



Australian Association for  
Research in Education (AARE)

Response to the NIQTSL  
Issues paper and Consultation Questionnaire

on

*Standards for School Leadership*

October 2005

## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Association for Research in Education welcomes this opportunity to respond to the NIQTSL Issues Paper and Consultation Questionnaire on Standards for School Leadership.

AARE has over 1300 members from all parts of Australia and many overseas countries. The majority of members are university academics, but there are also school and VET teachers; officers of teacher organisations, school authorities and education departments; and other educational researchers and users of educational research. AARE has an active postgraduate and early career researcher membership. Thus the positions taken in this response to the consultation paper reflect the views and expertise of this diverse membership.

AARE sees value in developmental standards to the extent to which they enable recognition of leadership, identification of professional learning needs, and support for succession planning. A set of standards may potentially enable easier recognition of the occurrence of leadership, from beginning teachers to principals. We believe, however, that greater clarity of purpose and content is required before support can be given to a specific model.

Guiding the following submission is the principle of flexibility. Education is rapidly changing, and schooling in the future may bear little resemblance to the structures of today. Effective leadership will be demonstrated in diverse and unpredictable ways. Any set of standards would need to inform school leadership as it occurs across a variety of contexts, is manifested in divergent forms, and which changes over time. The most effective framework would therefore:

- appreciate and promote local diversity;
- recognise a broad range of leaders and leadership in schools;
- be designed for adjustment and renewal over time;
- be informed by a substantial body of research linked to teaching and learning outcomes.

AARE also believes that some clarification of the purposes of the standards framework proposed is desirable. The Association sees value in developmental rather than regulatory standards, but notes that there appears to be some slippage in the Issues Paper. In particular, adopting a dictionary definition of standards (cf Section 3) which emphasises measurement and performance is more likely to be linked to regulatory standards, unsupported by the Association. Similarly, AARE remains unconvinced of the need to link certification to standards. Most notably, connecting standards to certification may impact negatively upon the flexibility of those standards and, at worst, may lead to a devaluing rather than strengthening of teachers as leaders. Understanding and minimising these risks is imperative.

As the Issues Paper notes, it is also important that standards be developed primarily by the profession itself. AARE acknowledges that an identified aim of NIQTSL is to fulfil the role of a national professional body. This long-term aspiration must nevertheless be balanced by the realisation that it does not currently fulfil that role. Thus, we believe that a broad range of consultation with professional bodies is advisable, both before and after implementation of the standards. AARE also maintains that the initial construction of standards should be subject to periodic revision by the profession. This is important not only in giving the overall framework greater legitimacy but also in ensuring that the framework is supported by educational research.

The need for further research is particularly pressing in the area of standards. There is currently a paucity of research linking sets of professional standards to improved teaching and learning outcomes. In this context AARE believes that large-scale longitudinal research accompanying the introduction of standards would be valuable. Indeed, the Association views research as fundamental to the success of this initiative. Regular evaluation of the standards, informed by dedicated independent research, would contribute to their long-term efficacy.

## SECTION 1 INFORMATION ABOUT RESPONDENT

**DATE:** October, 2005

### A. DETAILS OF ORGANISATION

**Name of organisation:** Australian Association for Research in Education

**Address of organisation:** Hon Secretary  
Ms Debra Cunningham  
Board of Teacher Registration  
PO Box 389

**City:** Toowong

**State:** Queensland

**Postcode:** 4066

**Telephone:** 07 3377 4736

**Signature:** (required only if returning a hard copy)

**B.** Does the organisation consent to being identified in the report from the consultation for NIQTSL?  **Yes**  **No**

**C.** Does the consultation response contain any confidential information?  **No**

**D.** Please note that we may contact you during the consultation process to clarify or seek further information arising from your responses. If you do not wish to be contacted please check (X) this box

## SECTION 2 THE IDEA OF A STANDARDS-GUIDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SYSTEM

### 1. What value could a standards-guided professional learning system for principals have for Australian schools?

Developmental standards might facilitate structures and cultures which support more systematic professional learning, which may be of substantial value to Australian schools. AARE nevertheless believes that the system proposed would be more appropriate if it began with the notion that leadership can potentially involve any and all teachers, irrespective of their official systemic roles. The Issues Paper notes the development of distributed leadership, and argues that ‘the guiding conception of what it means to be a principal has changed.’ These changes are likely to continue, redefining not only the role of principals but also the very concepts of leaders and leadership in schools. Thus, while some particular issues of administration and management will continue to concern principals alone, AARE advocates a broad standards framework to ensure greater flexibility in dealing with changing notions of school leaders.

More fundamentally, AARE believes a standards framework built around leadership rather than particular leaders (i.e. principals) would better reflect the contemporary education climate. As the Issues Paper concedes, a focus on individual leaders can be problematic in an era of greater cooperation, horizontal employment structures and team leadership. Indeed, a framework overly focussed on individuals and systemic roles may impact negatively upon the collegiality central to the teaching profession. What is needed is flexibility to appreciate a breadth of leadership, and to encompass the complexity of that leadership across rapidly changing schools.

## SECTION 3 STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Does your organisation share the same understanding of “standards” as described in the issues paper? If not, what is your understanding?

The Australian Association for Research in Education believes that if standards are to inform school leadership, the definition of “standards” found in the Issues Paper requires expansion for the framework to be effective.

The Issues Paper appears to endorse a view of regulatory standards. There is an explicit emphasis on measurement, allied to the suggestion that standards should ‘describe what practitioners need to know and [are] able to do.’ AARE believes that this framework is narrowly technical and underestimates the complexity of leadership work. In addition, the definition of standards adopted necessarily constructs leadership as an individualistic ‘performance’, despite the acknowledgement elsewhere in the Paper of the distributed nature of contemporary leadership. AARE maintains the importance and prevalence of distributed leadership, and believes that such leadership is profoundly mediated by local contextual factors. A set of regulatory, competency-based standards, could not hope to capture the

diversity and complexity of contemporary leadership and is potentially counter-productive to the work of schools and their communities.

Indeed, as our Introduction outlined, AARE believes that flexibility is paramount in the development of a standards framework. Standards defined too narrowly or inflexibly may inhibit the ability of the framework to accommodate diversity nationwide. For example, schools with large numbers of beginning teachers, schools in disadvantaged communities, or schools with high proportions of children with special needs likely require different approaches to leadership. The challenge for the framework is to enable leadership to be demonstrated and supported in each of these contexts (and many others not yet imagined). For this reason AARE values the adoption of a broader definition of standards than that currently envisaged.

## **2. What benefits might there be for principals and prospective principals of a profession-wide system of standards?**

The Australian Association for Research in Education would want to see the notion of 'profession-wide' applied in a highly inclusive manner. As Section 2.1 outlined, developmental standards could ultimately facilitate structures and cultures which support more systematic professional learning. However, the system should aim to have sufficient flexibility and relevance for leadership wherever it is found in schools and in all contexts rather than seeking to normalise the role of school leadership based on commonality in contrast to diversity. There are significant dangers in seeking to homogenise leadership and leadership practices in schools.

## **3. What benefits might there be for employing authorities and other interested parties in a profession-wide system of standards for principals?**

It is worth noting that employing authorities already have in place leadership frameworks and processes for principal preparation and recruitment. AARE believes, therefore, that a national system of standards would have most benefit if it sought to complement and build on these existing frameworks.

AARE maintains the importance of stakeholder consultation in any development of a standards framework. Without a ground-up approach which incorporates the views of current professional bodies, the proposal risks being perceived as an example of system imperatives being promoted at the expense of both autonomy and teacher leaders' engagement with the moral and ethical values associated with the profession.

From a parent and student perspective, a national standards framework would need to be accompanied by targeted research to ensure benefits. Currently, there is little research evidence about the impact and effects of leadership frameworks. Indeed, the presumed causal connection between principals' actions and learning outcomes, on which the entire standards edifice is based, arguably remains just that: presumed. Brian Caldwell, for example, has

acknowledged the absence of evidence regarding any direct cause-and-effect relationship between school management reforms and student outcomes (see *Self-managing schools and improved learning outcomes*, 1998, p. 38). Hence, the commissioning of research that investigates links between performance management and improved educational outcomes for students, school improvement or improved quality of management in schools, is highly desirable.

**4. In developing a national system of professional standards for principals, what issues would need to be addressed?**

The Australian Association for Research in Education is strongly committed to policy development processes being informed by research evidence and there is excellent recent research already available on school leadership, including that conducted in Australian schools. This evidence has clear implications for standards. To take but one example, standards can be seen as sequential or developmental (see Mulford, 2005). Taking full account of such research would strengthen the development of a standards framework, if such a framework was seen as desirable.

**5. What is your organisation's attitude to the development of profession-wide standards for principals?**

This is addressed in the Introduction.

**6. What role would your organisation want to play in the development of a national system of standards for principals?**

The Australian Association for Research in Education is a national (and international) stakeholder in Australian educational reform with 1300 members, 20% of whom are resident overseas. AARE members have specific expertise in school leadership, educational management, and educational change, and as such we could play a key consultative role in the development of a standards framework. We believe that AARE can make a unique contribution to the process due to its commitment to unbiased inquiry and the need for research to underpin educational decision-making.

**7. Which agency or agencies should be involved in the development of standards?**

AARE reaffirms its commitment to standards that are primarily developed and owned by the profession as a whole. Also, it is important that standards development not be overly centralised organisationally (at a national level) or geographically (the Eastern states). We also support the involvement of a broad range of agencies, including but not limited to: principals and teacher organisations; university teacher education faculties; government and

non-government employers; unions; education researchers; parent and other community organisations. An inclusive process would also prevent agencies or interest groups without a strong national presence, or without the capacity to influence peak decision-making groups (eg some subject area associations) from being marginalised.

**8. What mechanisms should be adopted to ensure broad involvement of the profession and other stakeholders in the development of a profession-wide system of standards for principals?**

Specific mechanisms may include workshops, a website, and multiple information gathering techniques such as questionnaires, discussion forums, focus groups and interviews. To ensure broad involvement of the profession, there is a need for a multi-faceted approach: for example, one questionnaire is unlikely to be capable of eliciting responses that accurately reflect the views of principal, teacher and parent organisations. Once again, if NIQTSL is to be an instigator of these processes, a wide range of consultation will be required to ensure legitimacy and acceptance by the profession. Further, AARE believes that transparency is essential to success of the project, and that aims and methods need to be clearly stated.

**9. How can stakeholder involvement in standards development be optimised?**

The Australian Association for Research in Education considers that stakeholder involvement will be optimised by a process that allows stakeholders adequate time to reflect upon their position, to consult with constituents, and to respond in a measured manner. Involvement will diminish if the consultation timeline is too short or inflexible. Further, involvement and the credibility of the process will also diminish if the views of stakeholders are not demonstrably valued, not explicitly incorporated in reports, or not seen to be influencing decisions. In the first instance, stakeholder agreement is desired on the nature, purpose and desirability of standards. They will also need to be convinced of the evidence and quality of research that informs and gives credence to a standards approach.

## **SECTION 4 PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION**

**1. What approaches for providing profession-wide certification seem most appropriate for Australian school principals?**

AARE believes that the case for profession-wide certification of principals requires greater clarity and evidence. As the Introduction outlined, effective leadership at all levels in schools will increasingly be demonstrated in diverse and unpredictable ways. A standards framework will need to appreciate leadership that occurs across a variety of contexts, is manifested in divergent forms, and which changes over time. Tying standards to certification, and limiting this certification to principals, may impact upon the flexibility desired. At worst, connecting standards to certification may lead to a devaluing rather than strengthening of teachers and school leaders working in particular contexts. Care must be taken to ensure that professional

leadership practice is not constrained by a model of certification, and that innovation does not diminish as a consequence.

Concerns around certification partly spring from an inherent tension between the expectations of employers and of the profession. Employer requirements for accountability and systemic compliance will potentially be manifest in prescriptive role and duty statements, use of metrics, and a behaviourist approach to demonstrating competency. A system of certification around leadership would need to be cognisant of these risks, and also of the risk of reducing the concept of leadership to individual acts (of principals, for example). It is worth noting that state teacher certification/registration schemes have attempted to resolve the dilemma of narrowly defined competencies by balancing employer, professional, professional associations, unions and public expectations.

Assuming the concerns of inflexibility were resolved, certification of school leadership certainly would be best developed through cooperation with the states and territories. Indeed, the approaches used for state certification/registration of teachers may well be more appropriate than a national one since these have proven viability and public and professional acceptance. The various principles and processes are probably also easily transferable to school leadership certification. A strong case can be made for teacher leadership certification following similar procedures, and these procedures being locally relevant and state-based. Moreover, certification of school leadership may not require direct linkage to a set of standards nor to a national system of leadership preparation or incumbent principal professional learning.

## **2. Which agency or agencies should provide profession-wide certification for principals in Australia?**

AARE notes that the history of educational reform is replete with examples of centralisation, quasi-de-centralisation and decentralisation that have been ephemeral or ineffective. This history also shows that many small-scale contextually-specific innovations have proven sustainable and effective. With this in mind, AARE would prefer a certification scheme in which there are multiple agencies with different roles and responsibilities – a non-hierarchical arrangement in which functions are delineated and allocated to particular agencies or combinations of agencies most capable of discharging specific responsibilities. For example, performance management is an employer responsibility, formal registration and deregistration is shared through membership of a joint body, professional learning is organised through a consortium. Implicit in this proposal is a minimal role for a national agency and such an agency not controlling other agencies or tying allocation of Federal funds to its own priorities.

## **3. Should standards for principals be differentiated by levels of schooling or area(s) of specialism?**

AARE re-iterates its desire for leadership standards rather than principal standards, for the reasons outlined in Sections 2.1 and 3.1. A differentiated view of leadership functions according to levels of schooling or area(s) of specialisation may have some utility. However, AARE does not consider it feasible or desirable to develop a nation-wide set of standards

specific to a generic class/type of school. Notwithstanding the difficulty in defining types of school according to models of schooling, schools differ in other ways that ameliorate the requirements of leadership. For example, specifying one standard for leadership of all 'middle schools' irrespective of students, staff and local community characteristics would not necessarily be in the best interests of the students, staff and local community of individual schools.

Such differentiation would also present problems for recruitment and transfer of school leaders.

**4. How should professional associations and other organisations be involved in developing methods for gathering and assessing evidence for professional certification of principals?**

The Australian Association for Research in Education favours professional associations and other organisations being involved in developing methods for gathering and assessing evidence for professional certification of school leadership. This support is contingent on these groups also being involved in decisions about who is responsible for the gathering, presentation and assessment of evidence for certification.

**5. How might the level of involvement of professional organisations and associations in the development of assessments and any certification process be optimised?**

See Section 4.4.

**6. On what forms of evidence could certification for principals be based? (e.g. course completion, assessment centre paper and pencil tasks; in-tray, scenarios, simulations, portfolio entries, etc.)**

The Australian Association for Research in Education favours a wide range of evidence being provided for certification of school leadership. However, this would be impractical for a variety of reasons. Time spent in certification compliance may be at the expense of more important leadership tasks. Assessment of comprehensive portfolios is a difficult and time-consuming task for assessors. Weighting of different forms of assessment would be required. Some forms of assessment might be disadvantageous for some leaders working in particular contexts or settings.

In terms of different forms of assessment, AARE is disposed towards reflective contextually-based forms which can show a deeper understanding of the role and of its complexities. These forms of assessment could be incorporated in professional learning programs such as those provided by employers and universities. AARE is less disposed towards paper and pencil tasks and self-report instruments although instruments eliciting evidence of school leadership from other parties would be useful, for example, parent, student and teacher surveys.

Additionally, personal dispositions (not character traits) are critical in conceptualising and in exercising effective educational leadership. Assessment forms can prevent disclosure of intent and mask personal preferences for particular ways of leading

**7. This issues paper makes a distinction between certification provided by a professional body and performance management systems in particular education employing authorities. Is there a place for profession-wide certification in addition to existing systems for performance management?**

The Australian Association for Research in Education prefers clear delineation between employer performance management processes and a certification process since these processes serve different purposes and need to be conducted differently. AARE does not see profession-wide certification replacing existing systems for performance management.

## **SECTION 5      CREATING AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STANDARDS-GUIDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

**1. What activities and elements might comprise a suitable infrastructure for supporting standards-guided professional learning?**

Though the establishment of developmental standards for school leadership may ultimately create structures conducive to professional learning, AARE is not convinced that standards themselves should be explicitly linked to professional learning. Indeed, adoption of a standards-guided professional learning approach has the potential to limit professional learning by restricting it to those aspects of leadership explicated in the standards. Avoiding this risk requires the implementation of standards which are sufficiently broad and flexible to incorporate a wide variety of school leadership. While supportive of a systematic approach to professional learning, AARE also proclaims the richness of local diversity, the breadth of school leadership nationwide, the changing content of that leadership over time, and the distributed nature of much contemporary school leadership.

**2. What role might your organisation play in providing an infrastructure to support standards-guided professional learning?**

AARE has the potential to play a significant role in ensuring that decisions about professional learning about school leadership and the provision of appropriate infrastructure are informed by quality research.

## SECTION 6 BUILDING SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION FOR CERTIFICATION

### 1. What benefits might a profession-wide system of standards and certification have in terms of:

#### Principal mobility

As Section 4.1 and the Introduction noted, AARE does not view a profession-wide system of standards and processes of certification as necessarily linked. However, in both cases the key to the mobility of school leaders will be flexibility. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 outlined the Association's desired approach to certification which, if adopted, would be likely to increase mobility.

Similarly, a profession-wide system of developmental standards which accommodated atypical, diverse, and distributed forms of school leadership, would be likely to lead to increased mobility of school leaders. However, in the absence of this capacity, standards could lead to a degree of homogenisation in school leadership, and to a dearth of teachers willing to take up principal positions (for example) in atypical schools both inside and outside of current employing systems. Retention generally, and the ability to attract and retain school leaders in 'high-need' settings, depend equally on flexible standards being implemented.

An overly regulatory system in which narrowly defined standards were tied to certification criteria would clearly be antithetical to attracting school leaders to under-privileged, hard-to-staff or otherwise different schools. Within any standards framework, diversity would need to be accommodated for the goals of mobility and retention to be attained.

#### Retention

See above.

#### Attracting and retaining principals in 'high need' locations, settings and areas

See above.

#### Other

### 2. Under what conditions would your organisation be interested in providing support/recognition/incentives for a profession-wide system of certification for principals?

The role of the Australian Association for Research in Education does not usually include provision of support/recognition/incentives in regard to systemic initiatives. Rather the role of its researcher members is more about informing decisions on program development and evaluating the outcomes of consequent programs.

### 3. How might a profession-wide system of standards for principals relate to existing systems?

The AARE submission has outlined a number of areas in which cooperation with state, territory and other jurisdictions is pivotal to the successful implementation of a standards framework for school leadership. Federal tensions in Australian education are well documented, and averting conflict will rely on NIQTSL adopting an open and inclusive process and recognising the need to involve the profession in collaborative ways. Ideally, a national standards framework for school leadership would complement the work of existing systems rather than seek to impose a model or replace existing procedures.

## SECTION 7 FURTHER COMMENTS

Please provide any additional comments.

Please see the Introduction