



Spotlight

Highly Accomplished
and Lead Teachers

Contents

The HALT Census	4
Becoming a certified HALT	5
Who becomes a HALT?	7
Benefits of certification	9
Supporting HALT certification	15
Conclusion	17
References	18



Nationally certified Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALTs) are expert teachers and reflective practitioners who lead and support colleagues towards better outcomes for learners.

Being certified equips HALTs with an understanding of their own impact in leading improvements in teaching and learning within and beyond their schools.

National teacher certification was first available in Australia in 2012 and was built on previous initiatives by states and territories to recognise expert teaching. Certifying authorities, state and territory systems and sectors are increasingly placing certification at the centre of their quality teaching agendas, and it is now fully implemented in most jurisdictions across Australia.

As of the end of 2018, 573 teachers across Australia were certified as HALTs.

A HALT Census recently conducted by AITSL, along with a series of interviews, have provided a national insight for the first time into who HALTs are, where they are working, and the impact of certification on the profession.

In addition to benefiting the teachers themselves, these findings indicate that having a certified HALT in a school who is recognised for their teaching expertise:

- improves learning outcomes
- contributes to an increased culture of learning amongst staff
- enables quality teaching to impact across the school¹ and all learners.

¹ As most HALTs are based in schools, the term 'school' has been used throughout but it is always written with the intention of being inclusive of other settings including early childhood services, outdoor education and other non-school settings.

At a glance

- 300 teachers completed the HALT Census.
- 14 in-depth interviews were conducted.



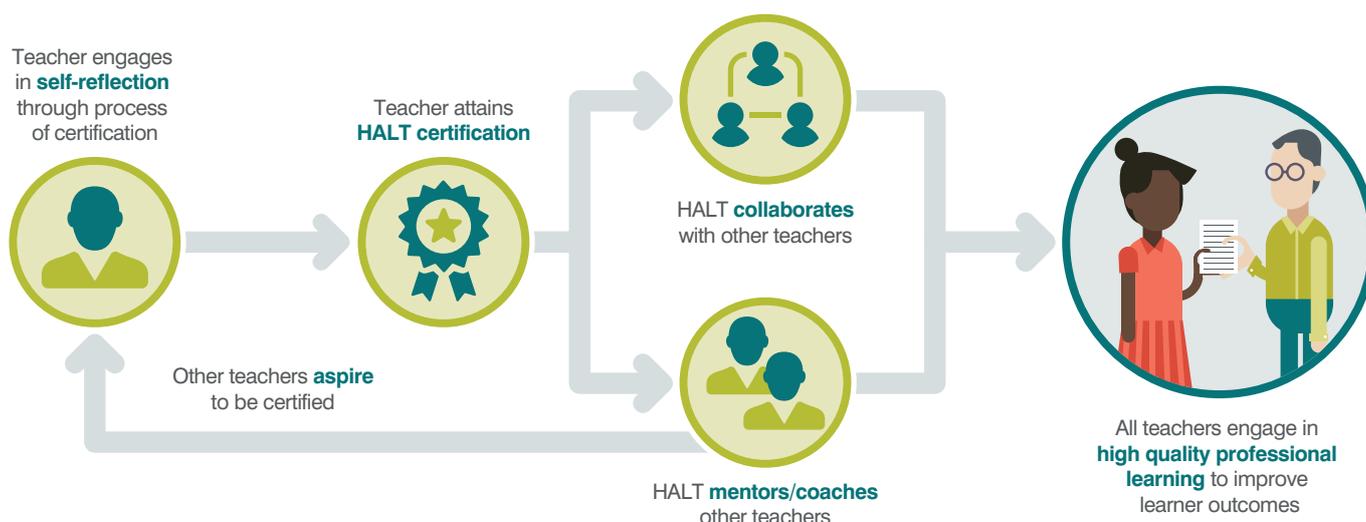
The HALT Census

Findings from the HALT Census and further research demonstrate that national teacher certification lifts the quality of teaching by:

- recognising high quality teachers and increasing their confidence
- allowing teachers to understand the impact of their instructional practices on learners and colleagues
- offering flexible pathways for professional development that encourage HALTs to lead from within the classroom
- creating a high quality professional learning experience that is rigorous, self-reflective, sustained and job-embedded
- acknowledging high quality teachers within the wider community
- providing opportunities for teachers to network and collaborate with other expert practitioners.

The HALT Census of 2017-2018 (the Census) collected a range of demographic data from more than 300 HALTs (70% of the cohort). This data has enabled us to explore the characteristics of early adopter, nationally certified HALTs. The Census was further supported by 14 in-depth interviews which were conducted with HALTs, leaders and one aspirant HALT from across Australia exploring perceptions and motivations for certification.

How does national teacher certification lift the quality of teaching?



At a glance

- Certified HALTs are highly effective practitioners who are certified by a recognised certifying authority.
- HALT certification is offered in most states and territories.
- Certification is a two stage process – individual teachers put together a portfolio and an external observation of their teaching is undertaken.

Becoming a certified HALT

Who is eligible to apply for HALT certification?

The applicant must:



1 be an Australian citizen or have a permanent residency visa



2 have full registration with an Australian state or territory teacher regulatory authority²



3 have been assessed as satisfactory in a specified number of their most recent annual performance assessments

How does a teacher know if they are ready for certification?

If a teacher believes they are consistently demonstrating the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) at the Highly Accomplished or Lead career stages they could be ready to apply. In the certification process expertise is valued more highly than the number of years one has been teaching, evidenced through the fact that 23% of HALTs have been teaching for less than ten years.

All applicants should conduct a professional discussion with their principal or supervisor regarding their readiness to apply. The endorsement of a principal or supervisor is beneficial as they could support the application process through, for example, building it into a professional learning plan. However, their endorsement is not required to apply.

Teachers are also encouraged to complete the Teacher Self-Assessment Tool on the AITSL website (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2017³), a free resource that will help them evaluate their practice and provide a valid and reliable assessment against the Teacher Standards.

² See <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/understand-certification-and-halt-status/find-your-certifying-authority>

³ <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/teacher-self-assessment-tool>

Where in Australia can teachers be certified?

HALT certification is offered in ACT, NSW, NT, SA, QLD and to some extent in WA.

Who manages the certification process?

Certification is managed and assessed by certifying authorities in participating states and territories.⁴ They determine timeframes for the application process, the costs involved and support available.



What are the stages of certification?

- **Stage 1:** a teacher submits a portfolio of annotated evidence against the Teacher Standards, together with a personal reflection on the evidence and referee statements. This is assessed by the certifying authority.
- **Stage 2:** an external assessor will observe the teacher's practice and conduct professional discussions with them, their principal or supervisor and colleagues.

If successful at both stages, the teacher will be awarded national teacher certification for five years.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

National certification is underpinned by the Teacher Standards. The Teacher Standards describe the key elements of quality teaching and articulate what Australian teachers are expected to know and be able to do at the four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead. The Teacher Standards inform the development of professional learning goals and provide a framework by which teachers can judge the success of their self-reflection and learning. Teachers can use the Teacher Standards to recognise their current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations and achievements. Certified HALTs must provide evidence of their impact against each of the descriptors within the Teacher Standards at the relevant career stage.

⁴ 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.

At a glance

- HALTs work across schools of various size, types and locations.
- The vast majority of HALTs work in government schools.
- HALTs work in schools of different socio-economic status (SES), however they are somewhat more likely to be working in schools with a higher SES.

Who becomes a HALT?

School size, remoteness and school type are not a barrier to certification

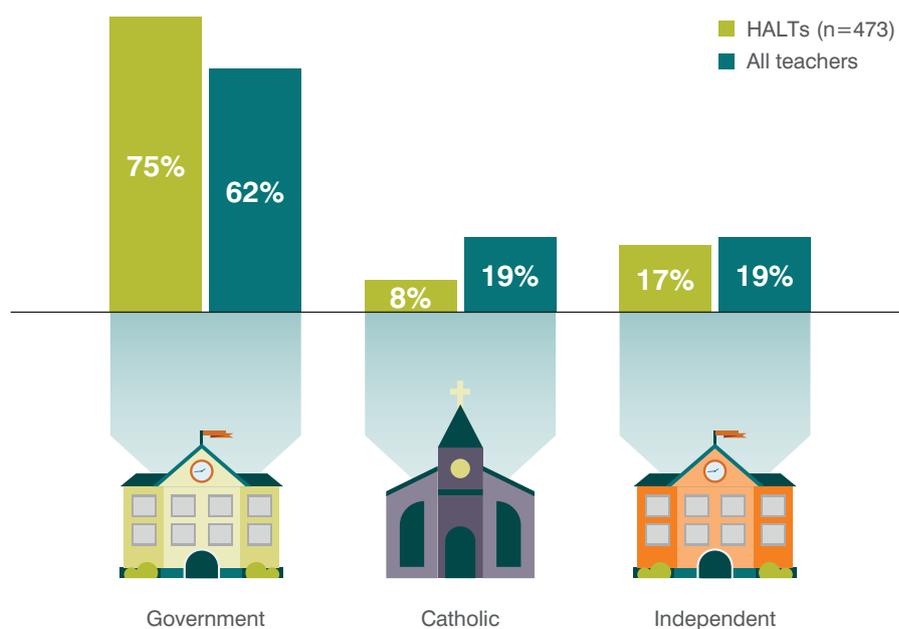
According to the HALT Census, HALTs work across schools of various sizes, locations and types (primary/secondary as well as early childhood) in a distribution comparative to all teachers in the workforce.⁵ This suggests that remoteness, school size, and the type of learning environment do not have a particular impact on the ability to undertake HALT certification.

Certified HALTs are more likely to be working in government schools

There is a greater proportion of HALTs in government schools compared with the overall teaching population (Figure 1). This difference may be the result of the connection between certification and remuneration/employment opportunities being more prevalent in the government sector. However, some non-government sectors are moving towards linking certification to industrial agreements. This may shift the balance so that HALTs are more evenly distributed across government and non-government schools in the future.

Figure 1

The sectors HALTs work in compared to all Australian teachers⁶.



⁵ Remoteness was determined by cross referencing ABS Remoteness Structure with ACARA schools data and HALT census postcode data.

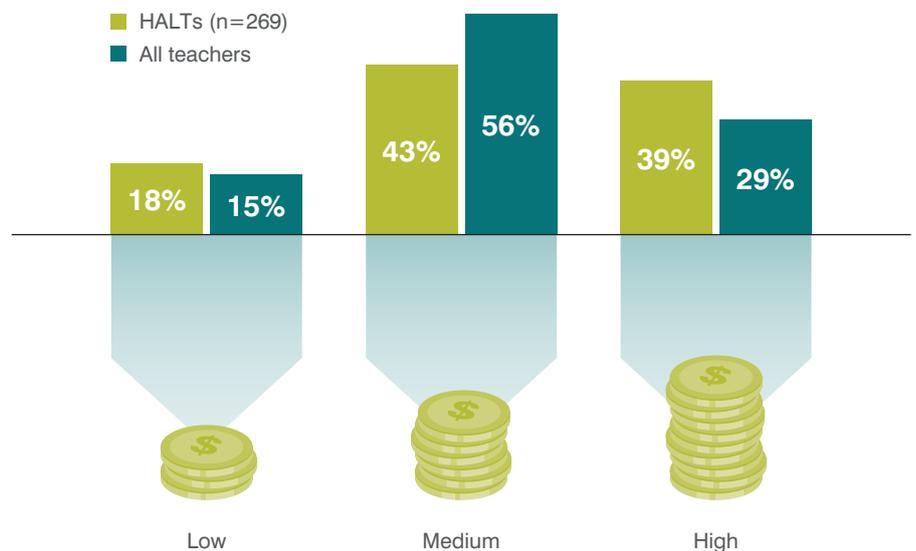
⁶ Data sources: HALT Census and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2017.

HALTs work in schools across socio-economic levels

The proportion of HALTs working in schools in low and high socio-economic status (SES) areas⁷ is more than the general national distribution of teachers⁸, and HALTs are least represented in schools in medium SES areas (Figure 2). A large proportion of the HALTs working in schools in low SES areas are from South Australia (40%) where there are specific incentives for HALTs to move into lower SES schools after certification, while in other jurisdictions HALTs are more likely to be teaching in high SES schools. It will therefore be important to track where HALTs end up teaching after certification in order to understand the impact of related policy initiatives.

Figure 2

Socio-economic status of schools that HALTs work in compared to all Australian teachers⁹.



⁷ The ABS Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) was used to categorise these levels and for the purposes of this analyses we have classified SES as Low (SEIFA; 1 & 2), Medium (SEIFA; 3-8) and High (SEIFA; 9 & 10).

⁸ HALT Census and ACARA postcode data was cross referenced with the ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (SEIFA) to determine socio-economic advantage.

⁹ Data source: HALT Census and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017.

At a glance

- Certification acknowledges HALTs and provides them with external credibility.
- HALTs are more frequently spending time in roles that allow them to spread their skills and expertise among colleagues.
- Most HALTs found the certification process a highly valuable form of professional learning.
- Certification is contributing to an increasing professionalisation of the teaching profession.
- The HALT Network allows certified teachers to create a community of practice with like-minded professionals.

Benefits of certification

Numerous international studies have demonstrated the benefits of national teacher certification. The process itself was found to be a significant factor in professional growth (Lustick 2009) and it was found to reduce teacher burnout by creating motivation (Pucella 2011). One study also found that there is a correlation between a teacher becoming certified and the number of colleagues the teacher helps with instructional matters (Frank et al. 2008). Certified teachers were also found to increase learners' achievement, beliefs and perspective (Helding & Fraser 2013).

Early evidence suggests that even at these initial stages of implementation, similar benefits are being achieved in Australia (Queensland University of Technology 2019) and the Census indicated that HALTs are highly likely to transition into various roles aimed at improving teaching and learning in schools.

Certification recognises high quality teachers



“Certification brings us [skilled teachers] out of our shell.”

– Lead Teacher, SA

HALTs perceive certification as a national acknowledgement of quality teaching. Over half of the surveyed teachers and school leaders viewed certification as a significant indicator of skill (57% teachers, 61% leaders) and several of the interviewed HALTs mentioned it increased their standing with colleagues and peers. Another study has found the benefits of undertaking HALT certification include renewed collegiality, personal practice improvement, improved leadership confidence and feelings of pride and accomplishment (Queensland University of Technology 2019).

Interviews revealed that certification helped build the confidence of HALTs and provided a form of validation when measuring themselves against the descriptors of the Teacher Standards. The rigour of certification was in itself perceived to provide credibility to and evidence of a teacher's expertise. This was particularly important for younger HALTs who were responsible for leading other colleagues.



Did you know?

In addition to providing opportunity to reflect on their teaching, receive feedback and improve their practice, there is (dependent upon jurisdictions) a remunerative benefit to undertaking certification. For example, in the Northern Territory teachers who remain in classroom-based positions are paid a yearly allowance of \$11,160 if certified at the Highly Accomplished level and \$23,368 for Lead Teachers (Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, 2018)¹⁰. This provides a financial incentive for teachers to lead from the classroom.

¹⁰ Figures for the financial year of 11 October 2018-10 October 2019.



1 in 7 participants were more likely to have a mentoring role after certification



1 in 3 participants were more likely to have a management role after certification



1 in 5 participants were engaged in coaching activities more frequently after certification



1 in 10 participants were more likely to have a team leadership role after certification

Certification builds alternative leadership opportunities



“Certification provides opportunities for teachers to remain in the classroom but increase their sphere of influence.”

– Lead Teacher, NSW

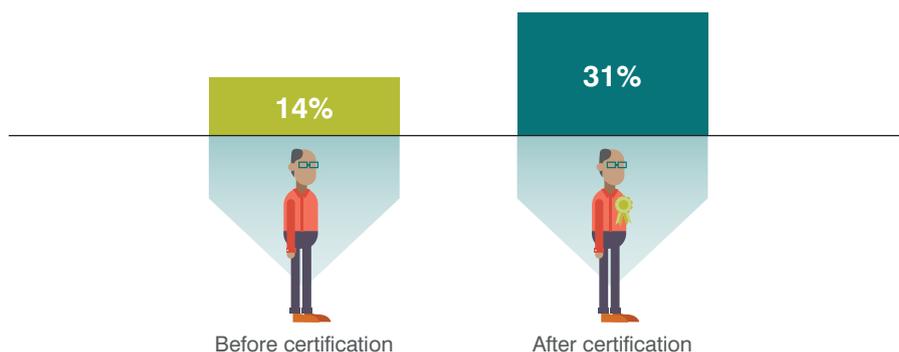
The evidence gathered shows that after certification HALTs are more frequently spending time in roles that allow them to spread their skills and expertise among colleagues. There was a significant increase in HALTs spending time coaching (post: 46%, pre: 28%), mentoring (post: 69%, pre: 51%) and in team leadership (post: 43%, pre: 34%) roles. In some schools, additional roles were specifically created to enable certified HALTs to have a greater whole-school impact.

The HALT Census also showed an increase in HALTs performing management and administrative roles post certification (post: 44%, pre: 17%). Interview data suggests these responsibilities come as a part of new leadership roles, such as impact coaching, curriculum coordination or leading a team within the school.

Twice as many teachers reported having an impact on learners at all year levels after certification compared to pre-certification. By extending their influence on colleagues, HALTs are having a wider impact beyond their own practice (Figure 3).

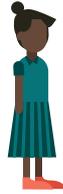
Figure 3

The percentage of HALTs impacting all learners in their school before and after certification.



Many teachers who undertook certification were motivated by opportunities for career advancement and professional growth, with most still wanting to retain elements of teaching within their work. Some HALTs had already taken on an acting or permanent school leadership position prior to commencing certification, while other teachers were offered or applied for school leadership positions after certification. Feedback from HALTs indicated that, while leadership opportunities often resulted, certification was rarely viewed as a stepping stone to become a principal.

Certification creates a high quality professional learning opportunity for teachers



“Certification gives more opportunities to build and reflect on your practice.”

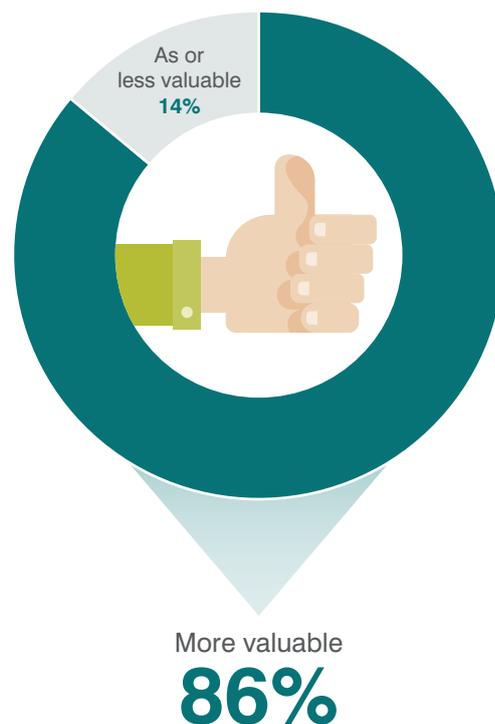
– Lead Teacher, SA

Certification offers a professional learning opportunity in which teachers engage in collaborative learning, collect evidence of impact and improve their practice. It involves considered reflection on a teacher’s individual teaching practice, their impact on learners and their influence on the practice of colleagues.

Certification also enables teachers to receive feedback and evaluation by nationally trained assessors. Of the surveyed HALTs, 86% found the certification process to be more valuable than previous forms of professional learning they had undertaken (Figure 5). We surmise that this is because the certification journey is reflective, ongoing, job-embedded, collaborative and Standards-aligned – key elements of high quality professional learning. Not only does it provide a structure for expert teachers to reflect on their practice, but certification also provides a roadmap to guide improvement of their already excellent practice.

Figure 4

Proportion of teachers who valued certification more, less or as valuable as other forms of professional learning.



Certification professionalises the teaching profession



“[Certification] highlighted what I was doing really well and the effect flowed onto other staff.”

– Lead Teacher, SA

Interviewed leaders and HALTs mentioned the role that certification can play in the professionalisation of teaching, particularly in the eyes of the community. They cited the certification process as an important first step for quality teachers to be acknowledged and in turn recognised within the wider school community. The status of HALTs has increased the number of opportunities for teachers to be included in board meetings, take on guest speaker roles and work in the policy space which has created impact on a system wide scale. HALTs are impacting further via strategic roles in curriculum development, educational policy and other sector-wide opportunities.

Certification builds opportunities for networking



“[Certification creates] a national network of great practitioners to advocate for better quality education.”

– Highly Accomplished Teacher, NSW

Certification connects HALTs with communities of practice and networking opportunities which have been reported as immensely rewarding. The national HALT Network brings together all certified teachers and enables them to increase their expertise together with like-minded colleagues and share their collective expertise with the broader profession. A major component of the Network is the annual HALT Summit which provides an opportunity for HALTs to collaborate, work with leading Australian and international thinkers and develop skills to lead and inspire colleagues.

The HALT Network and Summit are highly valued and effective opportunities for HALTs to share ideas and reaffirm their work. They offer HALTs a sense of community that extends beyond the formal events, with teachers working together across jurisdictions. This desire to collaborate has driven a growth of state-based networks to help spread expertise.

Summary of Benefits

The self-reflective process of certification, the collaboration and networking opportunities provided through the HALT Network and the mentoring and coaching HALTs undertake post-certification are together working to strengthen expertise and improve learner outcomes in the longer term.

Research undertaken with Independent Schools Queensland (Queensland University of Technology 2019) further demonstrated that the work of HALTs is having an impact on student learning and welfare, creating a positive influence on peers, building school community and facilitating the personal growth of HALTs. Certification was found to have renewed collegiality between teachers, improved personal practice, boosted leadership confidence and instilled feelings of pride and accomplishment.

To build on these initial positive findings, more research is required to further understand the impact of HALTs on their colleagues and learners.



“[The] experience of certification was extremely valuable for my professional growth.”

– Lead Teacher, WA



“I have a real passion for professionally growing my colleagues.”

– Lead Teacher, NT



“[Certification helped me] improve as a practitioner. It was authentic professional development that I had control of.”

– Highly Accomplished Teacher, NSW

At a glance

- The level of support from school leaders impacts on the certified teacher and their experience of certification.
- Systems and sectors can help support schools to leverage the expertise of their HALTs.
- Finding ways to incorporate the work associated with applying to be certified into existing performance and development processes will support the sustainability of certification.

Supporting HALT certification

Increase support for teachers applying for certification

HALTs experienced a diverse range of support from their colleagues, school leaders and employers when applying for certification. Some teachers were encouraged to apply for certification, but were not supported after the initial discussion; some teachers reported being supported throughout; and in other cases teachers reported no support at all while undertaking the certification process.

Systems and sectors have a key role to play here and are increasingly looking at ways to work with schools to support teachers to pursue certification. This could include, for example, funding release time for teachers to undertake certification as part of their ongoing professional learning, or coordinating access to coaching from existing HALTs.



AITSL has put together a guide *Getting the best from your teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2018¹¹) with advice on how teachers and leaders can work together to foster a culture that encourages teachers to pursue certification and how teachers are best supported at each stage. It also includes ideas for utilising expertise post certification, such as allocating time and resources for HALTs to lead projects, creating roles for them to support other teachers and initiating inter-school collaboration to grow networks to improve learner outcomes. This is the first in a series of resources that will look to support the communication between teachers and their leaders around national teacher certification.

¹¹ <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/getting-the-best-from-your-teachers-a-principals-guide-to-national-teacher-certification>

Embed portfolio collation within teachers' professional learning

The time that it takes to apply for certification surfaced as a key barrier to teachers engaging in the process. Though all certified teachers found the process worthwhile, they noted that the amount of work involved in compiling portfolios was seen as a significant investment of time that discouraged many of their qualified colleagues from undertaking the process. The Census revealed that while 85% of certified teachers would consider renewing their certification, only 43% think a colleague would do it. In order to combat the time barrier of compiling an application, the process of applying and renewing as a HALT could be embedded into professional development processes.



Increase support for teachers after certification

HALTs who moved to positions in other schools after certification cited a lack of recognition and appropriate utilisation of their skills and experiences by their previous school leaders. A large number of HALTs (42%) did not believe that their school provided sufficient time and opportunity to lead, initiate or plan professional or collaborative learning activities post-certification. By funding release time for HALTs, systems are likely to benefit more from a utilisation of their expertise across learning environments.

Conclusion

To date, in participating states and territories, national teacher certification is progressing the profession and benefits are emerging in schools and the broader sector.

The preliminary evidence indicates that the rigorous and transparent process of certification offers much needed recognition and validation of the skills and expertise of high performing educators. Additionally, it provides a high quality professional learning opportunity and offers a pathway for excellent teachers to grow in their self-efficacy and careers while remaining in teaching positions. It also leads to broader benefits in the professional development of other teachers in the schools in which HALTs are situated, with those certified more likely to engage in mentoring and coaching.

While early evidence suggests that implementation is progressing well, there are clear opportunities to increase access to national teacher certification across the full teacher workforce profile. Embedding certification into existing professional development structures and increasing the consistency of support received by teachers from leaders and the sector more broadly, are both opportunities identified by certified teachers to increase accessibility and sustainability of the HALT program.

AITSL will continue to work with systems and sectors across all states and territories to make national teacher certification accessible to all teachers for not only the benefit of individuals being assessed, but also the whole education system.



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