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Recognising and rewarding good teachers

Recognising and rewarding good teachers will require a rigorous national certification system according to [Dr Lawrence Ingvarson](#). In this opinion article, Dr Ingvarson argues that, while there is widespread agreement that Australia needs to place greater value on teachers' work, simply paying teachers more will not achieve this.

There is a considerable level of public support currently for significantly improved salaries and working conditions for teachers, but that support will be conditional on guarantees of quality teaching and learning.

A rigorous profession-wide certification system is the best way of assuring the public that improved salaries for accomplished teachers will be linked to high standards of performance.

Most professions have a standards-based assessment system for providing certification to members who want to show they have met higher standards of performance. This is a valuable service to employers as well. Teaching is almost alone among the professions in not having such a system.

To strengthen teaching as a profession, we need a profession-wide certification system. Professional certification would then become a criterion for increased salary.

Such a redesign of teacher pay scales would send a clear message that reaching high standards of performance is the main road to high status and career advancement in the teaching profession.

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Reform of teacher pay scales based on professional certification would involve several steps.

The first is to significantly increase base pay scales for registered teachers and to improve their conditions of work. Teaching must be able to compete with other professions in attracting an appropriate share of able graduates.

However, while this will help to attract more able graduates to teaching, it will not be enough to retain the best in teaching positions where they can have the most influence on student learning.

The second step, then, will be to provide incentives sufficient to attract most teachers to seek voluntarily a rigorous independent assessment of their performance against professional standards to gain certification.

The idea of setting standards that define levels of teacher performance has gained the acceptance of most stakeholders in education. Both sides of federal politics, teacher unions, state and territory governments, non-government school authorities and a large number of professional associations support the concept. They were joined recently by the Business Council of Australia, which recommended \$4 billion to support the introduction of a national system of standards for the assessment and certification of teachers.

The current ALP policy, *A National Strategy for Recognising and Rewarding Quality Teaching in Public School*, recognises the need to institute professional standards and reform pay structures for school teachers based on these.

This policy envisages three levels of professional standards for teachers: Competent Teacher, Accomplished Teacher and Leading Teacher.

Teachers who meet the Accomplished Teacher standards should gain access to further salary steps that rise to double the starting salary for teachers, or about \$100,000.

The standard for Accomplished Teacher should be set at a level that most teachers should be able to attain after about seven to ten years of experience with appropriate opportunities for professional learning.

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Certification should be based on performance, judged by the quality of opportunities for student learning a teacher provides, not years of service, academic course completion or value-added measures based on standardised tests of student achievement.

The idea of an “alternative” career path for good teachers (e.g. the “advanced skills teacher” concept) has been tried in most states and it has failed. If it is to have a significant impact on the quality of teaching, the Australian Government’s strategy should instead make certification as an accomplished teacher by an independent professional body a prerequisite for gaining executive and school leadership positions, as well as moving to higher salary levels for those who wish to focus on teaching.

This view may not be popular, but it is well justified by many research studies showing that the most effective school leaders are highly credible to teachers as expert teachers themselves. Its main virtue is to provide powerful incentives for all teachers to seek methods of professional development that lead to improved student outcomes.

Professional certification should be portable, across states and school systems, not limited to public schools, or particular jurisdictions. We do not have one certification system for doctors who work in public hospitals and another for those who work in private hospitals. It would be a waste of resources to establish different certification systems for different states and different school systems.

Developing such systems is complex and expensive. Rewarding teachers on the basis of their performance requires a rigorous system for measuring the quality of teachers’ work. However, there is ample research evidence now that this can be done in ways that are reliable, valid and fair, though few employing authorities would have the resources to do this alone.

The establishment of a national, independent professional agency with the core function of providing a rigorous, voluntary certification system for all teachers who wish to demonstrate that they have attained advanced levels of professional performance is required.

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This agency should see its main role as providing a credible certification service to all employers and the public, not only to the profession. The agency should live or die depending on the validity and credibility of its assessment processes.

The national professional agency should have all the players around the table to ensure the system will be utilised, including employing authorities, teacher unions and associations. While the system for providing certification should be profession-wide, the way it is recognised and rewarded will vary from one jurisdiction to another.

Most importantly it will need to be embraced by teachers themselves. This will only happen when they become convinced not only of its rigour and its advantages for their own professional lives and careers, but also of the student learning gains that must come when young people are taught by teachers of proven high accomplishment.

[Dr Lawrence Ingvarson](#) is a Principal Research Fellow at ACER in the Teaching and Leadership Program.

This article was published by Online Opinion, Australia's e-journal of social and political debate, in a series of articles published during February 2008 entitled ['Vive la revolution educationale!](#)

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Improving school leadership

School principals have an important role to play in successful schools and how they run. Leaders contribute to student learning through their influence on other staff, organisational capacity and context. The importance of school leadership makes it vital to better understand how effective leaders can best be recruited, developed and retained.

The OECD Improving School Leadership Activity aims to provide in-depth analyses of different approaches to school leadership in 22 volunteer countries. The fact that so many countries are taking part underlines the importance of leadership issues around the world.

The Australian Country Background Report prepared by ACER in 2006 provides a national overview of information and research on school leadership, including leaders' roles, the links between leadership and student learning outcomes, the attractiveness of the leadership role, and training and professional development for school leaders. The report also includes several short case studies of innovative practices in school leadership and the development of school leaders.

The Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (previously Education, Science and Training) released the Australian report in January. Later in 2008 an international comparative report by the OECD will draw on all the country reports to provide analysis and recommendations for OECD countries to consider.

The Australian research reviewed by the ACER team confirmed that success was more likely when the schools were collegial, consultative and involve partnerships. The review also revealed that there are major concerns in regard to attracting, developing and retaining effective school leaders. Australia is experiencing serious leadership supply problems, including the replenishment of principal vacancies, the identification of aspirants for vacancies and 'next generation' school leaders, and workplace well-being issues associated with leadership.

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Teacher employers, leaders' professional associations, and universities have initiated a wide range of programs in response to the issues of leader supply and demand, including measures to address leadership capacity building, first-time and experienced principal mentoring and professional learning programs for leading teachers and assistant principals.

While the majority of principals experience high job satisfaction, they were also concerned about role expansion, increasing overload, ambiguity, conflict and stress. The role of the principal has been affected by devolution to school level of greater school decision-making responsibility and accountability. This may point to the need for a review and possible redesign of the principal role and other senior leadership roles, as well as enhanced support.

A key challenge for developers of school leadership programs is to identify factors that are essential in the preparation of school leaders, including the capacity to take on a broad range of responsibilities and facilitate shared leadership, and the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. There is an expanding range of leadership learning activities in Australia, but there is also a need for more research and evaluation of the programs that have been developed. Much of the existing school leadership research is small-scale and localised, and the findings are difficult to generalise.

The ACER team who prepared the Australian report was Michelle Anderson, Peter Gronn (Monash University, now at Glasgow University), Lawrence Ingvarson, Andrew Jackson (now at Monash University), Elizabeth Kleinhenz, Phillip McKenzie, Bill Mulford (University of Tasmania) and Nick Thornton (now at the Lauriston Institute). The team was advised by representatives from government and non-government education authorities and professional associations.

The full report is available for download from the [DEEWR website](#).

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ACER UPDATE

On Track Annual Student Surveys in Victoria

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) has awarded ACER the contract for the project On Track: Follow-up and Referral of Year 12 or Equivalent Completers and Early School Leavers 2008 to 2011. This is a large-scale project that involves: (a) collection, analysis and reporting of post-school destination data of Year 12 completers and early leavers from all Victorian schools (2008 to 2011 annually); (b) providing information about support services to those school leavers who appear to be at-risk in the transition process; and (c) longitudinal research to provide a comprehensive picture of what happens to a cohort young people in the four years after they leave school. ACER has formed a partnership with the Social Research Centre, a specialist data collection agency, to undertake the work.

Staff in Australia's Schools Survey

Findings and recommendations from the Staff in Australia's Schools Survey (SIAS) project, undertaken by ACER in collaboration with the Australian College of Educators, were published in January. The survey gathered information from over 13,000 secondary and primary school teachers and leaders across the country. It aimed to address key gaps in the data available to characterise the teaching profession to support workforce planning. The project also involved extensive consultations with key stakeholder groups on data needs and processes to support long-term workforce planning.

The study was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (previously Education, Science and Training). The findings and recommendations from the study are presented in two volumes available from the [DEEWR website](#).

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Australian Council for Educational Research
Private Bag 55, Camberwell, Victoria Australia 3124
Tel: + 61 3 9277 5555
Fax: + 61 3 9277 5500
Web: www.acer.edu.au

