Standards for School Leadership: A critical review of the literature

A GUIDE TO THE REPORT

This report, by Lawrence Ingvarson, Michelle Anderson, Peter Gronn and Andrew Jackson, reviews recent and current developments in Australia and overseas in relation to standards for school leadership, professional learning and purposes for standards, such as professional development and certification. The report reviews leadership standards and certification from the perspective of “leadership of schools” rather than “leadership in schools”, with relevance to prospective and established principals. The authors acknowledge that recent developments in advanced standards for teaching indicate a continuum between leadership standards for accomplished teaching and leadership standards.

Recent standards for teachers, especially accomplished and highly accomplished teachers, commonly include expectations that teachers will increasingly provide leadership in a range of areas related to effective school functioning. The areas of school operation within which principals are expected to provide leadership are much broader, but the nature of that expected leadership action is little different (p. 8).

The report is introduced in Chapter One and lessons from the review are summarised in Chapter Eight.

Recent Developments (Chapter One)

The report notes recent changes in the context of school leaders’ work which has been characterised by increasing complexity in expectations for school leaders, increased work intensity and greater demands for accountability. Research suggests that these demands are having a negative impact on the attractiveness of school leadership positions to potential recruits. A common policy response has been to improve preparation for leadership positions through more structured and sequenced standards-guided preparation programs.

In Australia, work on school leadership standards has been pioneered by professional associations such as the Australian Principal’s Centre (APC), the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) and some Catholic education authorities, such as the Queensland Framework for Leadership in QLD Catholic Schools (2004) and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria’s recently launched Leadership in Catholic Schools: Development Framework and Standards of Practice. State and territory governments and employing authorities have also developed standards in their capacity as major providers of professional preparation programs for principals, such as the New South Wales School Leadership Capability Framework (2005) and South Australia’s Leaders Learning Framework (2005) which draws on the Australian Principal Associations Professional Development Council’s (APAPDC) five leadership propositions. The Standards Framework for School Leaders (1998) developed by the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts is in the process of being revised.
A comprehensive list of the sets of standards and guiding conceptual frameworks for school leadership from Australia is provided in Appendix One of the report.

A main reason for establishing school leadership standards is to increase the effectiveness of the professional preparation and development of school leaders. The report notes that the existing standards for school leadership in Australia are not profession-wide, but tend to be specific to jurisdictions or employing authorities. The report identifies several reasons for examining the question of profession-wide standards for teachers, principals and school leaders:

- Responsibility for the development and application of professional standards should rest with the profession, so that members have “ownership” of the standards, rather than have the standards imposed upon them;
- Standards have the potential to lift the professional status of teaching and school leadership;
- Taking responsibility for professional standards gives a profession more credibility in arguing for quality assurance mechanisms that emphasise professional accountability over managerial control;
- The profession should have a greater say in defining the nature and scope of its work;
- Standards improve the potential for relating research to practice;
- Standards have the potential to give the profession more control over its professional learning system;
- Profession-wide standards may improve the quality and consistency of professional development programs for school leaders; and
- The profession can provide recognition to its members who meet the standards through certification processes;

Case studies (Chapter Two)

The authors selected five sets of standards for detailed examination. They chose these five examples because they provided illustrations from different countries, were developed by different types of agencies, and were operational.

The basic components of each standards system are:

- **Standards** that describe advanced teaching and what counts as meeting the standards
- Provision of an *infrastructure for professional learning* that enables teachers to develop the attributes and capabilities embodied in the standards
- Methods for assessing and providing *professional certification* to teachers who meet the standards
- **Recognition** from school authorities for those who gain professional certification.
The five case studies chosen for review were:

1. **Performance Standards for School Principals in Western Australia**;

   The Western Australian Leadership Centre was established by the WA Department of Education to provide services to school leaders in government schools. Funded by the government, the centre is independent and has representation from school leaders’ organisations, union and government on its board. The centre’s staff are project managers seconded from the field on 12-month rotations, to develop professional learning and manage mentoring and induction.

   *Performance Standards for School Principals* were developed by the Leadership Centre in partnership with researchers from two local universities, to guide the Centre’s Professional Learning Progression Chart. The Centre is a major provider of professional learning and completion of its courses leads to certificates of school management and school leadership, with a further level – a certificate of executive leadership – planned.

   In collaboration with academics and school leaders, the Centre has developed scenario items grounded in school contexts. The performance levels help school leaders and others reflect on their performance and guide professional development. Responses from prospective school leaders are used to assess the degree to which aspiring principals possess the eight personal attributes, values and knowledge identified in the Leadership Framework. Since 2005, the standards scenario assessment approach has contributed to the selection of higher level principals and district directors.

2. **National Standards for Headteachers in England**

   In England, a non-government agency, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) has responsibility for the leadership development and certification of middle-level leaders, aspiring and serving heads. The NCSL recently produced a revised set of National Standards for Headteachers over a period of about 18 months and commissioned a review of leadership learning that led to an increase in emphasis on principals’ experiences.

   The NCSL prepares detailed specifications for professional development programs and calls for tenders from service providers who, together, cover the whole of England. The National Standards are used by NCSL to guide the leadership development, assessment and certification of aspiring headteachers through the compulsory National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). This program forms one part of a broader leadership framework, developed by NCSL, based on five stages of a school leader’s career from “emergent leadership” (first time teacher leaders); through to “consultant leaders” (able and experienced school leaders taking on training, mentoring and inspection type roles beyond their own school).
3. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders in Primary Education (Holland)

The Dutch Principal Academy (DPA) is an independent, professional body for leaders in primary education across the three autonomous government funded school systems: protestant, catholic and non-denominational. The DPA is a professional body established by government in 2000, to promote access to optional preparatory and ongoing professional development for primary school leaders in each school system.

In 2005, the DPA presented the Professional Standard for Educational Leaders in Primary Education, a model of “core competencies of leadership in education” with teaching and learning at its centre. This focus interlocks with eight areas of competence in personal and organisational effectiveness, such as leading staff and entrepreneurship. The Standard was developed over a four year period, during which the DPA facilitated dialogue between principals, employers, teachers and other experts in the field, as well as commissioning research. A process of ongoing validation of the Standard has been established.

The purpose of the Standard is to provide a framework to guide ongoing professional learning and certification. Currently, certification is voluntary. However, it looks like, from 2007, all aspiring principals will be required to complete a compulsory preparatory program and gain DPA certification.

The DPA is not a provider of professional learning programs, but provides a clearinghouse of professional development programs for school leaders, which must demonstrate that they are aligned with the Standard.

4. The Standard for Headship in Scotland

The Scottish Standard for Headship was developed in 1998, and reviewed over a 12-month period six years later. The review was overseen by a Continuous Professional Development Agency appointed by the Scottish Executive. A sub-group of ten people wrote the draft standards, four of whom were serving Head teachers. People could register online with the Scottish Executive to contribute to, and receive, updates about the consultation. The revised Standard was published in 2005.

The Standard is advisory in its status and is used, primarily, to guide the leadership development, assessment and certification of principals. One route to achieving the Standard, presently, is through the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) – a qualification that is a pre-requisite to being eligible for headship. The SQH can be accessed through standard and accelerated routes and university-led consortia run the Standard for Headship guided program.

In 2004, the Scottish Executive made a commitment to establish a leadership academy, to give access to world class thinking on school leadership and to allow the sharing of experience of school leaders, to establish new alternative routes to achieve the Standard for Headship, and to develop more rigorous procedures for selecting head teachers.
The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in the USA.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) was formed in 1994 as a project of the Commission of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in response to concern about the quality of school leadership and the level of ongoing support afforded to school leaders. Twenty-four states and four professional associations joined in the ISLLC project, the purpose of which was to develop the first set of profession-wide school leadership standards in the USA.

States are expected to take the ISLLC standards and adapt them for use as part of their licensure systems for school principals. Connecticut is one of over 40 states to adapt the ISLLC standards and is used for this case study. Connecticut developed its own state standards before the ISLLC Standards were written, but subsequently checked them for alignment with the ISLLC standards. The two sets of standards, ISLLC and Connecticut, are not the same but provide an interesting example of how various states in the USA have used the ISLLC Standards. The Connecticut state standards sit within a broader infrastructure of state-developed tests, reviews of programs using test results and other policies and programs to improve leadership, which are evaluated for their effectiveness.

Professional development is offered by a variety of state, regional and district-based providers. Intermediate level certification requires aspirant principals to: complete successfully a state approved educational leadership program; meet teaching requirements; and pass the Connecticut Administrator Test requirements (CAT). The CAT is taken prior to graduation. PD support for the induction of new administrators is in the process of being developed. Ongoing PD course credits are required for professional certification and re-certification.

Differences between the case studies

In each of these case studies, the agency responsible for the standards is different, and the extent to which the profession is involved varies. The authors observe, “the Dutch Principal Academy (DPA) in Holland is the only agency that would seem to warrant being called an independent professional body” (p.23).

Most of the five case studies of leadership models serve the needs of the government sector and are therefore not profession-wide. The five case studies are also focused on standards for school leaders at the entry-level. The authors therefore describe a proposal for a profession-wide model for leadership standards at an advanced level that is based on the same model as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), but which never gained the political support necessary to become operational.

The American Board for Leadership in Education (ABLE)

The American Board for Leadership in Education (ABLE) was intended to be an independent, autonomous, voluntary system of advanced certification for principals and superintendents. It was intended to focus on leadership development that adds value to the government’s/employer’s organisation, structure, finance and governance of schools. The writing and evaluation of the standards was to be
carried out by the profession and facilitated by ABLE. This was to involve the
development of one or more ‘standards’ committees made up of practitioners;
scholars and educators; and a public and professional review. It was proposed that
the standards be developmental for leaders to aspire to over time. The proposal
suggested funding for 30 months for initial planning and policy development activities.
This would include initial standards development work that underpins the purpose,
architecture and assessment of the certification system. Acceptance of different
pathways to becoming an advanced leader was proposed. The minimum
requirement was to be 3-5 years experience as a principal or superintendent. The
proposal was supported by the National Association of Secondary School Principals
and endorsed by President Clinton’s Secretary of Education but was shelved with the
change in administration

Research on school leadership (Chapter Three)

Leadership lacks a universally accepted definition and remains a contested concept
among scholars and practitioners. Although theorists are often reluctant to define
what they mean by leadership, there is a broad acceptance that leadership is
associated with “disproportionate patterns of influence in social interactions” (p.27).
Though most writers take for granted that “leaders” exercise more, and “followers”
exercise less influence over the course of mutual deliberations, there has been “a
growing emphasis on process, emergence and the dynamics of relations”, which is
best captured by the word “leading” rather than the more static concept of
“leadership”. The ideas of distributed leadership and communities of practice are
allied to this concept. The authors note that this switch in emphasis is not generally
reflected in leadership standards, which remain closely aligned to the roles and tasks
of individuals designated as school leaders. In some cases leadership standards specify
particular roles (eg. The NPQH in England) and in others the standards are generic
and the roles unspecified (eg. The ISLLC standards in the USA).

Two key issues for standards developers are:

• The extent to which standards should be linked to particular school roles
  (e.g. principals, assistant principals) or articulated in general terms;

• If standards are to be linked to particular roles, then to which roles and on
  the basis of which criteria might such role-related standards be differentiated?

The authors note that there is a need to reach a point of some complementarity
between profession-wide standards for school leaders and areas of knowledge and
practice expected of school leaders that are specific to particular school systems and
schools.

The concept of transformational leadership has dominated the literature for over
two decades, suggesting that transformational leaders have three distinguishing
criteria: charisma-inspiration; intellectual stimulation; and individualised
consideration.

Dissatisfaction with the “leader-follower” aspects of transformational leadership has
contributed to the popularity of the concept of distributed leadership. The
distributed leadership model assumes that when leadership is exercised by many
members of an organisation, it reduces the dependence of the organisation on the individual at the top of the pyramid. Nevertheless, the concepts of transformational and distributed leadership are not incompatible. The implications of both for professional standards are twofold:

- standards for professionals working in schools should reflect a continuum of expectations for leadership contributions, from classroom teachers to the school principal; and
- standards for school principals should emphasise their critical role in building such an organisation (i.e. effective school leaders spawn leadership actions and initiative from members of their organization).

The concept of teacher leadership also has implications for standards developers. The authors cite research by Day and Harris identifying the four core dimensions of teacher leadership:

- a brokering role for teachers in which they assist colleagues in the translation of school improvement principles into practice
- collaborative work by teacher leaders with colleagues to foster participation and collegiality
- a “mediating” role in which teacher leaders utilise their own expertise as a resource for the benefit of colleagues, and especially
- the fostering of shared and mutual learning about, and for the improvement of, professional practice.

This list points to the need to regard leadership as part of a continuum and a component of teachers’ work and part of the widening role of teachers as they gain experience. The authors suggest that while the scope of leadership expected of school principals is almost certainly broader, it is questionable whether the nature of leadership action is different.

Research on the impact of leadership (by principals) on school students learning outcomes has found some indirect effects. Where principal leadership was found to make a difference, it was in the realm of influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning. The most productive principal leadership practices appear to be: mission building; building capacity among teachers; and creating effective organisational structures.

Australian research on organisational learning also identifies indirect leadership effects on student learning. The research found that organisational learning (OL) involving three sequential development stages (trusting and collaborative climate, shared and monitored mission, and taking initiatives and risks), supported by appropriate professional development was the important intervening variable between leadership and teachers’ work, and then student outcomes. In other words, effective leadership contributed to OL, which in turn influenced teaching and learning, particularly in regard to students’ perceptions of how teachers organised and conducted their instruction, and their educational interactions with, and expectations for, their students. Students’ positive perceptions of teachers’ work
were found to promote directly their participation in school, their academic self-concepts and their engagement in schools.

**Definitions and purposes of leadership standards (Chapter Four)**

Chapter four of the report suggests that standards can be interpreted in at least two ways:

- flags that define professional principles and values; and
- tools for measurement, in that they provide “the context of shared meanings and values that is necessary for fair reliable and useful judgement” (p.38)

When standards are used as measures of performance, for purposes such as professional recognition and certification, there are three essential steps in their development:

1. Defining what is to be measured (ie. what is school leadership? – often called content standards);
2. Deciding how it will be assessed (ie. how valid evidence about practice will be gathered); and
3. Identifying what counts as meeting the standard (ie. how good is good enough?)

A guiding conception of leadership is offered, based on research by Fullan that sees leadership as collective mobilisation. This concept of school leadership has five components:

- Having a clear moral purpose
- Relationship building
- Understanding and managing change
- Knowledge creation and sharing
- Ensuring coherence and alignment of structures.

Three core leadership practices, from Leithwood, are proposed as part of the content domain of a set of school leadership standards:

1. Setting Directions
2. Developing People
3. Re-designing the organisation.

As the research suggests that these core practices are related indirectly to student achievement, it is possible that they would, as standards, have content validity. The authors also note other research by Mulford that could be used in this way. The National College for School Leadership in England has six main organisers that could also be used as core practices in a standards framework:

1. Shaping the Future
2. Leading Learning and Teaching
3. Managing the Organisation
4. Developing Self and Working with Others
5. Securing Accountability
6. Strengthening Community

The authors provide an example of how to write a content standard, providing a detailed explanation of what is meant by the standard, using ACER’s work on defining the standard of “Building Professional Culture” (p.44).

The authors summarise the following general characteristics of well-written standards:

1. The standards point to large, meaningful and significant “chunk” of a school leader’s work – which exemplify the purposes they are trying to achieve, rather than micro-level competencies, or personality traits. School leaders should readily recognize the standards refer to authentic (i.e. valid) examples of the kind of work they do (or aspire to do).

2. The standards are context-free, in the sense that they describe a practice that most agree accomplished principals should follow no matter where the school is. For example, “building a professional culture” is likely to be regarded as a core responsibility of the principal in any setting.

3. The standards are non-prescriptive, for example about how to build a professional culture; they do not standardise practice or force school leaders into some kind of straightjacket, accepting that there are many ways to build a professional culture. While the standards identify essential elements of good leadership, they do not prescribe how the standards are to be met, allowing for diversity and innovation.

4. Each standard, with its explanation, points to something that is measurable, or observable. It is possible to imagine the kinds of evidence that a principal could assemble over time to show that they have strengthened the various components of professional community in their school and met the standard.

In summary, the authors conclude that good standards for school leaders should:

- be grounded in clear guiding conceptions of leadership
- be valid; that is, represent what school leaders need to know and do to promote quality learning opportunities for students
- identify the unique features of what school leaders know and do
- delineate the main dimensions of development the profession expects of its members – what school leaders should get better at over time, with adequate opportunities for professional development.
- be assessable; that is, point to potentially observable leadership actions

There is a general trend towards the direct assessment of school leaders against standards rather than methods based on evidence of course completion. Course
completion in itself is no longer regarded as a valid indicator that a person has met a performance-based professional standard. Instead, “good portfolio tasks provide opportunities for effective collaborative reflection on practice with colleagues and learning in the workplace” (p.46).

The authors provide a list of principles to guide the development of valid tasks for gathering evidence of school leader performance:

- Tasks should be authentic and, therefore, complex;
- Tasks should allow for the variety of forms that sound school leader practice can take;
- Tasks should be open-ended, allowing school leaders to show their own practice;
- Tasks should be fair; that is, they should give school leaders a fair chance to demonstrate the quality of their practice;
- Tasks should provide ample opportunity and encouragement for analysis and reflection;
- Research-based knowledge should underlie all performances;
- Tasks should encourage school leaders to exemplify good practice;
- Each task should provide evidence relevant to a cluster of standards; and
- Each standard should be assessed by more than one task.

The final stage of developing standards is setting performance standards. Content standards define the scope of school leaders’ work but do not tell us how good a school leader’s performance has to be to meet the standard (i.e. what satisfactory performance is). Setting standards and training teachers and school leaders to use them in assessing evidence can be just as complex as identifying the content standards, but recent experience suggests that teachers and school leaders can reach high levels of reliability in assessing evidence against standards.

Standards for school leadership can serve many different purposes, but the process of developing them does not change. Developing standards for school leaders involves three key steps:

1. Define the content of the standards (what is to be assessed, based on a guiding conception of what leadership is)
2. Decide how valid evidence about leadership will be gathered
3. Develop a system for identifying whether a standard has been met

**Approaches to developing standards for school leadership (Chapter Five)**

In chapter five, the report analyses the way in which standards for school leadership are developed in each of the five case studies, asking:

- Who developed the standards and for what purposes?
- How they were developed and on what foundation?
• What is included in the standards and how are they organised?

In general, the authors find that most standards systems are not explicit in identifying the guiding conceptions, or principles underpinning the standards. In the Netherlands, Scotland and Western Australia, no system was explicit about the principles that underpinned their standards. The principles in the ISLLC standards appear confused and un-related, and the principles identified by the English system are so vague as to be virtually meaningless.

The authors present a set of principles from Leithwood and Steinbach that can be used to evaluate a set of school leadership standards (and to guide the writing of standards):

1. Standards should acknowledge persistent challenges to the concept and practice of leadership
2. Standards are claims about effective practice and should be justified with reference to the best available theory and evidence
3. Standards should acknowledge those political, social and organisational features of the contexts in which leaders work that significantly influence the nature of effective leadership practices
4. Standards should specify effective leadership practices or performances only, not skills or knowledge. The authors say that choice of knowledge to teach is based on an assumed (logical) relation between knowledge and practice.
5. Dispositions should not be included in any standards.
6. Standards should describe desired levels of performance not just categories of practice
7. Standards should reflect the distributed nature of school leadership.

The authors point out that the process of developing standards should be guided by a set of procedural principles to enable the professional bodies to withstand legal challenges to their validity. These principles should ensure:

- the integrity and independence of the body responsible for developing the standards;
- that the standards developing body is composed primarily of those who are already highly accomplished practitioners;
- that the diversity of perspectives in the profession is represented;
- that the process of defining the standards is developed on a sound scientific basis and that the process of developing the standards be formally documented; and
- that a wide sampling of agreement is sought for the standards from the major professional groups and other interested parties regarding the appropriateness and level of the standards.
The report argues for a degree of separation between professional associations and the bodies that have final responsibility for the development and application of the standards for the purposes of certification. Certification bodies should also include other interested parties, such as the public and employers, as well as representatives of the profession. These arrangements are necessary to “avoid the potential dangers in some professions of the relationship becoming a little too cosy and not necessarily placing the public interest first” (p.55). The authors cite medicine and accountancy as two fields where the self-interest of the profession has come before the public interest.

The report concludes that three of the five standards systems were not comprehensive in the sense that – with the exception of WA and Connecticut – all systems were still concentrating on the content of the standards, rather than deciding how valid evidence would be gathered and how performance would be measured against the standards. And when validation occurs, the authors argue that it should be done using research and expertise rather than consultation alone, which may lead to decisions being made based on the weight of popular opinion.

The five standards systems reviewed in the report shared these common purposes:

- Clarify expectations about school leadership for all those affected by it (e.g. principals, staff, parents, pupils, employers and policy makers)
- Enhance student learning outcomes
- Enhance the quality of educational leadership
- Provide a framework for professional development
- Provide a framework for certification
- Provide a framework for self reflection and assessment
- Provide a basis for determining eligibility for school leader positions.

These purposes may reflect the fact that most of the agencies in the case studies were employing authorities, with a consequent emphasis on recruitment and principal preparation.

Across the five systems, the report identifies five stages in the standards development process, some of which overlap in practice:

1. **A review phase** – the function of this phase is to inform and gather information about the current knowledge base about school leadership and standards development.

2. **The establishment of a committee(s) phase** – the function of this phase is to establish a group(s) who will act as the dedicated ‘engine room’ for the coordination, writing and consultation.

3. **A consultation and validation phase** – the function of this phase is to check the quality of the standards against a range of criteria including validity, build commitment, and gather the views and opinions of those affected by the standards.
4. A publication and use phase – the function of this phase is to raise awareness of the existence of the standards and embed the standards into the professional learning and certification system.

The duration of the standards development process differed significantly between the case studies. In Western Australia, the process took about 10 years as it began with a three-phase research project funded by the Australian Research Council, involving interviews with over 1,000 school administrators and extensive public consultation and feedback. In England, the process was managed by consultants and took about 18 months to complete. The Dutch system took about four years and is reviewed and validated annually. The Scottish standard was revised over 12 months. The ISSLC standards in the USA were developed over a two year period.

In each system, a lead agency coordinated the process and the standards were drafted by a small writing team, with various processes of consultation and feedback employed. Extensive consultation is necessary to balance research findings that try to conceptualise effective leadership with contemporary practitioners’ views of what is achievable within current contexts and conditions, (ie. to avoid a focus on what leaders *should* be doing, rather than what they *can* actually do).

The architecture (organisers) of the standards in each of the five case studies is described for comparative purposes in chapter five. There was considerable commonality in the way in which each set of standards described the core features of effective leadership practice. All the standards described the knowledge, skills and dispositions that comprise effective school leadership.

The authors note favourably that long lists of competencies appear to be a thing of the past, and far fewer top level organisers are used in the systems reviewed. They focus first on the quality of student learning and move outwards to identify the implications for what school leaders should know and be able to do. There is also less emphasis on information acquisition and more emphasis on application and critical reflection on information within a given school context.

The standards in the five case studies appear to be weakly related to current research on leadership. For example, all the standards mention personal dispositions whereas there is no research to suggest that dispositions and personal attributes have a bearing on student learning outcomes. Rather it is the knowledge, actions and practices of effective school leadership that have an indirect impact on student learning. The authors point out that the concept of what constitutes effective leadership is changing rapidly and research should be used to provide a “guiding conception” of what leadership is (which was not evident in most sets of leadership standards). The report notes that research can provide a useful synthesis of the aspects of school leaders’ work that establish the conditions for effective teaching and learning, citing a recent contribution from Leithwood, Seashore-Lewis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004):

- Developing a deep understanding of how to support teachers;
- Managing the curriculum in ways that promote student learning, and
• Developing the ability to transform schools into more effective organisations that foster powerful teaching and learning for all students.

School leadership and professional development (Chapter Six)

There is increasing policy concern about the extent to which school principals are adequately prepared for the role of school leaders. In their review of the professional learning infrastructure in each of the case studies in chapter six, the authors observe a general awareness of the need to develop professional learning systems that offer a structured, sequenced set of courses for school leaders over time. They found several examples where the professional learning infrastructure supported this type of activity, and where individuals play an active role in their professional learning, guided by standards.

The provision of professional development for aspiring or established school principals is widespread. Standards development bodies are often involved in course provision to varying degrees and increasingly the courses are linked to stages in career development, which can be based on professional standards.

In the USA, the professional development infrastructure is quite diverse, with course provision is predominantly “captured” by universities. The Standards body in Connecticut plays a course accreditation role.

In England, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) delivers programs to assist aspiring and established Head teachers to meet the National Standards for Head Teachers. Programs are aligned roughly to the stages of the Leadership Development Framework. Of the three key programs, the National Professional Qualification for Headship is the only one that is compulsory for new heads and it is the most structured.

The Scottish professional learning system is an open market. Some programs are highly regarded, such as the Induction program run by the Edinburgh authority, which provides a continuum of support over the first five years of a school leader’s appointment. When the Leadership Centre is established in Scotland, one of its priorities will be to provide feedback about professional learning offerings, including value for money, to assist teachers and principals in their selection of PD activities.

In Western Australia, the Leadership Centre has developed a draft Leadership Centre Professional Learning Progression Chart that presents three career-phase programs for aspiring, newly appointed, developing and experienced principals. Each program has course and field-based requirements and is accompanied by certification and post-graduate credits with the four universities in Western Australia.

The Dutch education system is highly devolved and the Dutch Principal Academy works within this system. The DPA’s Professional Development Framework guides and supports a principal to meet the DPA standard. Re-registration is dependent on evidence of taking a specified number of hours of professional development and the Agency accredits some professional development courses and providers.
Overall, the case studies illustrate that standards development bodies are all involved in establishing a professional development infrastructure to varying degrees – either as providers of courses, or in providing quality assurance through course accreditation, or both. In systems which have defined stages of career progression within their standards framework (e.g. WA, Scotland and England), the standards authorities are developing a professional learning infrastructure based on stages of career progression. In most cases, this involves the professional development provider mapping the content of their programs to the stages of career progression. It is less common to see professionals taking the standards and selecting the PD that they think will help them meet the standards – thus taking more responsibility for determining their own professional learning.

Although the provision of professional learning should be supported by employers, the report notes that members of a profession should also take responsibility for their own professional learning. Standards have the potential to place this responsibility on the individuals, particularly when they are seeking certification against the standards.

Professional learning is where standards can come to life. Basic questions come to the fore. “What does meeting this particular standard mean in my school context?” “How might I demonstrate that my practice is meeting this standard?” Standards place the person in a more active role in relation to planning their own professional learning (p.73)

There is very little research on the impact of professional development programs on the development of effective school leaders, although current research emphasises the need for rigorous content and active modes of learning through authentic tasks. The authors point out that the preparation of portfolio tasks for professional certification can be designed to engage school leaders in active modes of learning. Teachers who engage in the NBPTS certification process report it to be one of the most valuable professional learning experiences of their lives.

The report cautions against placing too much emphasis on the development of courses for school leaders by the standards agency. The authors cite the disadvantages of developing courses – regardless of the quality of the course – as: they place the learner in a passive position, because others are identifying their needs; courses are inevitably front loaded, when the learning that matters most is at the back-end – in the workplace; and there is no evidence that academic credits translates into effective school leadership. A noteworthy feature of many of the new leadership courses is their emphasis on field-based projects.

The authors argue that a well-defined and rigorous set of professional standards will empower individuals to take responsibility for their own professional learning. This is not to say that courses are unimportant, but rather that courses should be taken by individuals at a time when they decide that they need a particular form of professional development. An effective professional development infrastructure would make relevant courses available to be taken at times when the school leader decided that he/she needed them.
Instead of focusing quality assurance efforts on the ‘course’, the professional certification models like ABLE and the NBPTS focus on ensuring the quality of the certification. The lesson from the NBPTS experience is that if you get the standards and certification right, together with recognition for that certification, the professional learning and support infrastructure will look after itself (p.116).

Recall and assessment of school leadership standards (Chapter Seven)

In chapter seven, the authors argue that the assessment of school leaders against standards must be rigorous and fair, particularly if certification is used as a basis for making decisions about promotions and salary levels, as is the case in many of the case studies reviewed.

The most common form of assessment in each of the case studies was the successful completion of a prescribed course of study. Although there was some evidence of a move towards more active and school-based models of learning, there was little evidence of “systematic approaches to gathering evidence over time about performance against each of the standards” (p.109), (i.e. assessment involving multiple evidence related to each of the standards and multiple trained independent judges of that evidence). The English and Scottish systems, in particular, are “hands off”, leaving most assessments to the course providers. While course-based assessments are often based on projects where the school leaders conduct “authentic tasks” in their schools, the authors argue that structured portfolio tasks assessed by a professional standards body (i.e. a team of trained peer assessors) are a more effective method of assessing performance against a professional standard.

Overall, they conclude that there is little evidence of rigour in the assessment processes in any the five systems reviewed. In the five case studies, there is little research on:

a) the validity of the methods for gathering evidence as measures of the intention embodied in the relevant standards (i.e. the ‘fit’ between the assessment tasks and the relevant standards);

b) how well the assessment tasks as a group provide evidence that covers the standards domain as a whole (i.e. the extent to which it is appropriate to generalise from the evidence to the candidate’s performance generally);

c) the quality of training for judges and the consistency between judges in making assessments of the evidence (i.e. reliability); and

d) the methods used in setting the performance standards (i.e. in determining the level of performance that meets the standard for each assessment task, and the level of performance needed overall for certification).

The authors argue that assessment and certification systems should employ these ‘psychometric’ standards to ensure that their systems stand up to public and legal scrutiny. In the absence of rigorous assessment guidelines (for use by individuals, peers or certification bodies), the potential of standards to promote effective professional learning is limited.
The authors conclude that professional standards systems should be controlled by professional standards bodies (dominated by the profession) rather than by employers. This model has the potential to involve the profession at every level and create the greatest sense of ownership. The authors pose key questions that need to be answered by professional standards bodies (with the authors’ preferred answers in parentheses):

- Which agency/ies will provide certification - for prospective and established school leaders who attain national professional standards? (professional standards bodies)
- What forms of evidence are used to assess whether those standards have been attained? (teachers and school leaders should decide) Who will develop the methods of assessment? (teachers and school leaders)
- Who will assesses whether school leaders have attained the standards and how will they be trained to use the standards fairly and reliably? (teachers and school leaders)
- Who will provide the professional learning infrastructure to support candidates for certification? (teachers and school leaders)

From the five case studies, they conclude that evidence of professional certification – as opposed to employer certification – is rare. For each of the systems reviewed, responsibility for assessing and recognizing attainment of standards in school leadership rested with government or government agencies, and professional involvement was low. The Netherlands was the only possible exception to this. There was no system where school leaders had established their own system for providing members with a portable professional certification. In all cases, ‘certification’ simply meant eligibility for selection or promotion within a particular system.

The report also argues that professional standards bodies should choose between the roles of course accreditation agencies or providers of professional certification, and cannot do both effectively. They argue that this division would enable the standards body to focus all its energies on developing standards and gathering evidence from the profession about how to meet the standards in a rigorous way.

**Guiding conceptual frameworks for Educational Leadership in Australia (Appendix One)**

The authors list fourteen examples of leadership standards in Australia, describing the main organising categories of each system.

**The Dutch Principal Academy (Appendix Two)**

A description of the Dutch Principal Academy’s process for writing and validating the “Professional Standard for Educational Leaders in Primary Education”.
Western Australia’s Leadership Centre and Professional Learning (Appendix Three)

The professional learning progression chart from Western Australia.

Professional Learning provided by employers for Australian Principals (Appendix Four)

Examples of professional learning programs for school leaders in Australia, by States and Territories, with notes on the relationship between the PD and appointment to principal positions.

Professional Learning provided by associations for Australian Principals (Appendix Five)

The authors describe three Australian professional associations that offer professional learning for principals.