

Teaching Australia

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP



## Evaluation of the Leading Australia's Schools Program

A report by Atelier Learning Solutions



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# Contents

Acknowledgements	2
The Evaluation Project	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Methodology	6
3 The Effectiveness of the Leading Australia's Schools Program	8
4 Improving the Effectiveness of the Program for 2008	19
5 Possible Future Directions for Teaching Australia in Relation to National School Leadership	23
6 Future Leadership Development Needs, Opportunities and Gaps at a National Level	27
7 Conclusion	31
8 Appendices	33
Appendix 1: Strategic Interview Discussion Questions	33
Appendix 2: Participant Interview Discussion Questions	34

# Acknowledgements

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The findings made on the basis of the data are, of course, the responsibility of the Atelier project team.

**(Dr) John Manefield**

Director

Atelier Learning Solutions Pty Ltd

# The Evaluation Project

The Evaluation worked within the following parameters established by Teaching Australia, covering the objectives, structure and scope of the project.

*The objectives of the project are to analyse:*

- *The effectiveness of the Leading Australia's Schools program in meeting its goals of delivering a high quality, high status school leadership development program for the teaching profession; and*
- *Future leadership development needs; identifying opportunities and gaps at a national level.*

*The evaluation will be in two parts:*

- (a) *addressing the effectiveness of Leading Australia's Schools in meeting its goals, including the content, delivery, selection processes and impact of the program on participants and the profession; and*
- (a) *addressing the effectiveness of Leading Australia's Schools in meeting the objectives of Teaching Australia in supporting the program, that is to support and advance the quality of teaching and school leadership and improve the knowledge and leadership skills of school principals across Australia.*

*The project will provide an analysis of:*

- (a) *the effectiveness of the program, with suggestions for improvement in selection, delivery and follow-up;*
- (b) *future broad directions for a national school leadership program, including comment on the appropriate target groups; and*
- (c) *future leadership development needs, opportunities and gaps at a national level.*

# I Introduction

## Teaching Australia

Teaching Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, was launched as a permanent body on 5 December 2005, following a period of interim operation as the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL). Teaching Australia is a public company limited by guarantee, established under the *Commonwealth Corporations Act 2001* and is funded by the Australian Government. The Minister for Education, Science and Training is the sole member of the company. Teaching Australia operates under its own constitution, with decisions made by an independent board of directors drawn from the teaching profession.

The purpose of Teaching Australia is to support and advance the effectiveness and standing of the teaching profession. In particular, its objectives are to:

- *support and advance the quality of teaching and leadership*
- *strengthen and advance the standing of the profession*
- *develop as the national body for the teaching profession.*

The Teaching Australia strategic plan, *Our Plan 2006–2009*, recognises the complex factors affecting the practice of teaching and leadership in schools<sup>1</sup>, including:

- *technological change*
- *globalisation*
- *increased scrutiny*
- *a more demanding community*
- *socio-economic and demographic change*
- *parental, employer and government expectations of schooling*
- *social and educational inequalities*
- *changes to family structure, community infrastructure and institutions*
- *whole-of-government approaches to the delivery of services.*

## Background to the Leading Australia's Schools Program

The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is designed to provide significant, leading-edge professional learning for school principals, with particular though not exclusive priority given to those in the early years of the principalship. The Program design focuses on improving the knowledge and skills of Australia's school leaders and increasing their capacity to lead their schools effectively into the 21st Century.

The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* addresses in a highly explicit and truly national way an area about which there is substantial national and international research. The literature points consistently to the key issues and themes around which the Program is structured. *Inter alia*, these include the approaches and practices through which educational leaders can impact student learning. While there is much research, nationally and overseas,

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching Australia strategic plan, *Our Plan 2006–2009*, p.5 [www.teachingaustralia.edu.au](http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au). Accessed 1 August 2007

including work by Hill<sup>2</sup> and Darling-Hammond<sup>3</sup>, on teacher practice effects, there is also now a growing body of evidence about the leadership effect. Investment in Australia's educational leaders is an investment in the quality of learning in which Australia's children and young people will engage, now and into the future.

Another issue recurring in the literature is the critical role of effective educational leaders in creating and sustaining the circumstances in which a learning community can grow and prosper. Much of this is reflected in contemporary research literature around the concept of "networking" and how principals can shape policy, approach and practice across school communities. Another issue, strongly reflected in the research, is that of identifying and harnessing opportunities in a highly complex milieu. In this regard, the literature points to how effective school leaders can transform teaching and learning, build a broad base of identity of the school as a learning community, and expand students' social capital through broadened and more flexible and innovative concepts of schooling.

There have been many calls over the years for the development of teaching in Australia so that it has the key qualities and characteristics of a profession. One of the recurring characteristics of a profession is that its members take significant responsibility for and engage in professional learning. At its leading edge, such learning addresses key issues and questions in professional leadership. The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* represents, therefore, an initiative through which the profession itself contributes to the professional learning of its members.

## **Program design and structure**

The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* was developed in partnership with the Hay Group and the University of Melbourne. The initiative also involves the Australian Primary Principals Association, the Australian Secondary Principals Association, the Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools of Australia, and the Association of Heads of Independent Schools.

The Program focuses on the following areas:

- The nature and challenge of leadership
- Myself as leader
- Leading a learning organisation
- Myself as a leader in education
- Myself as a leader of the future.
- The structure of the Program consists of five main areas. They are:
  - pre-work, including a set of readings
  - a five-day residential workshop
  - a Challenge Project
  - a two-day residential recall session
  - the formation of an ongoing learning community.

## **Participation**

The Program is advertised nationally, including through the principal professional associations. Over the planned three-year cycle it is anticipated that approximately 240 school leaders will have participated in and graduated from the Program.

Two cohorts of principals from all Australian jurisdictions and sectors were selected to participate in the two programs conducted in 2006; with a further two programs being conducted in 2007.

The residential components of the course are held at the Melbourne Business School, Carlton, Victoria.

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2 P Hill, *Teaching and School Effectiveness. Perspectives on Education*. Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2001. [www.sofweb.vic.edu.au](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au) Accessed 2 August 2007

3 L Darling-Hammond, *Teacher quality and student achievement. A Review of state policy evidence. Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol 8, no 1, <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1> Accessed 2 August 2007

## 2 Methodology

### Introduction

The methodology for the Evaluation involved multi-level triangulation. The data gathering methods used covered qualitative and quantitative components as a basis for findings about the Program's operation and future directions.

The following were the principal forms of data collected and analysed over the course of the Evaluation.

- *desk analysis of relevant documents, including participant response data collected by the Program since its inception*  
The materials included in the analysis covered course planning and organisational documents, course programs and data related to Program applications, including a sample of applications provided by Teaching Australia.
- *in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and with a stratified sample of participants<sup>4</sup>*  
Through liaison with Teaching Australia, key strategic stakeholders were identified and semi-structured interviews were arranged with them. These stakeholders covered those directly associated with the Program, including the University of Melbourne and the Hay Group, representatives of the professional associations, the employing organisations, the tertiary sector, the statutory authorities with responsibility for curriculum and representatives of industry and business associations. In all, 26 strategic interviews and 38 participant interviews, across three Program cohorts, were conducted.
- *a survey of participants<sup>5</sup>*  
The survey focused on Program effectiveness in terms of design and implementation, key learning outcomes and implications for future national effort in school leader professional learning. All participants from the first three cohorts were invited to complete the survey; 86 participants responded, constituting a very positive 61.4 per cent response rate.
- *a review of the literature*  
The literature review explored the major challenges confronting school leaders and the extent to which such challenges are impacting on perceptions of the role and capacity to fulfil it. Research findings about factors that support school leaders, including professional learning, were also analysed and considered in the context of broader opportunities and directions for the profession.

The analysis also took account of a set of discussion notes provided by Teaching Australia from the 'Learning from the Future' Conference, 9–11 September 2007.

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4 A copy of the strategic and participant interview questions is included at Attachments 1 and 2

5 The survey is at: <http://www.questionpro.com/akira/gateway/750379-15238057-0>

## **Data gathering areas**

The data gathering was framed around a number of areas, viz.:

- an assessment of the overall impact of the Program in providing leading-edge professional learning for school leaders
- identification of the main factors contributing to effectiveness
- the extent to which the design and content of the Program meets school leader needs
- the scope and nature of new understandings, knowledge and skills acquired and developed by Program participants
- the impact of such understandings, knowledge and skills on professional approach and practice
- the scope and nature of transformations in schools linked to principal participation in the Program
- unanticipated outcomes from the Program
- gaps and/or hindering factors that could be addressed through new or developed approaches to design and/or content
- the nature of relationships and alignments between the Program and other national effort in school leader professional learning, with particular regard to the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme
- the scope and nature of wider support for the Program, including by professional associations and other key stakeholders
- the nature of emerging needs and challenges for school leaders and implications for the Program.

The findings are reported in the next chapters against:

1. the effectiveness of the Leading Australia's Schools Program
2. how the effectiveness of the Program might be improved for 2008
3. future directions for Teaching Australia in relation to national school leadership
4. future leadership development needs, opportunities and gaps at a national level.

# 3 The Effectiveness of the Leading Australia's Schools Program

This chapter presents findings from the evidence gathered across the Evaluation of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* about the effectiveness of the Program.

## Strengths of the Leading Australia's Schools Program

From the evidence it is possible to distil a number of strengths associated with the Program. These include, in brief, the following.

### Design

- The effective partnership between the Hay Group, the University of Melbourne and Teaching Australia.
- The inter-sectoral and inter-jurisdictional nature of the Program.
- The 'non-political' nature of the Program in that it addressed principals' immediate professional needs rather than jurisdictional or employer agendas.
- The emphasis in the design of the Program on 'professional learning by the profession for the profession'.

### Implementation

- The residential nature of the Program that enables a sustained focus on strategic issues of importance to principals.
- The strong emphasis on providing meaningful personal feedback to principals on their performance.
- The flexibility of the Program and the facilitators, including responsiveness to feedback.
- The potential of the Program to build national networks of educational leaders.

## Overall impact of the Program

The evidence from the Evaluation is apparent that the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is having a very significant level of impact on participants in terms of the provision of leading-edge professional learning for school leaders. Overwhelmingly, Program participants identify their involvement in the Program as constituting high quality, challenging and relevant professional learning. The evidence suggests that comparable professional learning opportunities are not widely available and that the Program has come to occupy a truly unique place in the overall landscape of school leader professional learning.

For example, many participants described the Program in terms of comments such as "*the best professional learning I have ever done*". Indeed, one respondent described the Program as "*fabulous*". Comments were often made about the fact that the Program had enabled "*in depth exploration of important issues*" for principals and had challenged principals to see their role in new and different ways.

Another recurring theme in the evidence base is the 'personalisation' of the Program, through pre-course 360 degree surveys and opportunities for follow-up analysis and reflection. This approach is 'connecting' participants in ways not normally possible through traditional professional learning courses. A large number of participants felt that this personalised approach was a key factor in the impact of the Program. However, the evidence also suggests that it is 'personalisation' within the context of the broader national schooling picture that is enabling participants to engage with key strategic professional imperatives and opportunities.

A large number of participants drew a distinction between the orientation of the Program to the key challenges confronting school leaders in the context of the profession and the tendency for much in other professional learning effort to be oriented to 'technical' issues. These issues are perceived largely as driven by the needs of employers.

Participants often commented on how many professional learning programs for school leaders in the jurisdictions were driven by areas such as new policy initiatives in schooling, school management requirements, reporting processes and broader areas such as ensuring principal knowledge of child protection legislation. While important, these imperatives were perceived by a large number of participants as 'leaving little room' for higher order leadership considerations.

Many respondents argued that impact had also arisen from placing educational leadership in the wider context of 'leadership'. The site visits and engagement with leaders from other fields were widely endorsed. A number of respondents made the point that embedding the Program in this wider context had increased its relevance and appeal. Indeed, one principal felt that this was a major outcome of the Program and had addressed the view held "*by many inside education that it is sacred*".

Many respondents explored their belief that the Program had impacted on them in ways that would, into the future, strengthen the effectiveness of their leadership and improve the overall quality of educational provision in their schools. One respondent summed up overall impact in the following terms:

*Ten out of ten...one of the most beneficial courses I have been to...The national parameter was very beneficial...*

While the Program enjoys strong support from principal participants, data gathered during the Evaluation suggest awareness of it among principals generally is still relatively limited. This can be attributed in large measure to the fact that the initiative is quite recent. Many principals who have graduated from the Program comment that they have actively promoted it to their colleagues. They believe that this will contribute to the Program being better known over time as more principals become aware of the unique opportunity for professional learning that it represents.

### **The main factors contributing to effectiveness**

The evidence indicates clearly that a number of factors has contributed to the overall effectiveness of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program*. The following factors are especially apparent in the evidence gathered over the course of the Evaluation.

- *The structure of the Program*, with an appropriate balance between the residential course, the challenge project and the recall session. This structure is perceived by participants as providing a sense of continuity over time that is not typical of professional learning opportunities for school leaders. Indeed, the 'continuity' factor appears to be a major consideration for participants as they make judgements about the effectiveness of the Program, with a number of calls for the Program to be extended into formalised networks or collegiate style arrangements.
- *The quality and credibility of the Program presenters*, including the currency and depth of their knowledge and skills. Much in the evidence base indicates that the Program presenters are highly regarded for their knowledge of issues in the area of school leadership, skills in leading workshops and course sessions, and 'people management' capabilities. The evidence base also includes reference to the 'wider knowledge and experience' of the presenters from the Hay Group especially, such that they brought perspectives about leadership generally that participants valued because they were "*somewhat outside the norm*".
- *The challenging nature of the Program*, particularly the challenges provided through the survey data and the extent to which such data focus participants on themselves as leaders in their schools. While a number of participants alluded to the survey data as 'confronting', there is a broadly held view that its collection and analysis were integral aspects of the Program and should be retained in any possible future iteration. Additionally, the evidence suggests that the presenters managed the data sensitively, although suggestions were made that for some principals with especially 'difficult' survey data perhaps additional personalised support could be provided.

- *Capacity in the Program for explicit linkages to be made between the theoretical and the practical*, so that transference of knowledge and skills into the school setting is facilitated. The evidence suggests that the Program has struck the appropriate balance between the 'theoretical' considerations that underpin school leadership and the 'practical' exercise of leadership in the local school setting.

While participants welcomed the opportunity to engage with current research findings and to debate and discuss national and international dimensions, they also valued the opportunities provided to place their learnings into their individual contexts. Relevance thus arises from both the currency of the Program materials and from applicability in specific contexts.

- *The opportunities provided to build and engage with a collegial network, both during and following the Program*. The evidence in relation to this factor features prominently in the evidence, and reflects most positively on that aspect of the Program design focused on the *formation of an ongoing learning community*. Many participants suggested that the opportunities to engage with fellow principals in sustained dialogue and exploration of issues were seminal in the overall effectiveness of the Program.

There is evidence that many participants appreciated greatly the sense of support and shared endeavour that characterised their time in the Program, with new and valued professional relationships and networks emerging. While this relates to the national profile of the Program, another important factor underpinning effectiveness, it possibly has more to do with the capacity of the Program to initiate and contribute to networks that principals value because they are built around key domains and issues of leadership of vital interest to them.

- *The extent to which the Program enables discussion based on a national perspective of school leadership and schooling more broadly*. This factor is prominent in the evidence base. It is clear that many principals applied for acceptance into the Program because of its national structure and profile. They believed that it would enable them to access knowledge and understandings about school leadership from a national perspective to an extent that would not be possible in more localised professional learning offerings. Their expectations appear to have been very substantially met in this regard.

Many principals have been stimulated by the focus built into the Program on this national perspective of school leadership. At the same time, the evidence suggests that many appear to feel somewhat disconnected from the 'big picture' of Australian schooling. They feel that the Program connects them to this picture. Moreover, many feel, as a consequence of the Program, that they would like opportunities to be able to contribute to the profession at a national level, especially through national school leadership networks that may arise from the Program.

- *The level of emphasis placed on the professional identity of Program participants*. Overwhelmingly, participants indicate that they felt strongly valued as 'professional people' by the Program. The 'independence' of the Program, organised and delivered by the profession rather than by the jurisdictions or systems, is undoubtedly a factor that accounts significantly for its effectiveness.

The profile of the Program as one belonging to the profession and implemented through a national professional body was one that participants identified and perceived to be important. A number of principal respondents observed that they felt they had been treated as "*truly professional people*" by the Program. Some observed that the 'independence' of the Program enabled discussion in the workshops to be both "*vigorous and fulsome*".

- *The level of flexibility built into the Program so that emerging needs and issues could be addressed*. The evidence suggests that the effectiveness of the Program is supported by the flexibility of its design and by the responsiveness of the presenters to in-course feedback. References are made in the evidence gathered across the Evaluation to instances where processes were adjusted and improved, so that participants felt that their observations were both listened to and incorporated.

Additionally, the evidence indicates that feedback from course cohorts is used to modify and improve subsequent Program structure and content. There is little, if any, notion of the content as 'imposed' with little regard for the contexts of principals' work. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some participants felt that there could be more explicit valuing and utilisation of their experiences in particular Program sessions.

- *The diversity of backgrounds and experience represented across participants.* While the Program was designed with principals in the first five years of the principalship as the target group, it has developed such that principals with greater experience are also included amongst the successful applicants. On the whole, this dynamic has contributed to the effectiveness of the Program. There possibly has been a greater level of cross-fertilisation of ideas and views than if the principals had only come to the role in relatively recent times. Participants have been reassured that more experienced principals still see issues as challenging and that, therefore, grappling with complexity and ambiguity is not an indicator of under-performance, or even lack of experience.
- *The high quality of Program management and organisation.* Many principals commented on the 'outstanding' nature of the management and organisation of the Program. Accolades were extended about the level of internal support for Program participants, especially with regard to the efficiency and responsiveness of those involved in the administrative arrangements.

One principal, representative of many, saw 'support' in the following terms:

*The level of support from people associated with the Program was excellent...as a principal you can be very alone...it was wonderful to be in such a supportive environment.*

The survey data provide a quantified insight into the effectiveness of the various Program elements. The figure below (Figure 1) shows that there was an average response of almost 9.4, constituting exceptionally positive feedback in relation to each element. Differences among the elements were marginal with only 'Leadership: Taking the inner and outer journey' being scored at less than 9. Against all elements, the score category 'Highly influential' was given the highest rating by the respondents. Between 49 per cent and 69 per cent of respondents chose this category against each element. Against each element, fewer than 3 per cent of respondents selected score categories less than 5.

**Figure 1: Relative effectiveness of Program elements on influencing leadership**

Question	Score	No influence at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Highly influential
Leadership: Taking the inner and outer journey	8.953											
Myself as a leader	9.698											
Leading an effective organisation	9.349											
Myself as a leader in education	9.523											
Myself as a future leader of my school	9.430											
<b>Average</b>	<b>&gt;9.391</b>											

Many factors can be identified as contributing to the effectiveness of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program*. Participants, however, typically perceive some as especially vital. To a very significant extent, these elements are those that enable principals to make linkages between national perspectives of school leadership to each principal's individual context, and the learning that occurs through networks initiated and sustained by the profession. The following observation by a participant alludes to both elements.

*(The Program provided) a critical and reflective look at my leadership in the school that was informed by the latest research and delivered within a national and international context...the opportunity to engage in that process with feedback from the staff at the school and also to be involved in networking and learning from principals in other sectors and types of schools.*

## Meeting school leader needs

In their applications for acceptance into the Program, principals set out information about their professional needs and indicated the range of expectations they held in relation to the Program.

The following are the key professional needs shown by an analysis of a sample of applications.

- Overwhelmingly, the critical and most commonly cited need identified by the principals in their applications related to the leadership of staff in their schools. Through the Program they are seeking to add to their repertoire of knowledge, skills and understandings that will influence directly the values, outlooks and practices of staff.
- The evidence indicates that the participating principals find issues associated with staff leadership highly challenging and very complex. There is an underlying view that unless issues associated with the leadership of staff can be addressed appropriately, wider change and improvement in schools will be both unachievable and improbable, even over the longer term. It is around this area that the principals had very particular needs.

While it is possible to identify a number of sub-themes across the needs of principals in relation to leadership of staff, it was often linked by them in their applications to issues associated with cultural change and the effective initiation and management of change management processes. In particular, principals through the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* want to acquire knowledge and skills that will directly impact on staff in terms of building shared values, a unified and cohesive school culture, school consensus around issues such as strategic and management planning, and support for innovation more generally in teaching and learning.

The principals identified crucial issues around learning about models of 'best practice' that could be applied by them to lead the creation of positive staff values and attitudes. Some of the applications convey a sense of frustration around building density of leadership and the necessary level of staff consensus from which cultural change could be leveraged. For example, some made explicit reference to 'blockers' amongst staff who had exercised a limiting and inhibiting role that had made the initiation and sustaining of change 'difficult'.

Another often identified area of need related to the management of what principals perceived as an ever more complex educational milieu, covering elements such as curriculum change, school reporting and accountability, the structure and organisation of schooling, school-community partnerships, succession planning and management, and the integration of technologies in learning programs and school management. These areas are consistently identified in the literature as posing major challenges for school leaders.

For example, research evidence indicates principals have in recent time been especially affected by a perceived increase in the managerial orientation of the principalship. The research shows that the principals' role over the past two decades has seen increased: school-based management; increased accountability requirements from employing authorities and government; more demanding relationships with the school community; and, more time spent on management and paperwork (Whitaker, 2003; Stevenson, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2005). The fact that these duties seem to be taking up more and more of the principals' time, to the detriment of educational leadership, is identified in the research as a major source of tension.<sup>6</sup>

A number of the principals who contributed to the Evaluation alluded to the importance of the community context in exercising their educational leadership. For example, issues were covered such as economic and social revitalisation and how, as an educational leader, they could contribute to such community imperatives. It is clear from the applications that the principals placed their leadership in a wide setting, and they are looking for the Program to build their knowledge and understandings around the larger community role that they exercise. In other words, they do not regard being an effective educational leader as being only limited to the school-based role.

An area of need identified by the applicants was how best to align and integrate teaching and learning programs in order to maximise effectiveness and efficiency in delivery. They are interested in developing their analytical skills to see points of alignment and potential for integration, enabling them to address student needs. It is around this area that they tend to identify themselves as leaders of school learning communities – bringing people (staff, parents, community and students) together around a consensus of the things that need to be done to improve learning outcomes. The applications show a keen interest in curriculum, but also a preparedness to explore innovation in curriculum delivery at the school level.

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to Third Supporting Paper: Literature Review, p.3

The Evaluation evidence suggests that the design and content of the Program is meeting such needs to a very substantial extent. In relation to overall design, as alluded to elsewhere in this chapter, the design of the Program with its constituent elements 'works' for the participating principals. The concept of its longer term continuity, leading up to the recall course, is one that they strongly endorse. Suggestions for change are relatively few in number and appear to have more to do with the relative balance of sessions and modest changes of emphases rather than overall re-design *per se*.

The evidence indicates that the Program is meeting principal needs around the complex issues of cultural change processes, including building staff consensus and a shared set of strategically oriented directions. While such processes, as previously canvassed, are inevitably long term ones, the evidence does point to the Program having made contributions to the confidence and skills of principals to lead the change processes. For example, some principals reported that following the Program they had worked through critical issues affecting the school with executive staff and that staff members were engaged by the ideas being canvassed. One principal canvassed a major re-structuring of executive staff roles and saw this as a 'first step' towards building a much stronger sense of the school as a learning community.

Issues associated with 'generational change' in teaching figure prominently in the thinking of many principals. While they understand that the Program is not the place for 'solutions', it is clear from the evidence that they valued greatly the opportunities provided to debate the issues and to engage with others in possible 'ways forward'. Some principal respondents suggested that since the Program they have become more interested in 'succession planning' and ensuring that staff members have opportunities to accept and exercise greater responsibility for the processes of school change and improvement.

The program is enabling principals to directly access crucial understandings about the complex milieu of Australian schooling in which their leadership is exercised. This access, and the level of debate, is enabling principals to understand the 'national picture' in ways that had not previously been possible. It is a key illustration of how a truly national professional learning program can meet needs that may otherwise remain unaddressed.

The capacity extended to participating principals to link learnings in the Program to their immediate school context is enabling needs to be met at the individual level. This 'individualisation' built into the Program design is playing an important role in ensuring the relevance of the Program and underpinning its potential for impact into the future.

One of the needs that Principals commented that they felt was well addressed by the Program was what some termed "wellness". There appears to be genuine appreciation of the focus of the Program on the wellbeing and personal outlook of principals, and the reassurances around balancing professional and private lives offered by course presenters and colleagues are valued.

*It was unexpected to have a principal wellness thread running through – and this was so welcome as usually it is all about what the principal can do for others, not for themselves – and to maintain the energy and passion one has to pay particular attention to this. I was also pleasantly surprised at just how supportive and cooperative all of the principals were – there did not seem to be any competition, but a wonderfully collaborative environment...*

## **The scope and nature of new understandings, knowledge and skills**

From the evidence it is possible to identify the key understandings, knowledge and skills that many Program participants are developing through the *Leading Australia's Schools Program*. The range of these appears not to be limited in any way by factors such as jurisdiction, sector, type of school or principal experience profile.

The following are especially noted.

- *The development of a much stronger strategic view of leadership*, and of the importance of engaging others in a strategic view of the school's directions. The evidence for this outcome from the Program is substantial. Principals point to the important role that the Program plays in enabling detailed self-analysis of their leadership orientation and performance. The Program is also enabling principals to acquire knowledge about a range of national and international imperatives that are impacting and will impact on schooling into the future. For example, comments are made in the evidence base about: "*the opportunities for structured reflection*"

provided by the Program; “engaging with others in informed debate about critical issues for school leaders”; and, “canvassing how schools can be different to meet changing needs and changes in our society”. No participants suggested that such opportunities, or outcomes, had previously been possible to the extent achieved through the *Leading Australia’s Schools Program*.

- *Greater awareness of one’s strengths and areas for further development as a leader*, including the importance of taking account of and building on the views of others. The component of the Program focused on analysis through 360 degree surveys is enabling participants to achieve a level of understanding of themselves as leaders that they have not previously had. The explicit linkage of this information to both the local context and to the broader national setting is something that the participants are finding especially powerful. Comments are made about: having a “level of understanding about myself as a leader that I can now use positively”; “knowing the areas in which I should focus future professional learning”; and, “understanding how I can develop a common sense of direction for the school”.
- *Increased orientation to the development of the school as a place where all can learn* – students, teachers, parents and the wider community. The evidence suggests that many principals are graduating from the Program with a repertoire of practical skills to engage their communities in learning. Comments are made about the: “importance of developing the school as a place where all can learn, including teachers”; “making sure that I model what professional learning really should mean for staff”; and, “creating a culture where we can show and prove the differences we are making in children’s learning”. Participants perceive the Program as equipping them to work more effectively with others, and to ensure that this work is focused around the key imperatives of quality teaching and learning.
- *Increased appreciation of the importance of engaging executive staff in planning for transformation, innovation and change*. Many applicants for the Program held expectations that it would achieve outcomes in this area. This is evidenced in the references made in applications to concerns about building a greater sense of executive staff purpose, orienting members of leadership teams to emerging priority areas, and challenging outmoded beliefs and practices. The Program appears to have met these expectations very substantially, as can be identified in comments such as: “I feel more confident about how to have my executive team more involved in strategic planning”; “we will need to change the roles in our structure, they don’t match the school’s needs”; and, “we need to do our own succession planning and invest much more in getting people ready for the future”.
- *Placement of school leadership in the context of a wider national perspective*. This outcome is prominent across the evidence base. Many participants express the belief that the *Leading Australia’s Schools Program* has given them insights and understandings about school leadership from a national perspective that would otherwise be largely inaccessible. Comment is made by participants that the Program gave them a holistic and comprehensive view of issues affecting school leaders as well as significant opportunities in the workshop sessions to debate and discuss the issues. Consequently, many principals express the view that they feel better positioned to lead their schools into ‘new areas’ and better prepared to articulate the reasons for doing so.
- *Increased appreciation of the role of school leaders in driving innovation* in school structure, orientation and broadened accountabilities. One of the significant outcomes to emerge from the *Leading Australia’s Schools Program* relates to the greater awareness that many participants have of innovative approaches to schooling and of how challenges can be effectively addressed and resolved. Hence, comments are made such as: “leading innovation will now be a priority for me”; “I have learnt about ways of doing things differently that I will adapt in my own school”; and, “the course made me think about how change can be managed better, and I learnt new approaches...”.
- *Identification of the ‘commonalities’ across sectors and school types and seeing leadership in more holistic terms, including similarities with non-educational settings*. One of the features of the Program commented on by a number of respondents was that it promoted a truly national view of school leadership and of issues in schooling. Its cross-sectoral, cross-jurisdictional and cross-school type structure is identified as a unique strength of the Program. Thus, comments are made such as “...just listening to non-government principals talking about their role was so informative, the similarities with my challenges were striking” and “...we got beyond whether it was a government or non-government school, the issues were dealt with as professional issues...”.

Additionally, and as alluded to elsewhere in this chapter, many principals commented on the value they gained from the approach of the Program in placing school leadership in the wider context of leadership generally. The course visits to non-school sites were especially commented on in this regard as a very positive element of the Program. One participant expressed ‘distress’ at the cancellation of a visit due to unforeseen circumstances.

- *Creation of informed and informing networks of Program participants*, with potential to sustain the underpinnings and directions of the Program. As alluded to elsewhere in this chapter, a major outcome of the Program is the creation of professional networks of school leaders. Principals value the opportunities provided by the Program to engage with peers in a truly professional setting, and to develop relationships of real value to them into the future. The fact that so many principal graduates have stayed connected after the completion of the Program is testament to the strength of this outcome. Hence, comments are made in the evidence base such as: “quite a few of us keep in touch, and talk things through”; “the professionalism is the thing that we have all in common”; and, “we all wanted something to go forward with from the Program, so the networking has been important”.
- *Increased awareness of the professional context in which leadership occurs*. The Program is enabling participants to place their leadership in an explicit professional context, as distinct from an employer-employee context. The Program gives participants a strong sense of their ‘professional’ identity. Moreover, the evidence suggests that it gives them confidence to move forward to act from within a professional framework where such elements as standards of professional practice and self-regulation are welcomed.
- *Increased capacity to contribute to educational leadership beyond the immediate setting of the school*. Many Program graduates appear to gain confidence arising from their involvement that they can make a meaningful contribution to educational leadership and schooling beyond the immediate setting of their own school. In particular, they want the ‘voice’ of principals to be heard in the national debates around schooling and the development of our society. The calls by some participants for the creation of collegiate- or alumnus-style arrangements arising from the Program are perhaps an indicator of how this particular Program outcome could be extended.

## Impacts arising from the Program

Given that the Program is in its second year and that the Evaluation gathered evidence in relation to two completed Program cohorts (2006) and from one current cohort (semester one, 2007), it would be unreasonable to expect that impact at the level of approach and practice would be substantial at this stage. Indeed, the evidence suggests that many of the impacts will be truly long term, and that the processes of change in schools emanating from the Program cannot and should not be short term, quick fix solutions to ‘problems’.

Indeed, one of the ‘lessons’ from the Program referred to by participants is that change is multi-layered. The time frames for embedding change and shifting culture and practice are, of necessity, likely to be over periods of at least three years, and perhaps longer.

That said, however, there is ample evidence of the Program having ‘impact’ at the school level and that change processes have commenced. The following provide some insight into these impacts.

- *Greater focus on quality strategic planning*. There is evidence to suggest that the Program is leading principals to re-think their approach to strategic planning. For example, some participants canvassed how they had become more appreciative of inclusive planning approaches across the school community, and of Program areas where their leadership could have greater impact within the school. The evidence indicates that many principal graduates feel more confident about their role in leading planning activities, and that planning is directed much more towards achieving embedded change in approach and practice as a basis for increased school effectiveness.
- *Increased attention given to leadership roles and succession planning*. The evidence suggests a linkage between participation in the Program and principals being more attuned to the roles that executive staff in particular should cover. For example, one respondent cited re-structuring the roles of executive staff so that there was an explicit focus on learning outcomes accountability and tied this directly to learnings from the Program. Additionally, many principals felt that the Program highlighted for them the challenges and opportunities posed by ‘generational change’ in teaching and canvassed how, at the local level, they would be much more oriented to succession planning.
- *Increased importance attached to business and community partnerships*. This is perhaps a somewhat unanticipated impact arising from the Program. Many participants appear to have been greatly impressed by the broader leadership context presented through the Program and by the site visits to non-educational settings. The Program in this regard appears to have ‘lifted horizons’ and to have prompted principals to see the potential of wider school-business partnerships. A number of principals commented that this element had been incorporated into school planning more prominently, and that they were being more pro-active to establish such partnerships.

- *Invest more strategically in the professional learning of staff.* Some respondents observed that the Program highlighted the value of sustained investment in quality professional learning for staff. For example, some participants observed that they would value an opportunity for executive staff to be involved in a similar program. Should this not be possible, a number of principals commented that they would ensure provision of broadened opportunities for teachers, including locally organised exchanges, placement with local business and increased mentoring and coaching arrangements. In other words, principals are seeing great potential for impact where the learning is not only within the confines of the school setting or its immediate priorities.
- *Increased understanding of the dynamics of broader societal change and ensuring that schools are well placed to respond.* Work undertaken through the Program that touched on 'future scenarios' appears to have especially engaged the participating principals. This appears, for most, to have been a new dimension in their professional learning and one that they both enjoyed and valued. There is some evidence to suggest that impacts have flowed through to schools. For example, some principals speak of their schools becoming more future-oriented because of the knowledge they acquired through the Program. They are leading staff to think more broadly about community and society and to work through scenarios and options for the future development of the school and of teaching and learning programs.

Further, this area was one canvassed by jurisdictional authority respondents to the Evaluation, with comments that for the future they will invest greater effort in raising principals' understanding of social change processes. It is a telling illustration of the desirability for dialogue across all the stakeholders to achieve complementarity of effort in school leader professional learning.

The survey data provide insight into participant perceptions of impact, albeit within the caveat of the relatively limited timeframes involved. Taken together, the survey data suggest that, through the Program, principals are developing the knowledge, skills and confidence to be more effective leaders. The Program is supporting changed approach and practice by Program graduates in their schools. The data indicate strongly that a greatly strengthened sense of professional identity is a major contributor to more effective school leadership.

**Figure 2: Overall impact of the Leading Australia's Schools Program**

Question	Score	No influence at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Extensive change
Improved knowledge and skills	8.663											
Changed professional approach	8.105											
Transformed aspects of the culture of the school	7.744											
Impacted directly on improved student outcomes	7.000											
Improved your professional identity as a school leader	8.512											
Improved the status of teaching as a profession	6.791											
Met your personal needs as a leader	9.523											
<b>Average</b>	<b>&gt;8.048</b>											

No principal respondent suggested that major transformation had been fully achieved as a consequence of the Program and no respondent identified any instance where the Program could be identified as the salient or only factor in a school change process. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, such considerations involve a much longer time frame and the inter-action of a complex range of factors.

However, there are some transformations that principals alluded to that had either commenced or were envisaged, confirming the data in Figure 2 above. The transformations included the following.

- *A greater level of engagement with school governing authorities in relation to strategic imperatives and objectives.* Some non-government school principals in particular observed that since the Program they had engaged much more fully with the school's governing body to explore and understand strategic imperatives in schooling and society likely to have impact into the future. They were now working with the governing body to incorporate objectives that would enable the school to address the imperatives. Government school principals were less likely to make such an observation, although some did canvass their having 'revisited' their strategic planning processes to make them more inclusive of the school's stakeholders.
- *The development of a culture of professional improvement.* Many participants commented on how powerful the Program was in focusing them on the importance of sustained professional learning, for themselves and for the teachers whom they lead. Some 'less experienced' principals commented that they had found the role so demanding that they had not sufficiently attended to their professional growth. Some 'experienced' principals felt that their professional learning had not always challenged or energised them. The following response captures aspects of the transformations that appear to be occurring as a consequence of the Program.

*(The Program has) given me heightened awareness of the importance of creating a vision that is known and valued by all in the school community. I have employed the services of a coach to keep me focused in this area of my work. Additionally, the power of coaching others to achieve their potential within the organisation was crystallised for me during the program and consequently I have undertaken an extensive program on cognitive coaching this year.*

- *Engaging staff in the professional standards debate.* Some principals observed that the Program had highlighted for them the importance of standards of professional practice. Instances were cited where discussion in schools about standards had become more prominent following the participation of the principal in the Program. A number of principals observed that the current emphasis on developing teaching and leadership standards set 'by the profession for the profession' was a positive step towards true professionalism. They felt that the Program had assisted them to better understand the 'place' of professional standards, especially in the context of a national approach driven by the profession.

### **Increased professional identity and status**

Evidence reported previously in this chapter suggests strongly that the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is contributing to increased professional identity and status. This arises from three principal sources.

First, the fact that the Program is initiated, designed and delivered 'by the profession for the profession' accords it a dimension and status that cannot be matched by employer initiated professional learning. The concept of a hallmark of a profession being one that takes responsibility for the professional learning of its members appears to have struck a chord with the participants. Indeed, many participants convey a genuine sense of pride that 'their profession' could organise and present this learning at such a high quality level and do so without any expectations other than sustained commitment to quality performance by participants into the future. The following observation captures the views expressed around this area.

*The professional approach and the care and concern for us as professional leaders was outstanding – and one not experienced before! We really felt valued by the approach and by the high quality service (venue, food, accommodation, flights).*

Second, the fact that the Program is truly national in its design and delivery. It brings together principals from extraordinarily diverse settings and contexts. Repeatedly in the evidence base there are references to this 'national dimension' through comments such as "*the participation of principals from different states and school systems made it a unique professional learning experience*" and "*I had never before sat down and talked at length with an independent school principal, it was a great thing for all of us to be able to shed those sort of labels*".

One participant respondent spoke for many in the following observation.

*This was the first time I had ever got to work across states, systems and levels of schooling and it was wonderful. Keep that (structure) as we felt we were talking about educational leadership and making valuable bigger connections than our normal narrow networks.*

Third, appreciation of the potential for principals to develop understandings from a national perspective and this feel better place to contribute to the profession. This features prominently in the Evaluation evidence base and suggests that the Program has enabled principals to identify and better understand their status as members of a profession and how they can contribute to and through the profession nationally. Hence, comments are made such as: “we can contribute to what is happening nationally through our networks and by being a profession”; “I felt as though I was treated and respected in the Program as a professional person” and, “Teaching Australia should be commended for this Program and for bringing principals together from all over the country and letting them have a voice”.

## **Conclusion**

There is substantial evidence that the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is a highly effective Program in the domain of school leader professional learning. In a quite short period of time it has come to occupy an important and unique place in the range of professional learning opportunities available to the leaders of Australia's schools. The evidence suggests that the design and implementation of the Program as effort 'for the profession by the profession' underpins its appeal to principals and contributes significantly to the capacity of the Program to meet their professional needs.

The Evaluation evidence indicates that the Program is successfully addressing the strategic dimension of school leadership to an extent that may not always be possible in other effort. Certainly, the national and cross-sectoral design and implementation of the Program are important elements in both its appeal to and impact on principals. The Program is effectively connecting the local contexts in which principals exercise their leadership to a national perspective of issues affecting school leadership. The evidence also suggests that the design and content of the Program is enabling principals to engage in critical issues of Australian schooling that represent both challenges and opportunities.

Irrespective of possible future effort in the area of school leader professional learning associated with the Program, there can be little doubt that the essential integrity of the Program should be retained. The design, orientation and content of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* are 'working', ensuring that a range of important professional needs of Australia's principals are addressed and met. Those associated with the Program should take very considerable pride in the extent of the achievements and the capacity of the Program to be even further strengthened into the future.

## 4 Improving the Effectiveness of the Program for 2008

This chapter considers implications from the Evaluation for ways in which the effectiveness of the Leading Australia's Schools Program could be improved for 2008. It is structured around the five areas where the Evaluation evidence pointed to potential for the further development of the Program to ensure that it meets the greatest possible suite of principal professional needs.

### **Futures thinking**

Participating principals are finding the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* to be especially engaging where it enables the canvassing of possible future scenarios for school leaders and for the futures of the schools that they lead. While there is awareness on the part of at least some of them of the work undertaken by Teaching Australia in the area of scenario building, there is a more general belief that scenario building has a highly legitimate place in the Program and should be incorporated into it wherever possible.

The evidence indicates that many of the participating principals are oriented to ensuring that their schools will be well placed to meet emerging needs, both in schooling and in society more generally. The Evaluation points to a keen interest on their part in engaging with processes that will enable them to identify and better understand these needs. It also points to a very high level of professional desire to acquire the understandings, knowledge and skills that will enable them to envisage, plan for and lead 'tomorrow's schools'. Where the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* has enabled debate and reflection around emerging challenges and opportunities, principals are overwhelmingly positive about the relevance and importance of their engagement. They comment about feeling better informed to address key issues at the local level. They believe that access to a genuinely 'national picture' of school leadership and of schooling gives them capacity at a local level to act from a sound and informed base.

The literature confirms the desirability of strengthening wherever possible the scope of the Program in this regard. For example, McCallum (2007) reports that:

*Professional development for principals must be designed and delivered to incorporate the principal's motivation and disposition towards learning and growth. What principals bring to their learning experience greatly influences the quality and outcomes of their professional development.<sup>7</sup>*

Principals see issues affecting 'leadership' and issues affecting 'schooling' as inseparably linked. The effectiveness of their leadership is increased where, as principals and learning in association with other leaders of the profession, they can engage in the debates, discussions and reflections that will improve their capacity for effective action into the future. Highly relevant in this regard is the extent to which many principal respondents endorsed the 'wider perspective' brought by the Leading Australia's Schools Program when it canvassed leadership more generally, beyond schools and beyond education. There is a strong sense in the Evaluation evidence that principals are keenly interested in broader societal shifts and transformations, and believe that what happens beyond the immediate setting of the school must be well understood and should be engaged with if they are to be well informed members and leaders of their profession.

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7 N. McCallum, *Professional development for principals. A way forward*. The Australian Educational Leader, 3, 2007, p.36

## **A broadened leadership perspective**

One of the important findings to emerge from the Evaluation evidence, reported in the previous chapter, was the value placed by participating principals on the visits conducted during the residential component of the Program to non-educational settings. Many commented in their responses to the Evaluation that they found these visits enormously valuable and stimulating. They valued the broadened perspectives that emerged during and from the visits. There were, over the course of the Evaluation, many calls for these 'visits' to be expanded wherever possible, and certainly for their retention.

Some principals observed that they were stimulated by the visits, and the associated discussions, because they extended their perceptions into areas with which they would otherwise not engage. For example, comment was made about how much was learned by discussing leadership issues with a person who was not associated with schooling but who had insights with implications for school leaders. Some expressed genuine surprise that they found themselves able to engage in quite in-depth discussions with non-educational leaders, and how similar were a number of the issues.

An indication of impact in this regard can be gained from the number of principals who observed that, following the Program, they had invested more time and effort in building associations with leaders working in other fields in the local community and beyond. Further, a number observed that they had re-thought their approach to mentoring and coaching, and were seeing the desirability of at least including non-educational leaders in arrangements developed for both themselves and for executive staff members.

Findings in this regard may have implications for the design and content of the Leading Australia's Schools Program. Certainly, the involvement of the University of Melbourne and the Hay Group would suggest that the Program is exceptionally well placed to venture even further into this area and to extend an aspect of the Program that is clearly meeting with considerable success. The representatives of peak industry groups, some of whom showed a keen interest in the Evaluation and the broader issues of concern to it, are likely to be potential partners in any expansion of effort within the scope of the Program.

## **The implications of information and communication technologies**

Evidence gathered from Program participants suggests that in the present arrangements of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program*, the area of the implications of information and communication technologies for school leadership could be somewhat more fully addressed. Indeed, some principals observed that they were surprised that the area was not prominent in the course content. They commented that there were 'high pressure imperatives' attached to information and communication technologies that they needed to engage with and believed that opportunity at a national level through the Program could make a significant contribution to their understandings, knowledge and skills.

The evidence in the literature pointing to the importance of this area is clear and compelling. Taken together, the evidence constitutes a 'revolution' in how schools will be structured and function into the future. Leaders will be confronted by imperatives for change in approach and practice if school effectiveness is to be ensured. Beare (2001) argues that traditional conceptions of schooling are passing, and that the environments in which they operate will become increasingly fluid.<sup>8</sup> Technology will very substantially shape this fluidity.

To a significant extent, this area is probably a sub-set of the domain concerned with 'futures thinking' canvassed earlier in this chapter. Potential for the Program to be strengthened in this regard should not be interpreted as increasing the technical skill level *per se* of principals in the area. It is not a technical issue; it is a conceptual issue focused on working through the implications of emerging information and communication technologies. There is, across the Evaluation evidence, a desire for the Program to be strengthened so that the importance of the area is appropriately acknowledged and so that there is appropriate opportunity for participants to engage with the many complexities that are involved.

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8 Refer to Third Supporting Paper: Literature Review, p.8

A 'way forward' may be for consideration to be given to a partnership arrangement whereby people with knowledge and skills in the area could support the Program. Again, the role of the University of Melbourne and the Hay Group in the Program means that current arrangements should be well placed to facilitate the strengthening of the Program around the area. The evidence suggests that the 'way forward' should be to integrate such a focus into the present design and delivery, rather than perceiving it as an 'add on' or as a separate initiative.

### **Supporting principals in relation to survey data**

One of the central elements of the design and content of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is the collection, through '360 degree surveys' of local data about the leadership of the participating principal. These data form a foundational set of information that connects the principal to the Program and in large measure creates its relevance to each individual context.

This element of the Program design is overwhelmingly supported by the principal participants. However, the evidence suggests that some principals can find the data, and their implications, quite challenging. Indeed, as commented on elsewhere in this report, the data can, in some instances, be distressing at the individual level. There were calls over the course of the Evaluation for there to be a continuing lookout and concern on the part of Program presenters where situations of this kind may arise.

The Evaluation notes that, since the inception of the Program, presenters have been increasingly conscious of the issue and that they are proactive in dealing with it. However, even amongst the 2007 cohort that contributed to the Evaluation, the view was expressed that a small number of principals felt "very exposed" by the survey data they received and, perhaps away from the course sessions, were visibly upset. Given the importance of principal wellness, commented on in the previous chapter of this report, there can be little doubt that the Program's support and counselling mechanisms must always be perceptive and close at hand. Where support is insufficient, there will always be a risk of the Program undermining the very things that it explicitly sets out to do, including raising principals' sense of professional identity and status and increasing their capacity to effectively lead their schools.

### **Building professional learning networks**

As explored in the previous chapter, there were many calls over the course of the Evaluation for the creation of 'formalised' networks that would link graduates of the Program. Some called for an alumnus-style arrangement whereby their participation in the Program would be accorded recognition by the profession and through which they could continue to engage in professional learning from a national perspective. It should be noted that, in general, principals expressed relatively limited interest in the role of the Program in relation to recognition for tertiary qualifications, although the opportunity to do so was endorsed.

The arrangements envisaged for possible formalised professional learning networks would need to be carefully considered as they could, potentially at least, have significant cost implications. Two elements could, however, play a vital role in giving the concept legitimacy. One element could be to engage the professional associations as key supporters of the networks, facilitating principals who have graduated from the Program staying in contact across state and sector 'boundaries'. For instance, graduate principals could have an important role in presenting and leading workshops or forums initiated by the associations, as a number have already done. It is very clear that a number of principals who have participated in the Program want to maintain engagement at a national level, and such a structure and process may be a highly appropriate way of enabling this to occur.

Another element to support a continuing network linked to the Program could be for consideration to be given to a website under the auspices of Teaching Australia, perhaps supported by group email arrangements to Program graduates. Such an arrangement would enable Program graduates to access communication channels and relevant information. However, the initiative would need to be well maintained to ensure its currency. Again, there may be potential for the professional associations to be partners in such an initiative.

There is some evidence to indicate that principals may value a second recall session, perhaps some 18 months out from the conclusion of the Program. A number of participants observed that they would value sharing their longer term post-Program experiences with their cohort colleagues and learning about how other

principals had leveraged from the Program. While the concept has obvious merit, it would need to be balanced against the issue of the extent to which it may limit the access of other principals to the Program given the associated costs involved.

## **Conclusion**

It should be emphasised that the areas identified across the Evaluation data for the improvement of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* are quite limited. The Program enjoys overwhelming endorsement from the participants and the strategic stakeholders who are informed about it. Indeed, many emphasised the importance of retaining the Program in its present design, structure and content and explicitly warned against too many changes at this relatively early stage in the life of the Program. Such calls should be heeded, and, as noted in the previous chapter, the essential integrity of the Program should be retained into 2008.

There were no calls made for any major changes to the design or structure of the Program, with the exception of the caveat noted above about a possible second recall session. The initial readings, residential program, challenge project and recall program are strongly perceived as the right 'mix' and as well balanced. Together, they clearly constitute a high effective best practice approach to school leader professional learning at a national level.

One issue raised across the evidence was that of the differing levels of experience of principals in the participating cohorts. While the Program primarily targets principals in the first five years of the role, more experienced principals are also accepted into it. This mixing of experience levels, explored in the previous chapter, appears to be a positive aspect of the Program. The Evaluation evidence suggests that the present priority given to less experienced principals should be retained, but that there should also be opportunity for those who have been principals for more than five years to apply and be accepted.

The primary investment of the Program should be in principals whose careers will extend into the next decade and beyond. At the same time, there are obvious benefits for these principals, and for more experienced principals and for the profession as a whole, where the investment involves a mix of experience levels as well as state and sector backgrounds.

# 5 Possible Future Directions for Teaching Australia in Relation to National School Leadership

This chapter explores, on the basis of the Evaluation evidence, some possible options for consideration in relation to future effort by Teaching Australia in the area of national school leadership.

## **Tomorrow's school leaders**

One of the references made frequently by Program participants was to the scale and complexity of issues associated with 'succession planning'. These references were prominent in the applications of a number of principals, often couched around how best to build the understandings and skills of executive staff. In interviews, principals frequently canvassed the value of the Program for enabling them to more effectively lead their staff and to build greater coherence around shared goals and directions. Additionally, some alluded to the perceived need for the profession to be more proactive in encouraging young and talented teachers into career paths that would lead to the principalship.

As one respondent noted:

*...generational change in teaching...has now commenced and...is challenging many principals.*

There is a strong sense of imperative around the issue in the Evaluation evidence base.

As commented on elsewhere in this report, there can be little doubt about the importance of retaining the essential integrity of the *Leading Tomorrow's Schools Program*. For example, the evidence suggests that the integrity of the Program would be both compromised and diminished if its target audience was extended to include principals *and* their leadership teams. The unique capacity of the Program to meet a range of needs explicitly linked to practising principals would be extremely difficult to replicate in a 'broadened' Program design.

In any event, a number of principals made the point that the Program had translated directly into strengthened team building at the local level and that the benefits of the Program were not only for them as graduates of it. For example, some participants observed that they had become more confident about developing approaches at the local level to address the area of 'succession planning' and were placing greater value on what could be done locally to build professional skills and interest in school leadership.

That said, the evidence is compelling that there is a gap at a national level which the profession could well address. The gap concerns the investment required, comparable in terms of design and approach to the *Leading Tomorrow's Schools Program*, for 'tomorrow's school leaders'. The need is for a national program through which the profession invests in those talented and energetic teachers, at whatever level, who will be 'tomorrow's school leaders', the next generation of school leaders.

The need is not for a program for deputy principals, for example, or even for teachers holding executive positions. That would be too limiting a view of the strategic role that a potential program could play. The need is to provide a significant strategic opportunity at a national level for those most likely to be school leaders into the coming decades. These could, of course, be those currently holding positions as deputy principals, but they could also be talented young teachers in whom the profession should now invest for a later dividend.

The 'mix' that would be involved should be seen as a significant element of the program design, creating a genuine sense of professional engagement around the critical professional issues and opportunities that will emerge across Australian schooling and school leadership. A broad base of participation opportunity would need to be prominent in the conceptualisation and in the promotion of the program.

The strategic orientation of the *Leading Tomorrow's Schools Program* should be viewed as pointing the way forward for the envisaged initiative. For example, the success of the Program in addressing the complexity of interactions between leadership, schooling and societal change suggests that it is the 'professional' umbrella under which the learning occurs which contributes significantly to the unique identity of the Program. Through this 'professional' framework the Program is able to engage with issues that may otherwise be regarded as a lesser priority when in reality they sit at the very heart of the principalship.

There is ample evidence for this in the literature. For example, an OECD study (2001) found that over the past decade school leaders have been expected to develop a new layer of skills in building partnerships and working with local communities. Understanding societal change has emerged as key component of the school leader's role. In preparing the next generation of school leaders, the complexity of issues associated with societal change, including the capacity of schools to be responsive and implications for school leaders as they shape the processes of school transformation, should be at the forefront of the profession's thinking.<sup>9</sup>

Further, investment by the profession in such effort would demonstrate its commitment to ensuring that its members were well placed to move towards and into leadership roles. There is ample evidence in the literature about a likely shortage of school leaders into the future, and of declining interest by members of the profession in looking to possible leadership. For example, Mulford (2003) concluded that we are in danger of losing our 'brightest and best' future leaders because the role is seen as 'too demanding, stressful, lonely and lacking support'. Research in the United States indicates that those who would be expected to lead schools in the future are consciously rejecting the role (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cooley and Shen, 1999; Beaudin, et al, 2002).<sup>10</sup>

These are issues with which the profession needs to engage. While they are issues that have implications for employers, many of the underlying factors cover key aspects of professional life. These include developing the skills and understandings for effective leadership and creating the professional networks and relationships that will sustain school principals in complex milieus. The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* has enjoyed obvious success around such issues, and there is every reason to believe that a comparable program for the next generation of school leaders could do likewise.

## Professional standards

The Evaluation evidence demonstrates that *Leading Australia's Schools Program* participants are keenly interested in the area of standards of professional practice for school leaders. Observations were made by a number of participants about the importance of a national view of standards of professional practice and how such standards could be a key reference point in leading a high performing school. Some participants suggested that the Program areas of focus 'fit' with at least the concept of 'advanced' leadership standards, even if there was yet to be national consensus.

The literature contains substantial evidence about the importance of standards of professional practice for school leaders and canvasses their implications for school leader professional learning. The literature suggests that professional standards can provide a framework for professional learning as they form the infrastructure for professional development programs and the basis for professional certification for school leaders.<sup>11</sup>

It is likely, where national agreement is reached about standards of professional practice for school leaders, that the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* would be well placed to bring a national perspective to the professional learning associated with their introduction. The evidence suggests that the Program could be readily adapted to fulfil a key role to support 'advanced' standards. Further, there may be potential for the Program to play a role in the recognition extended to principals in terms of their engagement in 'high standard' professional learning. This is an area where there will need to be cognizance of emerging opportunities for the Program, including the strategic positioning of it to make a potentially important national contribution.

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9 Refer to Third Supporting Paper: Literature Review, p.5

10 Refer to Third Supporting Paper: Literature Review, p.6

11 See Third Supporting Paper: Literature Review, pp.14ff

Similarly, a possible program for the next generation of school leaders, comparable to the *Leading Australia's Schools Program*, could be designed and developed around national professional standards of school leadership. One of the factors that appears to account for the success of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* was that it aligned so well with the generally agreed areas of leadership standards.

Should a national professional learning program be developed for the next generation of school leaders, its design should similarly look to the standards area and ensure that its coverage will enable professional learning to occur within the parameters of the standards. At the same time, care would need to be exercised that the final form and shape of possible agreed national standards were not overly pre-judged or overly predicted at the technical level. In any event, such a technical framework would not fit well with the strategic orientation of the envisaged program.

## **A national view**

The *Leading Australia's Schools Program*, in a quite short space of time, has come to occupy an important place in the landscape of school leader professional learning. Should the Program continue into the future, there is every reason to believe that its appeal to principals will become broader and that the key stakeholders will become increasingly knowledgeable about and supportive of the initiative. The Program is a powerful demonstration of the commitment of the profession to quality school leadership, and a powerful demonstration that a national perspective can and should be brought to the professional learning that supports quality school leadership.

The issue of complementarity, canvassed elsewhere in this report, features across the Evaluation evidence. At present, albeit with a limited number of exceptions, knowledge of the Program among the employers and others with a stake in school leader professional learning is quite limited. This is understandable given the time frame involved.

However, and irrespective of the considerable challenges involved, there may be scope for Teaching Australia to initiate and contribute to the dialogues that could strengthen the complementarity of effort in school leader professional learning in the domains that are the focus of *Leading Tomorrow's Schools*. Clearly, the Program meets a unique set of needs within a national perspective of school leadership that few, if any, employing authorities would be able to match in their professional learning programs. There may be scope to build recognition of this 'place' of the Program across the key stakeholders, contributing to complementarity at the national level.

The Program has shown that principals are looking for a national perspective of school leadership as part of their professional learning. The strategic, national dimension brought by *Leading Tomorrow's Schools* is perceived as relevant to their leadership at the local level. Where complementarity can be identified or created, principals will be better placed to appreciate the value that would be added through their participation in the Program. Without appropriate explicitness around complementarity, the value-add component of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* may be more difficult to identify.

While there may be a range of avenues for appropriate dialogues to be developed, it could be that the professional associations could fulfil a role in facilitating exploration of the issues. Many are also linked to programs provided by the employing authorities, and are in a good position to understand where there may be opportunities for complementarity to be strengthened. Additionally, the fact that some employing authorities have actively sought knowledge about the Program and are encouraging of principals to apply, suggests that the 'barriers' to the identification of complementarity may be relatively few.

## **Conclusion**

The success of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* points the way forward in the area of national effort in school leader professional learning. The national perspective has proven compelling for those principals who have participated in the Program, as has the development and implementation of the Program through the profession. These twin characteristics should be salient features of possible other effort in school leader professional learning.

The primary target audience to guide future directions in the area should be those teachers who will constitute the next generation of school leaders. Against a strong national perspective of school leadership and of schooling, there is opportunity for a program to be developed that addresses their professional learning needs. Any program that may be developed should incorporate the key success elements of *Leading Australia's Schools*.

These include the Program's linkage between a national perspective of school leadership and local action, the provision of opportunities to explore broad leadership issues and societal change, and the concept that the learning may be formally recognised, especially in the context of possible nationally agreed standards of professional practice.

The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* demonstrates the value of a highly focused, best practice approach to meeting the professional learning needs of principals. The strategic focus of the Program underpins its appeal and relevance. By the profession also extending this effort to meet the professional learning needs of the upcoming generation of school leaders, Teaching Australia will have made a significant contribution to the quality of leadership in Australia's schools.

# 6 Future Leadership Development Needs, Opportunities and Gaps at a National Level

This chapter considers, on the basis of the Evaluation evidence, the areas in which there are emerging leadership development needs and the opportunities and gaps that may exist at a national level to address these needs.

## Emerging leadership development needs

One of the principal findings to emerge from the Evaluation evidence is that the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is effectively addressing what would appear to be the major emerging needs of principals in professional learning. Overwhelmingly, the evidence points to principals applying to participate in the Program on the basis of identifying it as focused on their needs for increased understanding, knowledge and skills in the domain of strategic leadership. It is the domain of strategic leadership, pitched at a national level and delivered within the profession, which is the critical marker of the Program as one that meets the professional learning needs of principals.

Testament of the success of the Program in this regard can be seen in the extent to which principal participants express the belief that their needs have been met by the Program. This includes the extent to which the Program has filled gap areas, so that many participants concluded that because of their participation in the Program they felt they were at the forefront of the understandings and knowledge they required for effective school leadership. A comment by one participant was echoed by a number of principals:

*After this Program the gaps had been filled...the focus on the principal as the strategic leader was challenging and supportive...the Program tackled the important questions in school leadership.*

From the evidence it is possible to identify the areas in which the Program enjoyed particular success because of its orientation to the emerging professional learning needs of principals. These include, *inter alia*:

- building a strategic view of the directions of the school, as opposed to managerial considerations, and developing the repertoire of knowledge and skills to translate the directions into realities for all through a consensus based approach
- making explicit linkages between, on the one hand, a national perspective of school leadership and of issues in Australian schooling and, on the other, the local setting in which the leadership is exercised
- exploring futures thinking with a particular focus on the implications for school leadership and schooling of broader societal change
- building a perspective of school leadership from within the parameters of leadership more generally, including the world of business and industry
- addressing challenging issues associated with succession planning and the 'lifting' of leadership capacity at the local level, including the concept of leadership density
- accessing a truly national perspective of the leadership of Australia's schools, shaped by the views and expectations of the profession itself.

The literature is substantially confirming in this regard. For example, a review of the literature shows that there are five areas in particular where there are current and emerging needs for school principals.

- Tension between the demands of managing a whole range of community and government pressures, compliance requirements and accountabilities and being an educational leader.
- Problems related to an ageing workforce and a dearth of people prepared to 'put up their hands' for the principalship, as well as the need to retain current leaders.

- Rapid and persistent pace of change.
- Movement from an industrial model to a knowledge economy.
- Role of the leader within the school context.<sup>12</sup>

Given that the Evaluation evidence points to the implications of information and communication technologies as an aspect of 'futures thinking' needs, the commonality between the evidence base and the literature is striking. This commonality explains very substantially why the Program is perceived so positively as one that identifies and addresses emerging needs.

The Evaluation evidence indicates that effort in the area of school leader professional learning, especially at the national level, should be shaped substantially around the areas and considerations outlined above. The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* shows that a nationally conceived and designed program, delivered with the 'independence' of the profession as a key consideration, and oriented to making linkages between the local and national contexts of school leadership is well placed for high order effectiveness.

The evidence, including the research literature, suggests that the content of professional learning programs for school leaders should enable the development of understandings, knowledge and skills for them to:

- be future oriented and attuned to societal changes
- lead and influence quality teaching and learning in their schools
- have informed understandings about themselves as leaders and the learning required for effective leadership
- be adept at developing teams and practising distributive leadership
- develop skills in the areas of enterprise and innovation
- develop partnerships with business and industry and community groups to strengthen the relevance of schooling and improve students' learning opportunities
- initiate and contribute to important dialogues, including community leaders and politicians
- be innovative in harnessing finite resources, especially in the context of personnel shortages
- promote their profession and the rewards that come with standards of professional practice.

### **Opportunities and gaps at the national level**

As indicated elsewhere in this Report, the participant evidence in particular points to a belief that the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is largely unique. Its unique identity arises primarily from the extent to which it addresses the strategic issues of school leadership in a national context. As explored above, it is in this strategic domain of school leadership that can be found some of the most pressing imperatives for school leader professional learning, irrespective of state or territory, sector, school type or level of experience.

*The content and pitch of the Program is right...it deals with the important issues facing principals and challenges them in ways that most courses do not...it is something that all principals should have the chance to do...*

That the Program addresses needs in the strategic domain is critical to its effectiveness and success. The Program is addressing the gap areas in school leader professional learning at a design and delivery standard that constitutes 'best practice'. The Program is doing so because it is not driven by what some participants refer to as 'technical' considerations and nor is it driven by the imperatives of the employing and curriculum authorities. Needs in the 'technical' areas of leadership appear, on the basis of the evidence, to be well covered by effort elsewhere in school leader professional learning. What this other effort, by its very nature and positioning, has difficulty engaging with is the national, strategic perspective that appears such a strong area of professional learning need for many principals.

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<sup>12</sup> See Third Supporting Paper: Literature Review p.3

The emerging opportunities are suggested by the evidence explored elsewhere in this report. In particular:

- High value appears to come from the engagement of leading-edge practitioners in professional learning who bring both current knowledge and an independent perspective to program design and implementation. The important role of the University of Melbourne and of the Hay Group cannot be sufficiently emphasised in this regard. Design and delivery by 'internal' providers would probably not engage principals as powerfully as the 'external' presenters have done through the Program.

The evidence suggests that at the employer level there is increasing awareness of an 'external' perspective being brought to school leader professional learning and according greater responsibility to principals for the exercise of responsibility for professional learning. This represents a significant opportunity at a national level to shape future effort in school leader professional learning, led by the profession.

- The design of the Program in bringing together participants from across the states and territories, the sectors and types of schools has been an important success factor. The 'demand' for a national perspective in school leader professional learning constitutes a significant opportunity from which future effort could be leveraged.
- While the Program gives priority to the targeted group of principals in the early years of the principalship, its openness to more experienced principals has not acted as a limiting factor. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that the 'mix' has contributed to the effectiveness of the initiative. Any conceptualisation of possible other effort comparable to the Program should be cognizant of this outcome and the opportunities that are represented to support the next generation of school leaders.
- The interest of peak industry and business groups, however nascent, represents an emerging opportunity to broaden the base and appeal of national effort in school leader professional learning. It is clear that the incorporation of a non-educational perspective on leadership has added value to the *Leading Australia's Schools Program*. There is every reason to believe that there may be opportunities to increase the profile of such a perspective in future effort. Certainly, the observations of Program participants that they are much more focused on developing partnerships across their communities is testament to the impact of the perspective in the Program and of its relevance to principals.

As canvassed in the previous chapter, another area of emerging opportunity in the domain of school leader professional learning relates to national work on standards of professional practice for teachers and school leaders. The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* is well placed to access and utilise the understandings now being developed so that into the future a stronger standards perspective can be incorporated. The Evaluation evidence suggests that explicit incorporation of work on standards could be highly legitimate in the context of the Program, as could promotion of the potential contribution of the Program to meeting higher order school leadership standards.

Another area of opportunity may arise from the many calls for sustained networking to be more explicitly built into the Program. Strengthened effort in this area would contribute to the commitment made that the Program should support *the formation of an ongoing learning community* as an outcome. While a linked website could facilitate this, there may be also scope to engage the professional associations in carrying the effort forward. This could include identifying Program graduates who may play a valuable role in initiating and sustaining networks, and in facilitating broadly based mentoring relationships.

Finally, as explored elsewhere in this Report, the Evaluation found that there may be scope for an initiative to be developed that would complement the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* by providing a nationally designed and delivered program for the next generation of school leaders. The issue of succession planning figures prominently in the Evaluation evidence base, and there are likely to be opportunities for the development of a program that would have an explicit focus on meeting the needs of those members of the profession to whom the leadership baton must inevitably pass.

## Conclusion

The 'flagship' status of the Program as leading edge professional learning for school leaders 'by the profession, for the profession', is widely endorsed across the three participant cohorts that contributed to the Evaluation. Equally, the observations of those associated with the design and delivery of the Program suggest a high level of commitment to it on the basis of the level of success being enjoyed. At the level of leadership in the professional associations there is very considerable support for the Program, and an endorsement of its appeal to and relevance for school leaders, albeit with the caveat that the promotion of the Program needs to be sustained.

The Program has identified opportunity at a national level and moved decisively and creatively to address the needs of principals in a structure that truly constitutes best practice in the area. Indeed, the modelling of the approach may, over time, come to be seen as one of the tangible outcomes of the Program. The opportunity the Program represents for leading-edge school leader professional learning is unique, as is the potential of the Program to influence practice more widely. Given the resource constraints that apply, it may be that it will be in 'influence' on approach and practice that the Program leaves a particularly valuable legacy. It would be unrealistic to think that some ten thousand principals will ever be able to access a national program of its kind, but perhaps not unrealistic to believe that the influences of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* can extend beyond the immediate cohorts to school leaders more generally.

As a model, the Program shows how the profession itself can exercise responsibility for the learning of its members, and how valuable this learning can be not only for principals but also for those with a stake in the quality of their leadership. In other words, this is learning that can properly be the province of the profession. There is a need for the profession itself to play a leading role in the professional learning of the next generation of school leaders, and, therefore, the next generation of those who will lead the teaching profession. The *Leading Australia's Schools Program* amply demonstrates the value of the profession exercising this responsibility for its own members at a national level. The design and implementation of a program for the next generation of school leaders, along the lines of *Leading Australia's Schools*, would ensure that they would have opportunity to access at a national level the understandings, knowledge and skills required for quality school leadership into the 21st Century.

## 7 Conclusion

The *Leading Australia's School Program* is a highly strategic response to effectively meeting the high-order learning needs of Australia's school principals. The Program offers insights, understandings and 'ways forward' that participating principals endorse overwhelmingly. Critically, it is a demonstration of how a profession can work within its 'own' parameters to identify and meet needs in ways that will have quality outcomes more broadly for others. This 'professional' dimension is one that Program participants, on the basis of the evidence, come over time to value greatly.

There were many calls over the course of the Evaluation for the integrity of the Program in its current form to be retained. The evidence suggests that there is sufficient flexibility in the Program design and operation for adjustments and changes of emphases to be made where required. Any significant re-design at this time would appear quite unwarranted. In particular, the elements built around the residential course, challenge project and recall are clearly ones that principals value.

There are some challenges that should be addressed. Given that the Program is quite recent, understanding outside of those immediately associated with it is relatively limited. Unless addressed over time, this may restrict the capacity of all those with a stake in the quality of school leadership to ensure the complementarity of effort more generally. It would now be timely for appropriate dialogues to occur across the parties so that the capacity of the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* to have impacts in the areas of its focus and concerns is even further strengthened.

The initial success of the Program should be harnessed to promote it as widely as possible to school leaders. The professional associations could have a major role in this regard. As the number of Program graduates increases, there will be increasing opportunity to engage them as promoters of the Program to their colleagues. Indeed, there is strong evidence that this is already occurring.

The Evaluation evidence suggests some emerging opportunities and possible strategic directions for the Program and associated effort. These include the following.

- Exploring the establishment of a collegiate- or alumnus-style arrangement whereby Program graduates could extend their learning into more formalised networks, perhaps with access to the resources and support of Teaching Australia. One option for such an arrangement could be localised or state- and territory-based follow-up programs to maximise principal engagement and to contain costs. The professional associations could play a valuable partnership role in such an initiative.
- In the context of such an arrangement, another option could be the possibility of providing on-line support by way of materials and access to wider national and international information.
- Exploring how the Program could be complemented by effort focused on the development of the next generation of school leaders, perhaps also involving the engagement of graduates from the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* as contributors to the initiative.
- Promoting the Program to peak industry groups so that they can be better placed to understand and value the role of the Program in ensuring the quality of school leadership. Beyond this, there may be scope to engage the peak groups in the Program to strengthen even further its broad base of appeal and operation insofar as leadership generally is concerned.
- Considering how the Program could incorporate a more explicit focus on the challenges and opportunities posed by information and communication technologies, perhaps through a partnership arrangement with an entity at the leading edge of approach and practice in the field. This, in part, would respond to the 'future schooling' area that many principals identified as a priority for them.

Within a relatively short time frame the *Leading Australia's Schools Program* has gained a highly legitimate place in the landscape of professional learning for school leaders. The relevance, appeal and impact of the Program are demonstrated across the Evaluation evidence. It is successfully meeting the needs of its primary target group, principals in the early years of the principalship and points the way forward for the shape of national effort by the profession for those who lead and will lead Australia's schools.

## 8 Appendices

### Appendix I: Strategic Interview Discussion Questions

#### **Strategic Interview Discussion Questions**

1. What has been your association with the Leading Australia's Schools initiative?
2. What distinguishes this initiative from leadership initiatives offered by others such as the Australian Government and state and territory authorities?
3. What is your view about the scope and nature of wider support for the initiative, including by professional associations and other key stakeholders?
4. What is your assessment of the overall impact of the initiative in providing leading-edge professional learning for school leaders?
5. What are the main factors contributing to effectiveness?
6. Please describe any unanticipated outcomes that have arisen from the initiative.
7. Are there any gaps and/or hindering factors that could be addressed through new or developed approaches to design and/or content?
8. Please describe any emerging opportunities for improved school leadership you are aware of at a national level.
9. Please describe the nature of emerging needs and challenges for school leaders and implications for the initiative.
10. What are the issues in ensuring the strategic orientation of the initiative in relation to the targeted group/s?

## Appendix 2: Participant Interview Discussion Questions

### **Participant Interview Discussion Questions**

11. How did you find out about the Leading Australia's Schools initiative?
12. Why did you nominate for the Leading Australia's Schools initiative?
13. What distinguished this initiative from leadership initiatives offered to you by others such as the Australian Government and state and territory authorities?
14. What support was provided for you to participate in the initiative?
15. What is your assessment of the overall impact of the initiative in providing you with leading-edge professional learning?
16. What are the main factors contributing to effectiveness of the initiative?
17. Please describe any unanticipated outcomes that have arisen from the initiative.
18. Are there any gaps and/or hindering factors that could be addressed through new or developed approaches to design and/or content?
19. Please describe the nature of emerging needs and challenges for school leaders and implications for the initiative.
20. Have you any strategic suggestions for the future of the initiative?



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