AITSL embarked on its work on national standards for principals, all the best available evidence in Australia and internationally in other relevant industry sectors supported (and still supports) a profession-led approach to the development and maintenance of professional practice standards. The evidence is clear that for professional practice standards to be embraced and embedded in policy and day-to-day practice to drive improvements in quality and outcomes, the standards must have a high level of ownership among individual members of the profession concerned and their professional bodies, and this is most cost-effectively obtained when the standards are developed by the profession concerned and clearly linked to current and emerging evidence.

Despite this, AITSL itself developed the National Professional Standard for Principals, "on behalf of the profession", with some consultation with the profession and other stakeholders. Only 25% of respondents to Principals Australia's April 2011 market research survey agreed that AITSL had appropriately and sufficiently engaged with principals in developing the Standard.

Usual practice in other industry sectors such as Health sees the profession itself called on by government and the general public to develop and maintain evidence-based standards through an open and transparent model that includes recourse to evidence and consultation with both the profession's members and other stakeholders such as consumers, employers and the like. In the case of national professional practice standards for principals, using the best practice model outlined above, the profession itself would have lead the process in a partnership arrangement with AITSL providing the support and coordination.

Once AITSL finalised the National Standard for Principals it put the standard before MCEECDYA for approval, release and promulgation. With other professions (medicine, nursing, psychology, accountancy etc), Australian governments have taken the approach that if the standards of professional practice are deficient or lacking in any area, the profession is "called in". The profession leads action, possibly with some seed funding from government or its relevant

instrumentality, and attempts to remedy their standard. Under this arrangement any new standards or changes would be noted by Australian governments. Governments would consider the implications for its policy and programs.

It is clear based on considerable experience and research that for any professional practice standards to be effective, members of the profession concerned must be confident that the standards are free from political considerations (economic and strategic), reflect the best-available evidence and be advocated strongly by their own practitioner champions. Professional practice standards that are developed through a government-instrumentality led process, “approved” and promulgated by government are far less likely to have an impact on day-to-day practice because members of the profession do not own, value or embrace them quickly or with confidence.

For these reasons Principals Australia recommends to the Productivity Commission that, to help ensure all current and future principals embrace national professional practice standards in their day-to-day work, AITSL be urged to move swiftly to invite the profession to develop a partnership arrangement. This arrangement would enable the profession to take on the role of “custodian” of the new national standard for principals, further refine it for implementation (see below) and establish effective arrangements for its promulgation and uptake. As an example, the profession of medical administrators itself has established evidence-based national standards or competencies for medical practitioners who take on the complex jobs of leading and managing hospitals and health services through the Royal Australian College of Medical Administrators (RACMA). The profession owns the standard and promulgates and leads its implementation. In this model, AITSL would monitor, evaluate and report regularly to MCEECDYA and the Australian Minister for Schooling on the extent to which the profession’s new national standard is being continually refined in the light of feedback and new or emerging evidence, being embedded in policy and practice and having an impact on outcomes.

AITSL leaders have publicly stated that the new national professional practice standard for school principals is designed primarily to be inspirational and attract entrants to the profession at a time when declining numbers of people are taking on the job. This suggests that the national professional practice standard for school principals has been designed mainly as a solution to a difficult workforce problem around attraction, rather than a mechanism for lifting and maintaining quality school leadership and management (i.e. “adequacy” of the workforce).

The opportunity to use the Standard to drive quality improvement and improved outcomes with its potential for lifting productivity is being undermined by the lack of a coherent, consistent and profession owned approach to implementation. It also has not created the sense of value for the principal profession that is evident in other professions that have developed their own standard.

The public must be assured that national standards for any profession reflect the best available evidence and provide a sound benchmark for quality service and care which lead to optimal outcomes. This means that the development and maintenance of a professional standard must be through an open and transparent process operating at arm's length from government and potential political interference, have a clear link to current and emerging evidence-base and professional consensus based on experience. The Standard must be championed by the profession's own leaders and add value to their work.

There is the lack of linkage and pathway for the transition from achieving success under the AITSL Teacher Standards to attaining principalship and reaching the Principal Standard. Failure to articulate and support this transition may result in the loss of a generation of potential and aspiring leaders.

- 3. To enhance and maintain principals' professional practice in an ongoing way, meeting the Standard, they need access to continuous improvement programs and systems that are quality assured and accredited, and *inter alia* encourage frank and open reflection about personal performance in safe and confidential settings.**

The most effective continuous improvement programs involving performance review, professional development and reflection are those that are designed by the profession, for the profession and championed by peers, mentors and colleagues. Rather than AITSL outsourcing the design and implementation of national flagship programs itself, Principals Australia recommends that AITSL be encouraged to call in the profession to discuss how a more nationally coherent and consistent approach to these matters can be built based on the essential prerequisites of safe and confidential settings, data-driven performance assessment and peer review, mentoring and support.

New national arrangements for better coordinated planning and delivery of quality assured and accredited professional learning and leadership development for principals will be embraced and taken up by members of the profession if they can see that their profession has led the design and implementation of the new arrangements.

Access to appropriate, accurate and timely data that assist with benchmarking and comparative analysis of performance is vital. Evidence supports the effective role played by peers and mentors in this process.

- 4. Effective action in the short, medium and long term to ensure an adequate supply and deployment of school principals requires the leadership of an inclusive national taskforce, and will involve *inter alia* access to quality professional learning, leadership development and resources.**

Australia is facing an undersupply of people willing to take on the job of leading and managing schools in particular parts of Australia and/or catering for particular types of school communities. Given the demographic profile of the school leaders, according to our market research some 28% of principals and aspiring leaders are expected to leave the profession within the next five years, and 40% within the next 5 – 10 years. Urgent and effective action is needed. Other sectors, for example health, have undertaken action to address the shortfall of professionals and their deployment in other relevant industry sectors in Australia which has included targeted and strategic professional development interventions planned and managed by their professional bodies.

As the professional development arm of the principalship, Principals Australia recommends to the Productivity Commission that as the education sector does not have the equivalent of a national Health Workforce Agency, the time is right for a national taskforce to be established by MCEECDYA. Their role would be to determine the size and nature of the current and projected shortfall of quality principals across all jurisdictions and schooling sectors, and develop potential short, medium and long term solutions that include targeted professional development and resources, for consideration by Ministers. The taskforce should include representatives of the providers of schooling, government authorities, professional associations, parent bodies, universities and AITSL. It should be supported by DEEWR and take into account the lessons learned by the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) and the Australian Health Minister's Conference (AHMC) and in addressing current and projected shortfalls of health care professionals.

To do the job properly, the proposed national taskforce needs to go beyond traditional workforce data, to collect and analyse rigorous qualitative information from current and aspiring principals relating to their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours with respect to the job of the school principal. This is essential for the planning and implementation of any effective action to redress current and anticipated shortfalls in supply and any geographical and hard-to-staff school shortfalls. Professional market research is underutilised in the schooling sector to inform workforce planning and decision making.

Increasing the status of the profession is readily achievable by supporting the development of accreditation and a quality pathway to principalship. England has done this by creating the National College for School Leadership with its National Professional Qualification for Headship. It has also led to the creation of "the voice of practice". This is critical in generating new solutions to the continuing problems in workforce supply. Recognition of the complexity, diversity and significant skill requirements of school leadership and supporting the development of accredited professional development will generate greater recognition from other professions and the community, and increase individual self respect and pride.

Recent market research (April 2011) by Principals Australia found that:

- 77% of principals supported using the National Standard for Principals as the basis for accrediting professional development and learning programs;
- 85% believed that the move would be more valued by the profession if the move is managed by the profession itself;
- 70% felt that the Standard would improve public perceptions of the profession; and
- Only 39% felt they were managing their work life balance.

A nationally coordinated program of strategic policy driven by applied research focusing on the most important questions on workforce drivers could inform solutions for developing and deploying the required number of quality school principals for the short, medium and long term. The proposed national taskforce would be well-placed to oversee the development and implementation of an open and transparent national research agenda.

**5. To attract and retain talented school principals Australian governments must partner with the profession to build the status of the profession in contemporary Australian society.**

Consideration must be given to more than remuneration and non-financial rewards. Improving attraction and retention involves building new and lasting machinery and relationships as outlined above. These must clearly demonstrate respectful partnerships are in place with principals' professional associations. To move to this position, the government will need to invest in building the capability of the profession's own structures to lead from within, rather than constantly setting up new parallel institutions and processes. This involves strategic communications and marketing. In addition it requires a deliberate change in language from the use of the term "school workers" with reference to teachers and principals as occurs throughout the Schools Workforce Issues Paper. The term "school workers" implies old "employer/employee" constructs and cultures that are off-putting particularly to young talented principals and aspiring principals whose role and functions are similar to those of CEOs of small through to large organisations, and who have other career options.

It is important that educational employers understand what motivates people to become leaders in schools given the complex and heavy demands on school principals. If the workforce supply is to meet the demand sustained initiatives are required to:

- raise the status of the profession;
- create flexibility in the role that ensures it is attractive to a highly skilled and educated workforce;
- assist in work-life balance; and
- build competence in dealing with the demands of school leadership, including managing the complexity of the role and the challenge of change.