

Education and Training Workforce: Schools

Commissioned Study

Principals Australia Institute Inc.

Comments on Draft Research Report, November 2011

Principals Australia, now Principals Australia Institute (PAI), provided a submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Schools Workforce.

PAI wishes to correct several errors contained in references to its submission in the Draft Report and to also offer some opportunities that could be considered in the implementation of recommendations.

Corrections

1. On page 141 of the Draft Report, PAI's submission is referred to with respect to "whether principals feel they have been sufficiently involved in the framing of the (Principal) standard". PAI is stated as recommending a "profession-owned approach". In paragraph 4 on page 141, the Report states that "the Commission considers that wholesale change in direction would be precipitate, and that incremental adjustment to refine the process already in train is likely to be more appropriate".

PAI wishes its intent to be corrected. We are not advocating wholesale change in direction; rather supporting the process in train by the profession itself taking the lead in refining and promulgating the new national standard, monitoring and evaluating its impact on practice and reporting to AITSL on its effectiveness. This would allow AITSL to fulfill its role in assuring governments on action underway to promote quality school leadership and management across the nation. The Report acknowledges AITSL's lack of effective engagement with the principalship. PAI is concerned that there is a lack of recognition of the widespread evidence that unless members of a profession are engaged in, and in fact take the lead on embedding quality standards in day-to-day practice, efforts to lift and sustain performance are not effective. While a review of AITSL is anticipated, a five-year wait to review its effectiveness is inadequate. A post-implementation review in 2013 would be best-practice.

PAI, as the principalship's own professional development arm, is well-placed to partner with AITSL to provide the conduit to primary and secondary principals and aspiring school leaders for all school

sectors, all across Australia. PAI is able to facilitate the conversation with principals, creating collaborative forums to debate and realize the use of such tools as the Principal Standard, and to report back, through AITSL, on improvements and support for implementation. PAI's DEEWR-funded online professional development community palnet (www.palnet.edu.au) was launched on 14 February and was envisaged by DEEWR for just such a purpose as the engagement of principals in the implementation of the Standard.

2. On page 144, the Draft Report notes PAI's submission as stating "Principals Australia advocated a more regimented approach to school leadership training based on the mandatory National Professional Qualification for Headship in England". The context for this quote has misrepresented our submission. Our intent was to identify proven mechanisms to raise the status of the profession of principalship, and create a "voice" for the profession. It was not presented as a demand for a "mandatory qualification" and the Draft Report fails to offer any credible alternative to increase the status among members of the Australian community of the profession. Raising the status of the profession is one element of a multi-pronged approach to attracting teachers into the profession and retaining them. In addition, the focus in PAI's submission was not on "regimentation"; instead it proposed creating high quality support for, and pathways to, the principalship that recognize the complexity, diversity and significant skill requirements of the profession.

PAI does not support a "regimented approach" to professional learning and continuing professional development of school principals. Rather, PAI fully supports a system that facilitates the tailoring and customization of professional development to take account of the interests and needs of principals and aspiring principals. Indeed, through palnet and the L5 Leadership Framework, PAI already has a system that supports this tailored, highly customized approach to the continuing professional development of principals and school leaders¹. However, without formal recognition of achievement of the new national standard, and participation in continuing professional development linked to the national standard, the profession does not demonstrate professional credibility, much like many other highly regarded professions, such as Chartered Accountants or medical practitioners. PAI is not advocating that all principals be required to immediately meet a standard, but that accreditation should be available to distinguish principals who have attained excellence ie they have demonstrated they have achieved the Principal Standard. It will become the benchmark that distinguishes principals from teachers who achieve other school leadership positions.

PAI believes that the existence of the Principal Standard on its own, without the profession itself leading the next steps in using the standard as the basis for defining entry into the profession and recognizing the achievement of entry into the profession, there will be no significant impact on increasing the numbers of people aspiring to become principals and practice change will be minimal. Michael Fullan has written extensively on the importance of authentic engagement and ownership of leaders to achieve sustained change to practices in schools.

Suggested improvements to the Draft Report

PAI notes that the recommendations made in the Draft Report on the area of professional development for school leaders and principals are simplistic. PAI is concerned that the creation of a repository of

available research findings by AITSL is not enough to support principals in their attainment of improved professional development.

While there is evidence that there is a role for clearing houses, they need to be at arm's length from Government, with governance structures and processes that ensure critical appraisal by independent and credible experts, and quality assurance processes. This means that governance, management and operational links to universities and the profession are important. PAI believes the current governance, management and operational arrangements for the AITSL clearing house should be reconsidered to ensure they reflect best practice. PAI would be pleased to provide advice on best practice models for clearing houses that are designed and managed to have an impact on professional practice standards.

An important part of the success of such clearing houses, is not just the collation of the research, but the ability to interpret and apply the evidence to the unique context for each school principal. Interpretation and advice from peers, especially those who have implemented research, will be highly valued by school leaders in taking advantage of the clearing house resources. PAI's palnet offers an existing forum that school leaders can use to seek advice, work collaboratively with other leaders and support each other as they interpret the research and evidence held in the clearing house to their particular circumstances. Palnet (Commonwealth funded) has been fully promoted since February 2012, and there are already more than 700 school leaders engaged in conversations on issues critical for leadership, with more than 800 pages created and 72,000 page views. PAI suggests that AITSL be encouraged to partner with us to ensure palnet provides the online platform for professional learning conversations linked to the AITSL developed clearing house.

PAI's national market research survey, conducted in 2011, reveals that approximately 16% of school leaders are not planning to undertake professional development in the next two years. The most commonly offered reason was "lack of time" (51%), followed by "work/life balance" (37%) and "cost" (34%). This evidence demonstrates that simply offering more professional development in high priority areas using current delivery modes will not engage all members of the profession. There is a significant job to be done in "selling the value proposition" of quality continuing professional development linked to the new national standard. In addition, in order to make it attractive and possible for busy, time poor school principals to undertake quality continuing professional development, the way it is delivered needs to be redesigned (from the users' perspectives). This must be integrated into their day-to-day work and managed by them in such a way that it fits comfortably into their schedules. This has been achieved very effectively in other professions such as general practice, accountancy, psychology, and health administration. There is no reason why the same approach to system design and implementation of user friendly, quality continuing professional development could not be achieved for the principalship. As the principalship's own professional development arm, PAI is well-placed to partner with AITSL to undertake this work. PAI's palnet was designed to provide the national online platform for time efficient and targeted "professional development" utilizing professional learning networks that involve peer review of evidence and reflection on practice based evidence and performance; these models are among the best and most proven ways of lifting and sustaining practice among busy professionals.

PAI's national market research survey also found that principals rated professional development almost as high as financial incentives in making a decision to move to or stay in rural/remote settings. While 63% stated that financial incentives would be the greatest incentive, 58% stated that professional

support and development would encourage them to relocate as principals to rural and remote locations. PAI is well-placed to work with AITSL on professional development solutions which will attract and retain school leaders in rural and remote locations. The provision of high quality professional development that is not limited by location is essential if quality staffs are to be retained in rural and remote areas. PAI has developed with Flinders University a proposal to deliver accredited professional development up to Masters level, designed to meet the professional development and support needs of this group. It will be delivered in a variety of modes that ensure principals and those wishing to become principals, can undertake their training at times and in locations that suit their needs.

The decision taken in late 2011 by Ministers to disperse almost all Commonwealth funding for school leader/principal professional development to State and territories means that it is very difficult for initiatives like this, which aim to provide a national and flexible solution, to get funded as State and Territories look to developing their own specific solutions. This in turn can undermine the opportunity to obtain nationally consistent implementation of the Principal standard.

The national school principal workforce supply and distribution issues are very significant now and into the future. The draft report is relatively silent on addressing the issues for the shortage of school leaders in the short term in particular.

Employers may be increasingly tempted to meet short term needs by turning to the overseas market for teachers and school leaders in areas of great shortage (geographic and special subject areas). While ultimately the intention would be to ensure an adequate supply and distribution of Australian sourced teachers and school leaders, there is little choice between using existing teachers who are underskilled to deliver such specialist topics as maths and science and the use of fully qualified and experienced overseas trained teachers and school leaders. The success of this solution (for children, schools, communities, and the overseas trained teachers and school leaders themselves) will depend on the quality and effectiveness of induction, supplementary professional development and continuous support. This comes at a cost – it is not enough to provide only basic induction.

PAI recommends that a national taskforce be established to understand the current and projected workforce gaps in supply and distribution of school principals and leaders (and the drivers), and to plan nationally coordinated action to overcome current and anticipated problems, to monitor effectiveness of action and report to governments on same. While AITSL should most certainly be involved, it is important that all the relevant stakeholders be at the table; the profession (national associations representing principals and teachers), its professional development arm Principals Australia Institute (PAI), universities and other major providers of professional development.

¹ L5 Leadership framework is a contextualized and developmental approach which can be used to demonstrate achievement of the National Professional Standard for Principals www.leaderslead.edu.au