

# Preparing future principals

AITSL's report *Preparing future leaders: Effective preparation for aspiring school principals* looks at how well principals in Australia are prepared for the job. These are some of the findings.

"It is not surprising that in almost every country, the demands on and responsibilities of school principals are greater today than at any time in the past."<sup>1</sup>

"Over time, countries are likely to reap enormous benefits, in terms of school improvement and student achievement, from developing quality professional-preparation programmes for their school principals."<sup>2</sup>

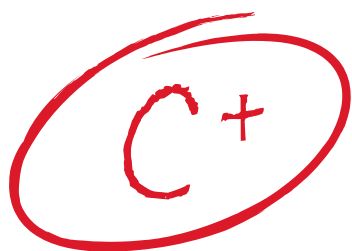
## CURRENT SITUATION

There are  
**7,783**  
principals in Australia.<sup>3</sup>

**71%**  
of principals are **over 50**,  
reflecting an ageing demographic.<sup>3</sup>

Only  
**15% (primary)**  
**to 22% (secondary)**  
of Australian principals  
report they were very well  
prepared for the role.<sup>4</sup>

There are as few as  
**10 principal**  
**preparation programs**  
in Australia that specifically  
focus on developing aspiring  
leaders for the principalship.<sup>5</sup>



Needs  
improvement

### Current principal preparation in Australia is OK, but could be a lot better

There are a small number of preparation strategies and development opportunities across Australia's education systems and sectors that have been put in place to see that aspiring principals are well prepared for the challenging and changing school leadership role.

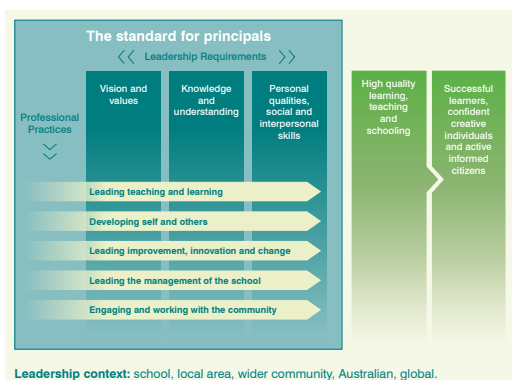
Nevertheless, the evidence clearly indicates there is much still to be done.

# 5 recommendations for preparing future principals

1.

## Take a systematic, standards-based and coherent approach

To be effective, principal preparation needs a strategic national approach based on the **Australian Professional Standard for Principals** that positively positions the work of school leaders and prioritises the importance of appropriate learning opportunities.



Only 26% (primary) to 34% (secondary) of deputy principals plan to apply for a principal role in the next 3 years.<sup>4</sup>

Only 3% (primary) to 4% (secondary) of principals view the job as being very attractive to potential applicants.<sup>4</sup>

More than 80% of school leaders agree that a better public image of school leadership would help retain leaders in the profession.<sup>4</sup>

“The critical question is what we can learn about policies and practices that could make the provision of high-quality learning opportunities for principals a regular occurrence rather than an exceptional event.”<sup>6</sup>

2.

## Identify and nurture talent

In the best approaches to principal preparation, potential leaders are identified early in their careers and given a range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Less than 10% of principals intended to be a school principal when they started teaching.<sup>4</sup>

The biggest factor for more than 3/4 of principals in their decision to take up the role was that they were encouraged and supported by the leaders in their school.<sup>4</sup>

### Years of teaching experience prior to becoming principal<sup>1</sup>



Early identification and development of high-potential aspirant leaders is crucial to ensuring a pipeline of future principals. However, the best identification strategies will fail if there are no clear opportunities for the aspirant leaders to advance their careers.

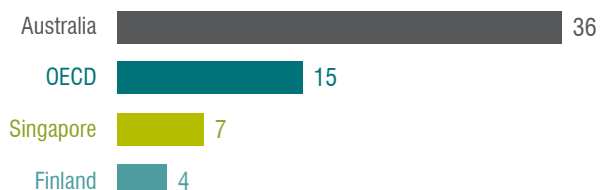
3.

## Match learning to an individual's capabilities, career stage and context

**Pathways to advancement should be clear, with professional learning opportunities appropriate to each level.**

Principal preparation should be sequenced to first focus on instructional leadership, followed by the development of higher-order and interpersonal skills, with management skills to be taught immediately prior to or on take-up of the principal role.

% of principals with no school administration or principal training program in their formal education<sup>1</sup>



% of principals with no instructional leadership training in their formal education<sup>1</sup>



100%

of surveyed leaders nominated

**'ability to coach others and support them to develop'**

as one of the top three most important skills of a good leader.

**'Planning and administrative skills'**

were rated in the top three by only 28% of those surveyed.<sup>7</sup>

4.

## Use evidence-based adult learning techniques

The design of principal preparation programs should be based on expert knowledge of content and adult learning techniques, clear purpose, and rigorous selection processes to ensure a match between participant skills, knowledge, prior experience and expectations.



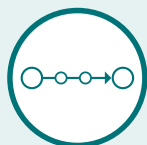
Collaborative



Personalised



Situated



Sustained



Use feedback



Formal



Informal



Selective



Blended

**"Adults learn best through a combination of collaboration, peer-to-peer feedback, trying new practice and evaluating its impact."<sup>8</sup>**

## 5.

### Evaluate programs for impact

**It is critical to engage in rigorous evaluation for purposes of accountability and improvement.**

“The quality of training principals receive before they assume their positions, and the continuing professional development they get once they are hired and throughout their careers, has a lot to do with whether school leaders can meet the increasingly tough expectations of these jobs.”<sup>6</sup>



**Assessing principal preparation program impact “continues to be a challenge.”<sup>5</sup>**



**“Given the outcomes of principal preparation programs are diverse and difficult to measure, multiple methods can be used to gain feedback on the program’s impact.”<sup>8</sup>**

“There is a realisation among providers that more needs to be done to make full use of the data that is already being collected, particularly via project assessment and feedback, and to develop an evaluation framework to measure learning, both as it occurs and in terms of longer-term impact.”<sup>5</sup>

**Getting principal preparation right is a big challenge for the education system, yet the rewards are great. An incredible 96 per cent of principals would choose the role again if given the chance,<sup>1</sup> which speaks to the depth of job satisfaction possible in leading a learning community to ensure all students reach their full potential.**

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