

# Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers

## Principles and major features

October 2011



The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has been working closely with key education stakeholders to develop the *Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers: Principles and major features*.

In developing this initial proposal for a nationally consistent approach to certification, AITSL consulted with all states and territories, including all systems and sectors with existing processes for recognising excellence.

The paper outlines the proposed purposes and principles underlying certification and a description of the major features of the proposed assessment process.

This draft will be the basis of further extensive consultation throughout 2011 and 2012 to refine the preferred nationally consistent certification principles and develop detailed processes for achieving and renewing certification. Endorsement of the finalised proposal will be sought in mid 2012 through the Ministerial Council.

The Institute's responsibility to lead this work is outlined in its Letter of Expectation from the Commonwealth Minister for Education.

This document was endorsed for consultation by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) on 14 October 2011.

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The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership with funding provided by the Australian Government.

## Preamble

The National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality commits all governments to national consistency in certification of Accomplished and Leading Teachers.<sup>1</sup> The *National Professional Standards for Teachers* describe what teachers should know and be able to do at these levels (renamed as ‘Highly Accomplished’ and ‘Lead’ career stages).

Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers is an important element in a broader workforce improvement strategy that develops, recognises and supports excellent practitioners.

Formal recognition of exemplary teachers can make an important contribution to quality teaching and leadership in schools. Teachers committed to improving their practice are vital to student success. As well, they contribute to the advancement of their schools through modelling and leading others to improve practice. Certification at the higher career stages enables teachers to gain recognition for the quality of their teaching and progress their careers while remaining in the classroom.

Much research has concluded that participation in standards-based certification processes accompanied by the appropriate feedback can improve teacher practice. ‘A reliable and valid system of performance assessment based on common standards would provide consistency in gauging teacher effectiveness...and anchor a continuum of performance throughout a teaching career.’<sup>2</sup>

*Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers: Principles and major features* is a companion paper to the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*<sup>3</sup> and is designed to ensure that the processes for certification of teachers at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages are rigorous and authentic. This paper is not intended to address issues around industrial relations or existing awards and performance management. The way in which certified teachers may be recognised or rewarded is an employment matter.

## Purposes of certification

Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers has three primary purposes:

- To recognise and promote quality teaching
- To encourage and assist teachers to improve their practice
- To provide a reliable indication of teacher quality that can be used to identify, recognise and/or reward Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers.

By contributing to teacher quality, a nationally consistent approach to certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers will help to achieve the national goals for schooling expressed in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2008, *National partnership on improving teacher quality*, viewed 28 July 2011, [http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov\\_agreements/federal\\_financial\\_relations/docs/national\\_partnership\\_on\\_improving\\_teacher\\_quality.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/national_partnership_on_improving_teacher_quality.pdf)

2 L. Darling-Hammond 2010, *Evaluating teacher effectiveness: How teacher performance assessments can measure and improve teaching*, Washington, Center for American Progress, pg. 3

3 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) 2010, *National professional standards for teachers*, viewed 28 July 2011, [http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/AITSL\\_National\\_Professional\\_Standards\\_for\\_Teachers.pdf](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/_resources/AITSL_National_Professional_Standards_for_Teachers.pdf)

4 Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) 2008, *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*, viewed 28 July 2011, [http://www.mceedyu.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.mceedyu.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf)

## Principles for a nationally consistent approach to certification

The proposed approach to the certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers is informed by five principles:

- 1. Standards-based:** Certification is against the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*. It represents an assessment against the Standards, independent of any use it might then be put to by teachers, their employers, or others.
- 2. Student-improvement focused:** Certification recognises those teachers who are highly effective in promoting student learning, engagement and wellbeing. Evidence of student outcomes is central to the certification process.
- 3. Development driven:** Certification is part of a wider teacher development approach that includes professional learning, and performance management and development. Participation in the certification process should be a positive experience for participants and provide useful feedback that leads to improvement and learning, including for those teachers who do not achieve certification.
- 4. Credible:** Certification is credible when assessments of teacher performance are based on rigorous, valid, reliable, fair and transparent measures and processes.
- 5. Evidence-based:** Certification must be built on evidence-based practice and contribute to the development of evidence about what works in promoting and recognising teacher quality.

## A nationally consistent approach

A nationally consistent approach to certification must maintain consistency of standards and judgements across the nation, while being able to be implemented at scale in the diverse contexts in which Australian teachers work. This proposal is for a nationally consistent approach to certification, where a common set of principles, protocols and processes is applied by the appropriate bodies in each jurisdiction.

As part of the national process it is proposed that certifying bodies will agree to participate in, and in turn conduct, training to implement nationally consistent processes; to provide summary data on certification decisions; and to participate in evaluation, review and improvement of the certification process.

Under a nationally consistent approach it is proposed that certification will be portable, allowing teachers to maintain their status if they move between jurisdictions and sectors.

It is not proposed to limit the number of teachers who can qualify to become certified as Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers.

## Major features of the proposed assessment process

Assessing teacher effectiveness is a challenging task. It is proposed that the major features of the assessment process are:

- Eligibility criteria being met
- Self-assessment prior to certification application
- Authentic evidencing of the Standards through various forms and sources
- Observation of a teacher's practice
- Involvement of assessors external to the school
- Comprehensive feedback provided to all candidates
- Over time, certified teachers playing a major role in the assessment process.

These features are elaborated below.

### Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for certification at the Highly Accomplished or Lead teacher career stages it is proposed the applicant:

- Be an Australian citizen or have a permanent residency visa
- Have full registration with an Australian state or territory regulatory authority<sup>5</sup>
- Be working as a teacher in an Australian school or early childhood setting.

It is proposed that teachers would not have to be certified as a Highly Accomplished teacher before applying for Lead teacher.

### Self-assessment

It is proposed that a self-assessment be undertaken prior to submitting a certification application. This might involve:

- An online assessment being made available for candidates to self-assess their likely success in meeting certification requirements and to provide them with a clear understanding of what is required for certification
- Applicants conducting a professional discussion with their principal/line manager who will advise the teachers whether they are ready and/or what additional preparation they need to proceed with their application.

### Evidencing the Standards

The proposed principles underlying evidencing the Standards are outlined below. Further detail on the number, types and presentation of evidence required for each career stage will be developed throughout the consultation phase. It is proposed that:

- Evidence collected by the applicant clearly reflects the teacher's individual contribution and demonstrates how the teacher's professional knowledge, practice and engagement directly resulted in improved student outcomes, as demonstrated through student learning, engagement and/or wellbeing.

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<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the regulatory regimes in individual jurisdictions

- Evidence presented by the applicant is drawn from a specified period of practice preceding the application for certification. As far as possible evidence should be generated in the course of a teacher's work and must be authentic and reflect the teacher's actual practice.
- Evidence collectively addresses all of the Standards by taking account of each of the descriptors at the relevant career stage. One piece of evidence presented can address multiple descriptors across multiple Standards. Applicants are required to use a range of forms and sources when demonstrating the Standards.
- Applicants nominate and provide written comment from referees to verify evidence. It is proposed the current principal/line manager must be a referee. If an applicant is in a new position the previous principal/line manager's details must also be provided.
- Evidence includes a written application/statement addressing the Standards.

### **Observation of practice**

It is proposed that observations of the teacher's practice on site will underpin evidence collected and be a mandated element of the process. For observations to be practical, they will need to be conducted locally by the teacher's principal/line manager. This can occur as part of the routine classroom observation arrangements of the school/system. This is proposed to be supported by observations by external assessor/s and may involve:

- Direct observation of classroom practice
- Other observations and discussions designed to provide evidence against the relevant Standards
- Discussion with applicants about their approach to teaching and the ways in which the evidence they have provided addresses the relevant Standards.

### **External assessors**

To ensure impartiality and consistency, it is proposed that the jurisdictional certifying body nominate external assessors to consider all certification applications. The role of the assessors will be to verify the evidence and judge whether it demonstrates that the teacher meets the relevant Standards. It is proposed that:

- Assessors may include - classroom teachers, school leaders, education consultants, teacher educators, and/or specialist staff
- Assessors be trained in the certification and assessment process, and have the expertise to assess against the Standards at the relevant career stage and in the applicant's context.

### **Comprehensive feedback to all applicants**

It is proposed that useful written feedback be provided to all applicants regardless of whether they were successful or not. Feedback should be instructive and designed to lead to further improvement in practice.

## Application for renewal of certification

It is proposed certification be granted for a period of five years and that if teachers wish to retain certification at the higher career stages they be required to demonstrate that their practice remains exemplary against the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*. It is proposed the process for renewal will:

- Require successive satisfactory performance assessments
- Focus on professional growth during the previous five years
- Require candidates to provide evidence of impact of their practice on student learning
- Require the endorsement of the principal and one other trained assessor.

The specific details of this process will be determined through consultation and a guide to the renewal of certification will be developed.

## Appeals

It is proposed that where an application for certification or renewal of certification is unsuccessful and the applicant can provide evidence that assessment procedures have been breached, the applicant may apply to the jurisdictional certifying body for a review of the decision or appeal against it. The appeal should be conducted in accordance with the legislative, policy and administrative requirements of the relevant jurisdictional certifying body.

## Certification process - Quality assurance and continuous improvement

It is proposed that AITSL develop agreed processes and mechanisms to assure the quality and consistency of certification processes and judgements, in partnership with employers of teachers, teacher regulatory authorities, unions, the profession and other stakeholders. Moderation mechanisms could include consistent assessor training and use of experienced assessors.

To support this process AITSL will coordinate and collate authoritative research on assessing teacher quality, and the reward, recognition and certification of excellence in teaching. In addition, AITSL will seek to actively participate in international benchmarking studies on recognition of quality teaching and will monitor and evaluate the operation of national processes to continuously improve the approach to certification.

AITSL will report annually to the Ministerial Council on the operation of the nationally consistent approach to certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers.

## Certification process - Roles and responsibilities

**Table 1** Outlines the roles and responsibilities for AITSL and jurisdictional certifying bodies

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities		
Item	AITSL	Jurisdictional certifying body
<b>National Standards and certification process</b>	Establish, review and maintain the <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> , the certification process and supplementary materials (supporting documentation, guides and advice to assessors).	Advise and collaborate on establishment, review and maintenance of the certification process.
<b>National training of assessors and jurisdictional officers</b>	Provide support materials for nationally consistent training to assessors and to jurisdictional officers.	Conduct nationally consistent training for assessors and jurisdictional officers.
<b>Promotion of voluntary certification</b>	Develop information packages to enhance understanding and promote voluntary certification.	Conduct information sessions. Disseminate information and make available guides for users.
<b>Appeals</b>		Run or participate in appeals processes, depending on jurisdictional requirements. Where an appeal is upheld, convene a new assessment process.
<b>National data</b>	Maintain summary data on the certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers. Establish links with relevant bodies for provision of data and information relating to the implementation of nationally consistent processes for certification.	Maintain a jurisdiction database of the certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers. Provide AITSL with summary data on certification decisions. Provide quarterly data updates.
<b>Quality assurance</b>	Review nationally consistent certification and work with jurisdictions to implement improvements.	Participate in quality assurance and review processes to support national consistency.
<b>Reporting</b>	Report annually to the Ministerial Council on the implementation of nationally consistent processes for the certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers.	Report to AITSL on implementation of nationally consistent processes for certification.



# aitsl

Australian Institute  
for Teaching and  
School Leadership  
Limited

[aitsl.edu.au](http://aitsl.edu.au)

## Further information

**Telephone:** +61 3 9944 1200

**Email:** [certification@aitsl.edu.au](mailto:certification@aitsl.edu.au)

Melbourne | Brisbane | Canberra

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