

# Summary of the National Forum on Professional Certification of Principals

Held March 5 2013

## Introduction

---

On March 5 2013, Principals Australia Institute hosted a national forum in Canberra to engage the profession in discussion about the need establish a model for voluntary professional certification.

The forum sought broad representation from all education sectors and included representatives from:

- AHISA – Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA)
- APPA – Australian Primary Principals Association
- ASPA – Australian Secondary Principals Association
- CaSPA – Catholic Secondary Principals Australia

The aim of the day was to gather the collective wisdom from educational leaders from around the country and to begin ongoing dialogue about the ‘what, why and how’ of certification.

### Key outcomes:

At the conclusion of the day, there was:

- **A commitment from the nation’s peak principal associations and their professional development body, Principals Australia Institute (PAI), to continue working together to define and develop a process for certifying Australian Principals.**
- **A commitment from PAI to continue open and transparent consultation with principals as we work towards a national voluntary certification process.**

## Summary of discussion

---

### Why certification?

PAI Chairperson, Susan Lenehan opened the forum with this outline of why PAI is leading the discussion on certification:

*“Today’s forum has been organised in response to principals across the country who have said that they want professional recognition through a formal process of certification administered by the profession, for the profession. This message has been very clear, coming to the Institute through surveys, through its network of branches and through the principals’ associations.*

*“This is therefore a very important day in moving towards that formal recognition and we are grateful to you all for accepting our invitation to participate in the development – and ultimately the implementation – of a rigorous, formal process of certification for principals.”*

## The PAI Proposal

PAI CEO, Jim Davies, outlined why PAI is calling for certification.

*“Our aim is to provide principals – no matter whether they work in catholic, government or independent sectors; whether they work in rural or remote settings; in primary or secondary school; an opportunity to develop their professionalism as a school principal.*

*“The profession needs to engage heavily as we do this intensive work – just as they did with the development of the professional standard.*

*“People could ask ‘What is about PAI that gives them to legitimacy to be the authority?’ The answer to that is that we are the institute that has been developed over the past 20 years that relates to all peak bodies and principals associations.*

*“We are committed to consulting with the profession – we want principals to tell us what they want certification to look like and to work with us as we move this forward.”*

You can read the full discussion paper from the day here: <http://www.pai.edu.au/News-and-Events/Certification>

## Professional Certification in Other Contexts – Expert Panel

Principals can learn from the wisdom of other professional bodies that have been down this road before us.

The forum heard from three speakers representing different professions:

- Jacqueline Shimeld, Director, Professional Development, Australian Institute of Company Directors,
- Richard Brown, CPA program manager, Certified Practising Accountants
- Dr Laurence Ingvarson – Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research

There were a number of parallels and contrasts from their various settings for participants to reflect upon. Jacqueline and Richard outlined their organisations’ approaches to certification covering:

- What it means for their profession including the impact on profession in terms of status and continuing professional development
- A broad description of the nature of requirements
- Timeframes for currency and maintenance
- Status of certification, its impact and community acceptance.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the profession came from Laurence Ingvarson who said:

*“Whose jurisdiction is this? No-one is going to give this to you – you’ve got to take it and grasp it. In my experience, no-one is more committed to the future of this profession than the profession itself. You need to grab it – and run with it.”*

## Workshops

The forum spent time in workshops reflecting and giving feedback on three topics:

### 1. Understanding Certification in the context of Australian Principals

Workshop groups were given a set of draft principles to discuss and provide feedback on. The draft principles included:

- demonstrable capability and capacity against a peer developed quality assessment process and measures
- demonstration of innovation and continual improvement
- recognition of knowledge transfer beyond the individual, clear evidence of a significant return to the profession/professional learning of others
- maintenance of continued professional development requirements, commitment to self-improvement and development
- benchmarked achievement aligned with the National Professional Standard for Principals
- demonstration of educational leadership is fundamental
- evidence of dedication to achieving the highest standard of education for their students

### 2. Potential Levels of Certification

The groups discussed the concept of differentiating levels of certification as occurs in some professions and also in the Australian Teacher Standards.

They looked at levels of certification that might reflect school context (eg size/scope/level) vs competency/skill and/or experience/time-served based approaches.

They also discussed what it might mean for attracting and building the skills of aspiring and emergent leaders.

### 3. Governance

What governance structure will we need if we are to implement certification?

The groups discussed the proposition that for professional certification to be owned and developed by the profession, a credible governance model that has the respect of the profession and public, is essential if it is to contribute to raising the status of the profession and the quality of professional development.

## Final Panel – Reflections

The forum continued with reflections from a panel. Comments included:

*“My reflection is that we need to make sure we can answer the question: “why certification?” We need to be able to articulate a compelling case.”*

*Principals need to know “what’s in it for me?” and the profession needs to understand “Why is it good for the profession?”*

**Norm Hart, APPA**

*“There’s a very strong need for a credible rationale. We need to articulate who the key stakeholders are and what conversations need to happen to move this forward.*

*“Don’t underestimate the significance of the culture change required to make this happen – it has to be owned by the profession.”*

**Daryl Hanly, CaSPA**

*“There is a platform that exists: our national standards. There is a void that we must fill. If we don’t step up as a profession and fill this void – and define for ourselves what certification should be – who will?”*

*“Clearly there is much work to be done in defining what we are certifying – but if we don’t begin now, we will still be sitting here having the same conversation in 10 years time.”*

**Sheree Vertigan, ASPA**

*“I’d suggest you restructure the statement “by the profession for the profession” – you mustn’t forget “by the profession for the public.”*

*“We serve the public interest. Certification must demonstrably lift performance of principals and schools for the benefit of the community.”*

**Dr Laurence Ingvarson - ACER**

*“How you communicate this will be key. You also need to think about not only how you will communicate this to principals and school leaders – but how is the broader community going to embrace this concept?”*

*“My word of caution would be that you need to look out for vested interests from within your ranks that may blindside you.”*

**Jacqueline Shimeld  
Institute of Company Directors**

*“I’ve heard lots of questions. Lots of “why would we do this?” and “How will this work?”*

*Maybe you need to focus your attention on the simple question “What makes great principals?”*

**Richard Brown - CPA Australia**

## Summation

Jim Davies, CEO of PAI, closed the forum stating:

*“Education in Australia is so diversified. There is an opportunity here to bring the profession together and redefine the principalship.*

*I’ve heard a number of key messages today including:*

- **Independence** – this must be for the profession by the profession and for the public
- **Quality and rigour** – if we focus on the robustness of the certification process, the value of certification will be inherent
- **Differentiation** – We need to develop a certificate that aligns with the teaching certificate but also differentiates the skills required to be a quality principal
- **Voluntary** - Certification will be voluntary and support self-directed professional learning
- **Demand driven** – certification needs to be valued by those who are engaged in the practice of school principalship
- **Engagement** - It’s time for the principals and school leaders around the country to stand together and embrace this work towards the betterment of the profession
- **Joint responsibility** – we have a joint responsibility – as leaders of the Institute and Associations – to move this forward.

*We have the National Professional Standard for principals. Now is the time for us as a profession to set benchmarks that recognise the value of quality school leadership. This will lift the profile of the profession. But more importantly it will improve outcomes for our kids.”*

## Next Steps

---

At the conclusion of the day, there was:

- **A commitment from the nation’s peak principal associations and their professional development body, Principals Australia Institute (PAI), to continue working together to define and develop a process for certifying Australian Principals.**
- **A commitment from PAI to continue open and transparent consultation with principals as we work towards national voluntary certification.**
- **In invitation to participants to join in ongoing online discussion via the PAI Certification group on palnet – [www.palnet.edu.au](http://www.palnet.edu.au)**

**For more information visit [www.pai.edu.au](http://www.pai.edu.au) or join the online discussion at [www.palnet.edu.au](http://www.palnet.edu.au)**