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Proposal: Certification of Principals

Discussion Paper 1: March 2013

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What is Certification?

Principals Australia Institute (PAI) defines certification as:

> *"The formal procedure by which the performance achievement of school leaders is assessed, verified and recognised in writing by issuing a certificate as to the attributes, characteristics, quality, qualification, or status of individuals in accordance with profession-developed requirements and the national standard."*

There is currently no national process for certification of Australian principals. Most professions have a form of professional certification which involves assessment of the individual against the profession's developed standard(s), usually through a peer-developed review process which might include formal training, development of a portfolio and/or on-the-job assessment. Normally professional certification is subject to other conditions post-award to ensure that the integrity and currency of certification and individual capacity to meet the standard(s) is maintained eg through ongoing professional development and/or time-limited certification.

To issue certification to individuals an organisation must have:

- robust processes that are quality assured and consistent, particularly in relation to assessment of performance
- a clear, defined and quality assured process of accrediting professional development/learning, and
- recognition as the appropriate professional body by either self regulation (eg Australian Institute of Company Directors) or in legislation (eg health practitioners).

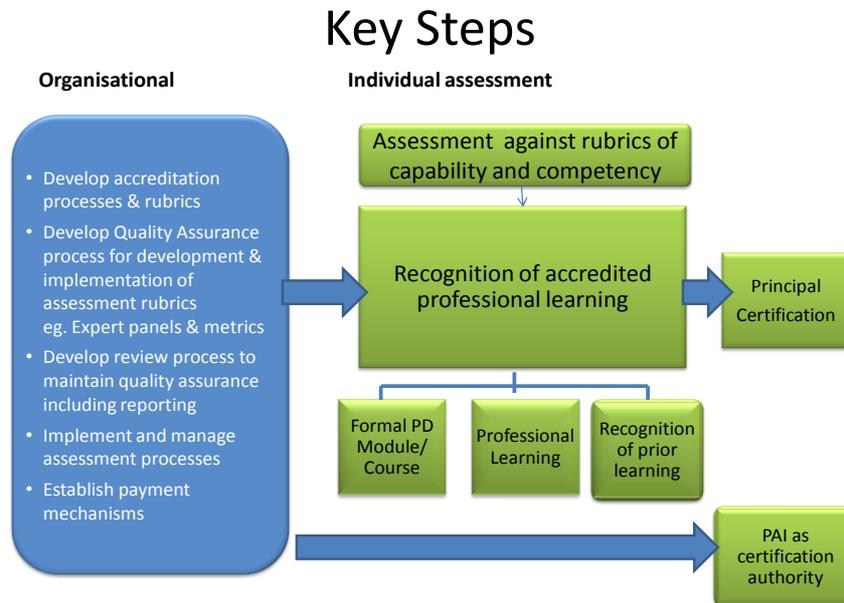## Principals Australia Institute as a Certifying Body

The Principals Australia Institute, as the national professional development body for all Australian school principals, is ideally positioned to build the professionalism of school principals through a profession-led process to establish a certification model that builds on the National Professional Standard for Principals.

In order for PAI to be recognised as the certifying body it will need to:

- work with principals and associations to establish the framework in which PAI will develop and manage a process of accrediting professional development, such as:
    - tertiary studies or formal courses or modules
    - other professional learning including action research and on-the-job activities
- define the assessable-requirements and levels that must be reached to achieve certification
- continually review and quality assure the frameworks and processes.

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Key steps

This diagram sets out the key steps for this process.

Key Steps

Organisational

Individual assessment

- Develop accreditation processes & rubrics
- Develop Quality Assurance process for development & implementation of assessment rubrics eg. Expert panels & metrics
- Develop review process to maintain quality assurance including reporting
- Implement and manage assessment processes
- Establish payment mechanisms

Assessment against rubrics of capability and competency

Recognition of accredited professional learning

Principal Certification

Formal PD Module/ Course

Professional Learning

Recognition of prior learning

PAI as certification authority

Why would you do it? Improving the professional status of principals

Most professions have several characteristics that distinguish them as a profession. These include, but are not limited to:

- specialised body of knowledge and skills
- group mission and identity
- codes of practice and institutional policies
- educational standards
- entry barriers or a preferred level of certification
- evidence of ongoing development to maintain accreditation and standards including certification of individuals by the recognised professional body
- ability to be flexible and update regulations and practices to meet community needs and demands
- group commitment to promoting and raising the public profile of the profession
- strong professionals as leaders and role models
- professional code of practice, ethical and behavioural standards
- community service ethic, commitment to public good
- public standing and reputation
- engagement in public debate
- commitment to continuous improvement.

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In ensuring that the profession takes the lead in this process, school principals will begin to develop and shape the requirements for formal and public recognition as a profession. These encompass but are not limited to:

- Quality assured demonstration of systematic theory or skills applied in practice
- Creation of an ethical code (a precursor to a quality assessment process)
- Accreditation (of professional development)
- Public responsibility
- Authority in the industry sector and
- Community recognition.

Why would principals support this?

There are many reasons that professional groups have chosen to distinguish themselves as a group. In the case of principals these include:

- establishment of a National Professional Standard for Principals
- increasing levels of public accountability through the MySchool website
- pace and scope of National and State/Territory education reform agenda
- increasing complexity of student needs
- looming workforce shortages precipitated by the age profile of the current cohort of principals
- perceptions of declining status, pay and conditions relative to other professions
- perceived lack of principal engagement and leadership engagement in shaping reform and educational agenda[1]
- the opportunity to increase respect and understanding in the community of the important role that principals play in educating young people for the future of Australia
- increasing engagement with and leadership of the community
- increasing legal liabilities and compliance requirements as individuals
- national and international transportation of accreditation and certification.

This creates an environment in which principals are likely to support the idea of differentiating themselves from the teaching profession, particularly if they see that they can gain greater support to assist in their personal development and the contribution that they make to improving education.

"Certification will help principals to achieve excellence in their practice, and in being recognised, will lift the status of the profession."

Jim Davies
CEO - Principals Australia Institute

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[1] Principals Australia Institute National Market Research Survey 2011

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Who has the power to certify?

Providers of a professional certification are either regulated or unregulated. In Australia, professions are regulated according to the Australian Qualifications Framework which applies to higher education, vocational education and training and schools (i.e to certify schools to operate as schools in the delivery of education services). Regulation is not about recognition of a profession; it is primarily to protect the public from poorly trained or untrained, unscrupulous or fraudulent practitioners. Regulated professions include health, veterinary science and architecture.

Self regulating and unregulated professions employ competency-based assessments and/or assessments based on qualifications. The accounting CPA and CA are examples of this type of certification.

An unregulated occupation is a profession or trade for which there is no legal requirement or restriction on practice with regard to licences, certificates or registration. School principals may have a registration requirement, for example they must be a registered teacher, but they may require no other qualification or licence, other than those that are required for their teacher registration. There is no regulated difference between a teacher and a principal.

Some unregulated occupations offer certification/registration with a professional body to applicants on a voluntary basis. These bodies can provide industry recognition for standards and codes of practice. It is this model that is proposed by Principals Australia Institute.

In these cases certification (by the recognised industry professional body) becomes the single pathway to recognition as a professional.

What are the processes required?

In most professions the standards body acts as the certification authority. The standards body is usually charged with (although this varies considerably across industries and industry sectors):

- leading the development of national statements of attributes and competencies for the profession
- developing national accreditation standards for education and training that support registration
- implementing accreditation processes for education and training courses that are peer-based, independent, professional, effective and well regarded by the public, the profession, educational institutions, registration authorities and government and
- overseeing the assessment of knowledge, skills and professional attributes of individuals seeking certification as a professional.

In education, teacher registration processes are State/Territory based. Certification for teachers, aligned with the Professional Standards for Teachers, is being progressively implemented around the nation. In the case of principals, the Professional Standard has been developed by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and endorsed by all Ministers of Education. There is, as yet, no national articulation of this into a process of certification of individuals aligned with accreditation of professional development.

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The missing elements in moving towards the voluntary certification of principals are:

- development of a national process that specifies the attributes and competencies for the profession in an assessable way
- profession-driven development of an assessment process for principal certification, aligned with the National Professional Standard for Principals
- profession-led accreditation of professional development and learning offerings
- development of a profession-led code of ethics to underpin this work and
- assignment of responsibility for oversight and conducting assessment to the level of certification.

Proposed model

It is proposed that certification of Australian principals be developed under a self-regulating model, sitting outside the Australian Qualifications Framework but underpinned by a code of ethics, and rigorous profession-led assessment rubrics that include consideration of:

- demonstrated capability and capacity of application to practice and context
- innovation and continual improvement
- knowledge transfer beyond the individual i.e. significant return to the profession/professional learning of others
- continued professional development requirements and
- achievement of the National Professional Standard for Principals.

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