

PRE-PRINCIPAL CERTIFICATION

Preparing leaders to lead

A national framework now in development will ensure that new principals around Australia are equipped to deliver optimal outcomes to students

THE JOB of any school principal is and has always been tough.

But as Lisa Rodgers, CEO of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), tells *The Educator*, the role is changing and appears to be becoming even tougher.

“Basically, principals are CEOs of businesses,” she says. “They are also the instructional leaders in schools now, or expected to be.”

Figures say it takes an average of 27 years for educators in Australia to become principals, which is in stark contrast to Singapore, where the average time is 14 years. And right now the profession is faced with the reality that many principals are nearing retirement, with 71% aged over 50.

Another concerning issue for the education sector, Rodgers says, is that a number of principals come into the role feeling insufficiently prepared for the job. Approximately 35% of principals report not having received any school administration training, while 30% say they received no instructional leadership training. That’s especially alarming in light of evidence that indicates instructional leadership has the greatest impact on student outcomes.

“We don’t want to be putting people in

those positions and they’re going to sink or swim,” Rodgers says. “They might get by, they might run great businesses, but it’s the principals that are critical to leading the student outcomes, reforms and the improvement work.”

When it comes to the current potential talent pool, the number of aspiring principals in Australia is not substantial.



“We need to ensure that it is a consistent, quality, standards-based approach to ensure aspiring leaders are well prepared for the role” Lisa Rodgers, AITSL

“When you ask teachers and deputies, ‘Would you like the job of principal?’, about 90% of them say no,” Rodgers says.

Time for change

In September, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham announced plans for pre-principal certification, a process that AITSL has been tasked with developing. Focused on assessing preparedness for principalship, the pre-principal certification

will look to strengthen the principal pipeline by increasing the number of well-prepared candidates for the top job.

A complete national leadership development framework will be created, which will include evidence-based policy guidelines, evaluative questions and implementation advice for each of the identified elements of effective leadership development.

Rodgers discusses the work AITSL has undertaken in the lead-up to the decision to create pre-principal certification.

“We went out and consulted on this and the strong advice we got, and what we heard, was that there was an absolute appetite for some form of pre-principal certification or process, but it had to be situated within a broader niche development space,” she says.

“You can’t just think about some form of principal accreditation or certification. You have to think about principalship, from identifying emerging leaders through to eliciting that aspirant, developing them through to principalship, induction into

the role and, at the other end, our retirees, our very experienced principals, and what we do there.”

The process

When it comes to the form the process will take, Rodgers says AITSL will be building voluntary certification that will enable leaders to pick up credentials against the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Principal Standard).

“We’ve got a professional Principal

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PRINCIPALS IN AUSTRALIA



27 years

Standard, so principals will be able to understand the Leadership Requirements and Professional Practices set out in the standard, understand the criteria, and then basically certify or accredit against those elements,” she explains.

“[In terms of] how that looks at the moment, we’re still working with the sector to design it, but ... it’s got to be a good, credible assessment ... We have to be able to use multiple methods. Aspirants aren’t going to go and sit in an exam room for three hours. There need to be multiple ways to demonstrate readiness for the role against those particular elements.”

Rodgers points out that what’s proposed is not something that will take the shape of a simple checklist.

“It’s a national approach. We need to ensure that it is a consistent, quality, standards-based approach to ensure aspiring leaders are well prepared for the role,” she says. “It’s something sophisticated that

is the average time it takes to become a principal in Australia



71%

of current principals are aged over 50



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of principals say they received no school administration training



30%

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the profession will have the opportunity to engage with.”

Additionally, she emphasises its voluntary nature.

“We will be designing how it’s done [and] what it looks like with the profession,” Rodgers says.

“There will be a part of that which will allow aspirants to identify themselves early as people with leadership potential or people that want to go into leadership. Currently, we’ve got a number of resources teachers and principals can use, and they can self-assess against both the Teacher Standards and the

Principal Standard, and we get a lot of good feedback from the profession about those tools and the insights they give to them. A lot of teachers underassess, in terms of their competencies and the ability to take the next step, so this gives them a little bit of feedback. It will indicate readiness for a principal position and it will also recognise diverse career pathways.”

Rodgers continues: “It will be an authentic assessment that aspiring principals will be able to use to demonstrate their already-acquired learning and readiness for principalship.”

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An inclusive conversation

AITSL has bipartisan support in examining principalship in Australia at a national level. “Buy-in from across the board is key to any success,” Rodgers says.

“We’ve also consulted extensively across states and territories with the profession, and we’ve found agreement on a number of elements. Again, this is really important to success.

“People want to be able to identify potential leaders early; they want a consistent, high-quality approach to principal preparation ... They want a framework or

glove with them. It will be delivered for them, almost by them.”

While pre-principal certification is a new initiative, AITSL itself has been supporting educators for several years. Rodgers talks about its school leadership development resources, a package launched in August that’s designed to assist aspiring and new principals in addressing their responsibilities and the situations they can expect to face.

Included in the resources package are ‘Leadership Scenarios’ that offer new principals strategies and tools to help them deal with common challenges, including

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opportunities or the support around inducting principals into that standard-based process ... Expert and experienced principals want to give back and ... people want to be able to leverage principal expertise across the country.

“All of that’s in place and we’ll build on that work and continue to work with the profession to go forward and develop the best model.”

But Rodgers stresses that it’s still early days.

“We’re not anywhere near finalising what this might look like; we’ve got to the point where these are the things people are asking for, [and] this is what we agree on,” she says.

According to Rodgers, existing school principals will play a crucial role in developing the process.


“We’re working with them now and they’ll continue to play an absolutely vital role in the development of any model,” she says.

“These people are in the job, at various stages of their careers, and we work hand in

time management and the establishment of a learning culture.

“There are also some new video profiles there, where we’ve got inspiring principals discussing their journeys to becoming principals and offering advice about preparing for leadership,” Rodgers says.

“There is a series of multimedia case studies about how to use the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard, and how to support professional growth in leadership skills. [And] we recently released an evidence summary around preparing for the rewards and challenges of the principal role and what that looks like.”

Looking ahead, AITSL’s consultation with principals, professional associations and school leadership academics will see the development of a model for voluntary pre-appointment certification in the coming months. The work will then be presented to the Education Council for endorsement in December. 

AITSL

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides national leadership for the Australian, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. AITSL is funded by the Australian Government. More information is available from www.aitsl.edu.au.



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