

24 February 2023

## **NCEC Response to the discussion paper ‘Developing a new national framework for the certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALT)’**

### **Introduction**

The NCEC is the peak body for Catholic education in Australia and is responsible for the national coordination and representation of Catholic schools and school authorities.

Working collaboratively with state and territory Catholic education peak bodies, the National Catholic Education Commission advocates through effective liaison with the federal, state and territory governments, and key national education bodies. Our role is to ensure the needs of Catholic schools are served through funding, legislation and policy.

Catholic schools are universal in reach and open to all families who seek a Catholic Education. Australia's 1,759 Catholic schools educate one in five, or nearly 794,000 students and employs over 104,000 Australians.

This submission to the Australian Institute Teaching School Leadership (AITSL) responds to the issues raised in the discussion paper and makes some broad observations regarding a national framework that aims to address the existing barriers and streamline processes to increase the number of teachers applying and reaching HALT certification.

### **Key consultation questions**

- 1. What are the essential elements that should be included in the framework to ensure adequate rigour?**

#### **Eligibility criteria and evidence requirements**

Any national certification framework should clearly state the eligibility criteria used and teacher documentary evidence requirements. There must be clear guidelines as to the volume of evidence required. The amount of evidence against the standard, and how this is presented is best demonstrated through worked examples that applicants can refer back to with clearly annotated feedback from assessors.

The current flexibility has allowed significantly different expectations in terms of evidencing impact across states and territories. For example, there is concern that the requirements in NSW are far more demanding than in other states. If approaches to assessment are deemed by applicants as being more challenging than others, it may be demotivating to potential applicants. Another example is in the Catholic sector in Queensland where all 37 descriptors of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), are not assessed as fully evidenced unless each word is addressed in the descriptor and each element is directly evidenced.

NCEC also recommends that consideration be given to national consistency in the weighting of evidence types. Evidence should be based on feedback from several experts – colleagues, external observers such as principals and school leaders as well as documentary evidence.

### **National Portability**

National Portability is critical in achieving a nationally consistent approach to certification but is often overridden by many local controls. Certifying authorities across jurisdictions often have points of difference when it comes to registration and certification of renewal. Cross-jurisdictional consistency must be guaranteed regardless of geographical location. Additionally, a new national certification framework should reflect the expertise of registered teachers working in a wide range of settings and skill sets.

Where there are implications that relate to teacher registration authorities and state-based legislation concerning teacher certification, advocacy and engagement by AITSL to bring consistency and commonality of recognition and portability of status would potentially set this up for success and minimise the potential for inconsistencies that may challenge portability.

### **Clear advice**

Clear and explicit guidelines and processes are needed to ensure candidates develop successful submissions. Clear guidelines reduce the wide variability in evidence assessment processes across all certifying authorities and ensure certification processes are applied justly, equitably and consistently. Guidance (and national acceptance) on how descriptors should be 'broken down', with additional guidance offered on what key demonstrations would align for each descriptor would be instructive and supportive and would offer teachers considerable time savings. Clear advice and clarity around portfolio development would be beneficial to applicants. Additionally, it should be clear what specific documents assessors are using for assessor moderation. process and this should be made evident to applicants upon registering for HALT.

### **Support Feedback**

Feedback is a critical element that provides opportunities for teachers to critically reflect on their practice. Feedback should determine not only how a teacher is meeting the standard but highlight areas of strength and areas for further development and learning. Teachers are encouraged to participate in communities of practice, seek a mentor and engage the support of a critical friend as well as source referees. This can be quite time consuming and overwhelming for an applicant who may become despondent with the process, needing to find the time for multiple check-ins and discussions. Additionally, referee statements are required, yet references cannot be used as evidence and do not count as evidence. It raises the question of why referee statements are needed.

Occasionally support and feedback does not occur resulting in the applicant embarking on their own individual certification journey, frequently ending with an unsuccessful assessment result at Stage 1. A pre-submission session where feedback is offered and a more detailed report against each of the areas assessed is needed.

### **Recognise the role of existing HALTs**

The framework should recognise the role of existing Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers in moderating the standards through their work as assessors and in supporting aspiring HALTs. It should recognise that their knowledge and experience in the process is a value add to certifying authorities, advisory authorities and aspiring HALTs.

### **Ongoing professional development of assessors**

Assessor moderation through national preparation programs and ongoing feedback should work to ensure rigour in the process. Professional learning for assessors has been well received and deepens understanding of the requirements of a HALT submission and the evidencing of impact. There was a recommendation that regular feedback is given to HALT assessors to support their continuous improvement. This may also address opportunities for HALTs to maintain their accreditation.

## **2. How could these elements lead to a more streamlined process for applicants?**

NCEC recommends that a more streamlined and consistent process for HALT applications should be a priority for AITSL as the current process varies across jurisdictions. A streamlined, consistent approach across all jurisdictions would promote a fairer process for HALT aspirants but also build confidence in HALT certification as a career pathway for teachers.

### **Clear advice**

Consistent and clear advice before undertaking a submission and while undertaking a submission are vital in ensuring participants' time and expertise are respected. Opportunities to clearly understand the requirements of submission are an important aspect of streamlining.

Consistent and clear advice needs to be available to those that support an application at higher levels, particularly principals and assistant principals. Clearer guidelines to support applicants to select referees, as well as more streamlined and condensed referee statement templates would lighten workload pressures and support higher levels of efficiency during this stage of the process.

There is also a burden on school hierarchies in giving applicants the experiences required for successful accreditation. The required experiences often impinge on other people's roles. School and system leaders need guidelines on how to navigate this issue.

### **Evidence**

The current process takes up too much teacher time and discourages teachers from applying. The amount of documentary evidence to demonstrate higher-level practices is an administrative burden. Redistributing weight across evidence types will contribute to a more streamlined application because it requires the collection of less paper evidence and an opportunity for conversation about practice. A conversation with referees and the candidate's principal could contribute to a more streamlined process.

While current evidence requirements should be maintained, the process could be simplified and streamlined through a modular approach. For example, teachers could submit Stage 1 in a modular format with a nominated maximum of artefacts. Retaining a holistic overview to meet all descriptors is of value to ensure each is deemed to have been met based on an 'on balance' judgment. Reducing the minimum of classroom observations from two to one, the option of video evidence submission, both written and verbal annotations, and assessors adopting a positive stance on what has been achieved rather than what might be missing will enhance the process. Ideally, applications should continue to be assessed by two AITSL nationally trained assessors using a modular approach, with feedback provided to the applicant following each modular submission. Maintaining the current status of referees is seen as important.

### **Setting consistent expectations**

To streamline the process and support submissions, the framework should set an expectation that all certifying authorities be consistent in leveraging technology as a tool for the collection of data and production of evidence sets. The framework should commit certifying authorities to quality technical infrastructure to support the process.

### **Professional development of assessors and others**

Principals and assistant principals skilled in observing and reporting on the practice of highly accomplished and lead teachers reduces the impost on other schools to supply HALTs in external observation roles. It builds the capacity and expertise of the staff within the school and brings the standards to the centre of conversations, observation, and work.

### **3. What additional considerations should AITSL have in developing the draft national framework for certification?**

The following additional considerations could be considered when developing the draft national framework:

- Consider the applicant's setting - primary and secondary school settings raised different challenges in addressing the standards and in evidencing impact.
- The criteria for HALT certifications need to be condensed and more accurately reflect the roles within schools. For example, in some elaborations under 'highly accomplished teachers' applicants need to provide evidence for actions that are offered in leadership roles, not their class roles. Likewise, some elaborations under 'Lead teacher' might go beyond the expectations of a lead teacher and may be the responsibility of the principal or deputy principal.
- Technology should have a stronger role in submissions, e.g., an online platform to build portfolios that include video, and audio, for collecting samples of work and other artefacts.
- Offer a standard template for applicants - an online template would assist applicants in submitting their evidence collections and also assist assessors who are frequently faced with large file Word, or PowerPoint documents.
- Develop specific guidance on the APST for Principals and Middle leaders so they can offer closer levels of support.
- A new suite of resources aligned to the relevant career stage, coordinated and developed by AITSL at the national level, would provide support to jurisdictions around Australia. This might include resources and motivation for teachers at the 'proficient' level to successfully pursue and achieve the requirements of career stage descriptors in the Standards to achieve highly accomplished or lead teacher status. Strong, good practice evidence examples and resources would support applicants across the country.
- The ability of schools to be able to leverage HALTs to support school leadership – there is a need to showcase HALTs within the school setting. Guidance is needed for how schools can best utilise a HALT teacher in improving student learning.
- Consider HALT as a centralised role where teachers can provide consultancy across a network of schools rather than simply a role within an individual school.
- National consistency - ensuring consistency in jurisdictional costs and applicant fees will greatly assist to position certification as strongly national and accessible.
- Would it be possible for the Commonwealth to fund a stipend for assessors? This would encourage people to take on the extra workload.

- Consider the portability of assessors across states and territories. Australian curriculum vs state and territory curriculum frameworks poses some obstacles to portability.
- A shared vision statement – why - what is the purpose – what is the intent – what is the value of HALT philosophically. An AITSL coordinated national research into the impact of certification would be welcome, as would a national campaign that espouses the value of HALT certification.
- Review the standards – is the role of HALT the work of middle leaders? Do the standards consider the work of HALT/ middle leader that may be about the performance of others, managing conflicts, influencing up and down and the development of self.
- Lead teachers who have not been able to continue to 'lead' (eg because of a change in role/school), should have the option to renew at highly accomplished status.
- Finally, - it is critical not to reduce the value and status of teacher certification in the interests of streamlining the process. AITSL must ensure there is no loss of rigour or oversimplification.