

# Getting the best from your teachers

## A principals' guide to national teacher certification



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“

Growing expertise is the most powerful thing we can do for student learning and national teacher certification focuses attention on that.

”



John Cleary  
Principal, Casuarina Street Primary School, NT



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# What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide provides information to help principals and their delegates (herein referred to as 'school leaders') to understand and support national teacher certification.

## **The guide will:**

- highlight the value of nationally certified teachers to your school, including to students, staff and the wider school community
- provide you with a greater understanding of your role and responsibility in supporting teachers through national teacher certification
- help you understand the steps to enable your teachers to pursue national teacher certification
- suggest ways to work with your existing nationally certified Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs) to share their expertise across the school and beyond.

# What is national teacher certification?

National teacher certification is an Australia-wide coordinated approach to support teachers to progress their careers while remaining in the classroom, where they can have the greatest impact on student learning. National teacher certification is a voluntary, portable process, and is managed and assessed by certifying authorities in participating states and territories<sup>1</sup>.

National teacher certification, as outlined in *Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia* was endorsed by Education Ministers in April 2012. National teacher certification uses the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (the Teacher Standards) to make rigorous judgements regarding the certification of teachers at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages.

## **Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs) has three purposes:**

1. Recognise and promote quality teaching.
2. Provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice.
3. Provide a reliable indication of quality teaching that can be used to identify, recognise and/or reward Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers.

<sup>1</sup> Please see <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/understand-certification-and-halt-status/find-your-certifying-authority> for details of certifying authorities in participating states and territories

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, V 2011, *Student-centered Leadership*, John Wiley and Sons Ltd, United Kingdom.

School leaders have the greatest impact on student learning when they promote and participate in the professional learning and development of their teachers<sup>2</sup>.

National teacher certification provides an opportunity for school leaders to develop staff and improve student outcomes through a process that is largely externally managed and teacher led. Certified teachers are esteemed to become the next instructional leaders. By mentoring and empowering colleagues, they are well placed to improve outcomes for all.

# Why promote national teacher certification in your school?

The benefits of national teacher certification are far-reaching and include positively influencing teachers, parents and carers, school leaders and, most importantly, students. National teacher certification encourages teachers to be reflective practitioners against the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages of the Teacher Standards. It recognises their commitment to maximising their impact on students' learning, progress and educational outcomes.

We know that the biggest in school influences on student outcomes are the quality of teaching and school leadership<sup>1</sup>. We also know that collective teacher efficacy beliefs contribute significantly to the school's level of academic success<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, if we enable our best teachers to lead from the classroom, we should see more Australian students excel.

National certification of teachers improves teaching quality and therefore student outcomes by:

- **esteeming our best teachers:** national teacher certification provides a clear professional pathway, motivating expert teachers to stay in the classroom where they can have the greatest impact on student outcomes
- **building a professional growth culture:** through national teacher certification, teachers demonstrate their impact on their students and colleagues, and reflect on their practice against the Teacher Standards. This provides them with the skills and understanding to lead conversations about practice and impact against the Teacher Standards within a school
- **facilitating collaboration:** through national and jurisdictional networking opportunities, certified teachers share expert practice and promote growth and change in the way we educate young people
- **creating mentors:** nationally certified teachers share their expertise and lead others, creating the next generation of evidence-based practitioners
- **developing instructional leaders:** the rigorous assessment means nationally certified teachers have the externally validated credibility to lead conversations about improving professional practice and impact
- **esteeming the profession:** national teacher certification is rigorously assessed and provides a national mark of quality teaching that can be used to identify experts and build community confidence in education.

<sup>1</sup> Hattie, J 2003, *Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?*, Australian Council for Education Research Annual Conference on: Building Teacher Quality, October 2003, ACER, Camberwell, Victoria, viewed 23 November 2016

<sup>2</sup> Hattie, J 2016, *Mind frames and Maximizers*, Third Annual Visible Learning Conference, Washington





**Mentoring emboldens me to continue to reflect on the standards and my own practice in the classroom.**



Tania Crawford, nationally certified Highly Accomplished teacher, SA



**Certification validates our ability to impact on student outcomes outside of our own classroom. There is currently no other method as rigorous as certification to recognise expert teachers as exemplary instructional leaders.**



Melinda Haskett, nationally certified Highly Accomplished teacher, NSW



**National teacher certification made me address my avoidances. I am a stronger and more reflective practitioner because of it.**



Prue Gill, nationally certified Lead teacher, ACT

# Building individual and collegial expertise through national teacher certification – a case study



Tracey Peden is a nationally certified Lead Teacher from Queensland. She describes the rigorous journey to become formally certified as a defining moment in her career, and explains how certification is vital to strengthening the professionalisation of teaching.

She explains how national teacher certification enabled her to reflect more deeply on her practice in relation to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

“I believed that no matter what the outcome, I had become a better teacher just from engaging in national teacher certification,” Tracey says.

Tracey is an advocate for a growth mindset and saw national teacher certification as a way to build her capacity and lead others towards having a more focused impact on students, their progress and outcomes without leaving the classroom.

“It will encourage teachers to contribute to the advancement of schools while being in the classroom – there’s not that need to have to move out of the classroom to do that,” she adds.

Tracey has shared her expertise beyond her school. She and a fellow nationally certified Lead Teacher, Carly Sopronick, founded and coordinate a regional Cluster Collaboration Network. She believes national teacher certification will promote inter-school collaboration and provide a benchmark for practice that is comparable interstate.

# Linking with the Australian Professional Standard for Principals

By promoting and supporting their teachers to achieve national teacher certification, school leaders are enacting Professional Practices outlined in the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*.

The Principal Standard provides a public statement setting out what school principals are expected to know, understand and do to succeed in their work and improve their impact. It describes five key Professional Practices that improve student learning and support excellent teaching practices.

The Professional Practice, 'Developing self and others,' outlines how leaders build a professional learning community

that is focused on continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Strong leaders build capacity in others by encouraging staff to reflect upon their practice, identify and develop their professional learning needs. National teacher certification supports this practice, giving school leaders the chance to enable staff to develop as professionals.

For further resources on The *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* visit <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/australian-professional-standard-for-principals>

# Understand your role in national teacher certification

National teacher certification comprises a pre-assessment and two assessment stages. School leaders are involved at each stage of national teacher certification. Outlined below are steps the school leader can take to make sure that the applicant is supported at every stage.



## Pre-assessment

Recognise expert teachers in your school and encourage them to take part in certification.

Be involved in a professional discussion with the applicant based on the Teacher Standards regarding their readiness for applying for certification.

### TIPS

Work with the applicant to reflect on their practice against the Descriptors of either the Highly Accomplished or Lead career stage.

Consider the applicant's recent performance reviews and goals against the Teacher Standards.

Negotiate opportunities for the applicant to address gaps in their practice.



## Stage 1

Support the applicant to compile their portfolio of evidence.

Provide a referee statement for the application.

### TIPS

Work with the applicant to break down and explore any Descriptors that they might find challenging to demonstrate.

Help to identify authentic artefacts to evidence their practice against the Teacher Standards.

Provide the applicant with a formative feedback report aligned to the teacher standards from recent observations of classroom practice.

Collaboratively review the applicant's portfolio so that you are well informed and able to provide validation of their practice as presented against the Teacher Standards.

Verify the applicant's practice with specific reference to the relevant career stage of the Teacher Standards.



## Stage 2

Be involved in a professional discussion with the external assessor during the site visit.

### TIPS

Be prepared to discuss the applicant's practice with specific reference to the Teacher Standards.

# Leverage the expertise of nationally certified teachers in your school

When teachers become nationally certified the benefits extend beyond the achievement of certification. The greatest impact on school communities can be achieved when school leaders work effectively with nationally certified teachers and support them to share their expertise to improve student outcomes across and beyond their school.

## **HALTs can:**

- **support other teachers:** the national certification process strengthens teachers' reflective practice. Nationally certified teachers can work with other teachers to become more reflective practitioners and in doing so become more effective teachers
- **lead initiatives and improvement:** having demonstrated their leadership through being certified, nationally certified teachers can lead effective change from the ground up and engage colleagues to improve their practice and student outcomes
- **champion expertise:** nationally certified teachers can use their in-depth understanding of the Teacher Standards to promote quality teaching practice through the school community and beyond

## **School leaders can:**

- **create roles:** through informal or formal roles, certified teachers can support beginning and pre-service teachers to use the Standards to reflect on and improve their practice
- **allocate time and resources:** this can enable nationally certified teachers to lead projects, for example on developing instructional leadership capacity in others, and present back to staff
- **initiate inter-school collaboration:** by establishing links with other schools, nationally certified teachers can grow networks and clusters to drive improved student outcomes. This could have a focus on a particular subject or effective pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning

# Leveraging expertise to build a culture of excellence – a case study



Loretta Wholley, principal of Merici College in the ACT, describes how national teacher certification has been a powerful professional development experience for her staff and a way to recognise and promote excellent teaching.

When she joined Merici College in 2012, Megan Keogh (who had been part of the ACT certification pilot program) became the school's first certified teacher. Loretta worked with her to create a role involving supporting graduate teachers and working with experienced teachers to encourage and support them to apply for certification, including to develop a portfolio of evidence.

Loretta says: "Every teacher applying for national teacher certification has skills in a certain area. As principal, my role is to leverage those skills to benefit the school community."

In the years following, Catherine Amesbury and Kathryn White also achieved certification, and two other staff members, including one of the deputy principals, trained as assessors. Megan and Catherine have since moved on to positions at other schools, while Kathryn leads numeracy initiatives at Merici. With a two-lesson allowance per week, she develops numeracy activities for students and assists teachers both to understand and use data, and to develop integrated numeracy activities in their own subject areas.

Loretta explains: "We now have better teachers in the classroom. They know the students and can respond to the data. At the same time we've seen improvements in student growth in numeracy through NAPLAN."

National teacher certification has also contributed to a shift in staff culture at Merici. Loretta says: "It has raised the expectations and standards of teachers across the school so that we now have a group of teachers who are inspired, who see the benefits of certification and want to get involved. It has also improved our retention of early career teachers."

Loretta's advice to other principals is to be involved in the certification process and learn from what other schools are doing through the networking opportunities it creates.

"There is much to be gained from the networks," Loretta states.



## More information

Further details about national teacher certification and corresponding resources can be found in the national policy *Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia*, and the *Guide to the Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia* available at [www.aitsl.edu.au/cert-resources](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/cert-resources)

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