Victorian Academy
of Teaching and Leadership

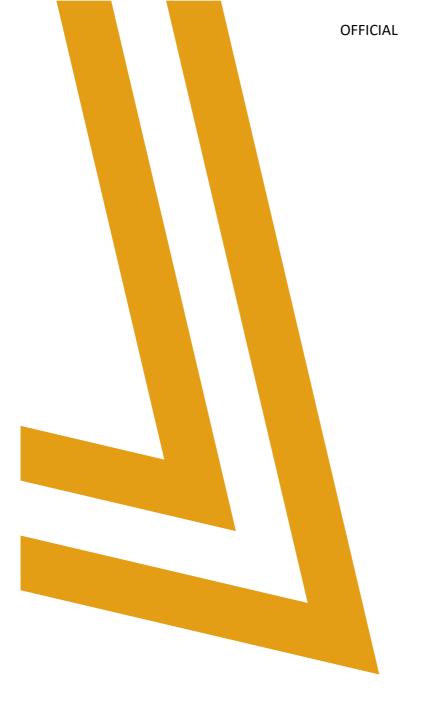# Evaluation of Principal in Residence initiative

Report
June 2025

VICTORIA State Government | Department of Education

Independent Schools Victoria

Victorian Catholic Education Authority

Contents

Executive summary

Background

The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership's (the Academy) Principals in Residence (PiR) initiative. The initiative has run since the Academy's establishment in 2022, and this report provides the first formal evaluation of the initiative.

The PiR initiative aims to contribute to the achievement of the Academy's legislated objectives and functions through providing an improved interface between the Academy and the Victorian school sector. The PiR initiative also seeks to leverage principal expertise, insight, advice and leadership to enhance Academy professional learning, resources and stakeholder engagement. The initiative also aims to strengthen pathway opportunities for PiRs to contribute to school and system improvement and finally, to support the revitalisation and retention of principals.

The evaluation was undertaken by the Academy's Evaluation and Evidence Centre. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness, impact and appropriateness of the PiR initiative. The evaluation was informed through a desktop analysis of documentary evidence as well as individual semi-structured and focus group interviews with internal and external stakeholders.

Findings

Effectiveness / Impact

The evaluation found positive impacts of the PiR initiative across 5 major areas. The key findings are summarised below.

1. **Contributions to Academy effectiveness and impact:**

   > The PiR initiative has evolved to become effective in delivering its intended outcomes and impacts that are integral contributions to the Academy's delivery of its legislated objectives and functions.

2. **Improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement:**

   > The PiR initiative has impacted positively on participants' understanding and skills to bring about school and system improvement including:

   > improved understanding of the broader Victorian education system

     - deepened understanding of pedagogy and practice

     - improved leadership capabilities and confidence

     - improved coaching skills

- improved facilitation skills
> improved ability to advocate for the profession.

3. Principal development and pathways:

> The PiR initiative has had a positive impact on career progression of participants, with a significant majority of participants either moving into higher level roles across Victoria's education system or returning to their substantive roles within schools.

4. Amplifying the impact of Expert Teachers in Residence:

> PiRs are uniquely equipped to act as managers, leaders and challenge partners to amplify the impact of the Expert Teachers in Residence.

5. Principal reinvigoration and retention:

> The PiR initiative has had a positive impact on the reinvigoration of some PiRs, enabling them to feel valued and inspired to continue working within the education system, including through returning to a principal position.

Appropriateness

The evaluation assessed the appropriateness of the initiative across two major areas and made the following key findings.

1. Design and delivery:

> There have been significant improvements to the PiR role clarity since inception and the development over time of a shared understanding of the role's purposes and impact.

> Further work is required by the Academy to continue to clarify expectations of a PiR's role within the Academy and more broadly within the Victorian Public Service (VPS). This will benefit incumbents and support future evaluations of the PiR initiative.

> The design and delivery of PiR initiative are appropriate to ensure the continued alignment of Academy professional learning with the contemporary requirements of Victoria's education system, and to provide legitimacy and credibility to the Academy's role as a professional learning organisation.

2. Access and participation:

> The design and delivery of the PIR initiative are broadly appropriate to ensure the recruitment of principals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. That said, there are barriers to attracting a diverse pool of applicants including those from outer regional and remote areas, the western growth corridor and lower ICSEA rated schools.

> There is a perceived lack of awareness and limited promotion of the PiR initiative within some regions, networks and their associated schools, which may limit exposure and therefore the involvement of some principals.

> The necessary metropolitan attendance for professional learning facilitation and Expert Teacher in Residence line management are potential barriers for regional and remote PiR participants, especially those with caring responsibilities.

> Participation in the PiR initiative requires a significant adjustment for individuals who have previously operated with greater autonomy and limited exposure to VPS hierarchies, processes, and policies. Recent development of more comprehensive induction and support processes by the Academy are enhancing the transition.

> Opportunity exists to refine position descriptions to more accurately reflect the nature and variability of the contributions expected of PiRs.

Recommendations

This report makes the following recommendations to support ongoing enhancement to the PiR initiative.

Effectiveness

Principal development and pathways

That the Academy continues to:

> proactively communicate the PiR initiative as a professional learning pathway available to school leaders

> consider opportunities to ensure PiR learnings and experience can be shared back into the system by returning principals

> develop ongoing understanding of the PiR initiative as a professional learning and personal development opportunity to better attract principals from a range of backgrounds.

Appropriateness

Access and participation

That the Academy continues to refine recruitment strategies for PiRs that consider:

> opportunities for further promotion of the PiR initiative to ensure state-wide awareness and engagement

> diversity across the PiR cohort (e.g. PiRs from metropolitan, regional and rural schools with higher and lower Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

(ICSEA)[1] ratings).

> clear communication of expectations of PiRs regarding metropolitan site attendance to deliver PL and supervise Expert Teachers in Residence (ETRs).

> continuing to work closely with the Department and principal association peak bodies around barriers and enablers to PiR recruitment.

Design and delivery

That the Academy continues to:

> clearly articulate expectations of individual and collective PiR contributions to ensure alignment to Academy legislative objectives and functions, including in PiR work plans and schedules.

> improve record keeping ensuring that the dynamic and wide range of activities and outcomes delivered across PiR roles are appropriately documented and recorded.

Conclusion

The PiR initiative has continually evolved to become a key contributor to the Academy's effectiveness and impact. Through opportunities provided by the Academy, PiRs have leveraged their expertise and experience to enhance the development, design and delivery of Academy professional learning programs and resources and provided high-quality leadership for ETRs. The recommendations in this report seek to further this positive trajectory. Future evaluations will further assess the progress of the initiative and begin to measure the medium and longer-term impact of the initiative.

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[1] ICSEA – a scale assigned to a school based on the average socio-educational background of its students.

Introduction

The Evaluation and Evidence Centre (EEC) of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership (the Academy) undertook an evaluation of the Principals in Residence (PiR) initiative. This initiative has run since the Academy's establishment in 2022. This is the first formal evaluation of the PiR initiative and considers the effectiveness, impact and appropriateness of the initiative based on data collected from January 2022 until March 2025 – a period of just over 3 years. Recommendations for improvements to further enhance the impact of the initiative are also provided.

Given the recent establishment of the PIR role, this evaluation considers the short-term and emerging medium-term impact of the initiative as per the theory of change model included below (see Figure 1). Although early indicators of long-term impact are present, the long-term impact of the initiative will be possible to measure more clearly after 5+ years.

Background

The PiR initiative involves principals and assistant principals from Victorian schools being selected through a competitive recruitment process to undertake 12 months in residence at the Academy. Each year, a cohort of up to 12 principals are recruited for this initiative, with up to 3 based in the Academy's Teaching Excellence Division (TED), and up to 9 in the Leadership Excellence Division (LED) although there is movement across Divisions as necessary.

The PiR initiative seeks to contribute to achievement of the Academy's legislated functions and objectives. It aims to improve the interface between the Academy and the Victorian school sector through leveraging principal expertise, insight, advice and leadership. As noted in relevant position descriptions, the PiR initiative is intended to provide the Academy with a school leadership lens that enables:

> - expert insights into real world education professional learning needs

> - enhanced connection between the Academy and Victorian schools, networks and regions

> - improved development, design and delivery of Academy professional learning programs and resources

> - improved leadership mentoring for Academy staff, in particular the Expert Teachers in Residence (ETRs) in the TED.

The PiR responsibilities have evolved over the past 3 years to include a range of activities to support the Academy's strategic direction and operations. In the Leadership Excellence Division (LED), the PiR responsibilities include:

> - lead and advise on developing, implementing, and maintaining the highest quality leadership excellence professional learning programs.

> - provide expert insights to strengthen coherence and the impact of leadership

excellence PL, including representation on design summits and advisory and other committees

> act as a thought leader and subject matter expert to monitor, evaluate and strengthen the quality and coherence of the leadership excellence PL in partnership with Academy colleagues and stakeholders

> develop leadership capability through expert facilitation of Academy PL for exceptional teachers, leaders and Department staff, supporting initiatives, and mentoring Academy staff.

Within the TED, the PiR responsibilities include:

> lead, advise and mentor Victorian Public Service (VPS) and ETR staff on maintaining the highest quality of learning design, and in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the Teaching Excellence Program (TEP), Teaching Impact Fellowships and the TEP Alumni program.

For both divisions, PiRs work collaboratively across the Academy and, when requested and appropriate, with the Department of Education (the Department). PiRs also support the delivery of Academy priority initiatives and programs, as well as becoming Academy facilitators for PL programs.

The roles are advertised as fixed-term for a period of 12 months (with the possibility of a further 12-month extension) and are open to applicants who are not more than 23 months out of their substantive position. Due to the nature of the work and the period of the tenure, it is expected that applicants commit to being available for the length of the contract.

Scope

This evaluation assesses the PiR initiative from January 2022 to March 2025.

At a high level, the scope includes consideration of the following:

> Effectiveness (including impact)

> Contributions of the PiR initiative to the Academy achieving its legislated objectives and functions

> The appropriateness of the PiR initiative

> Identification of areas for improvement.

Out of scope

The longer-term impacts of the initiative (e.g. impact on Academy's legislated objectives), which are not expected to be realised for 5+ years from the initiative's inception in 2022, are not included in scope. The evaluation will not measure impact of the PiR initiative on these objectives but will consider contributions towards these long-term legislated objectives and towards the functions that underpin them.

Evaluation purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness, impact and appropriateness of the PiR initiative over the short and medium-term.

Impact was considered across the following five areas:

1. Contributions to Academy effectiveness and impact
2. Improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement
3. Principal development and pathways
4. Amplifying the impact of ETRs
5. Principal reinvigoration and retention.

The extent to which the implementation of the PiR initiative aligns with Academy expectations (appropriateness) considers two major areas:

6. Access and participation
7. Design and delivery.

Evaluation audience

The primary audiences for this evaluation include the Minister for Education, Department Secretary, Academy Board, Academy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the Academy Executive Leadership Team. Secondary audiences may include current and future PiRs, Academy staff and possibly the public, through potential incorporation into public facing Academy reports.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation was undertaken in two phases, with insights gained form Phase 1 informing the approach and focus for data collection in Phase 2. Phase 1 included a desktop assessment of available data as well as interviews with former PiRs and Academy staff involved from 2022 – 2023. Phase 2 focused on gathering data from current PiRs, Academy staff and external stakeholders with current knowledge of the initiative.

Data collection involved a mixed methods approach, drawing inferences from qualitative and quantitative data. Further, a realist[2] evaluation lens was applied to consider any key differences in context, activities and outcomes for PiRs. Quantitative data was derived from relevant initiative documentation. Qualitative data was captured primarily through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews.

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[2] *Realist evaluation aims to identify the underlying generative causal mechanisms that explain how outcomes were caused and how context influences these (Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). Realistic evaluation. Sage Publications, Inc.)*

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Key evaluation questions

The Key Evaluation Questions guiding this evaluation are as follows.

Key Evaluation Question 1: **To what extent has the PiR initiative been effective (had impact)?**

> Contributions to Academy effectiveness and impact

- To what extent have PiRs contributed to improvements to Academy effectiveness (impact) including legislated objectives and functions?

> Improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement:

- To what extent have PiRs contributed to improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement?

> Principal development and pathways:

- To what extent have PiRs contributed to improved principal development and 'pathways' to contribute to school and system improvement and enhance their career?

> Amplifying the impact of Expert Teachers in Residence:

- To what extent have PiRs contributed to amplifying the impact of ETRs?

> Principal reinvigoration and retention:

- To what extent has the PiR initiative led to improved principal reinvigoration and retention?

Key Evaluation Question 2: To what extent has the implementation of the PiR initiative been appropriate?

> Access and participation:

- To what extent has the initiative recruited principals that are representative of the demographic and geographic diversity of Victoria's education workforce?

- What knowledge, skills and dispositions do principals bring to the PiR role that enables them to succeed?

> Design and delivery:

- To what extent does the design and delivery of the PiR initiative contribute to the successful delivery of the Academy's legislated objectives and functions?

Theory of change

The Theory of Change provides a high-level overview of how change is expected to occur through the PiR initiative. It notes some of the key assumptions, inputs and activities that drive the key outcomes and associated impacts for the initiative.

IF exprienced government school Principals are recruited to the Academy as Principals in Residence

AND these Principals are effectively supported and inducted into the Academy and VPS

WHILE retaining their unique connections to the workforce, schools, regions and areas

UTILISING their expertise, knoweldge and skills

AND evidence-informed approaches

THEN the quality of Academy PL content and delivery and resources and guidance will be improved and enhanced

AND relationships with stakeholders in regions, areas, networks and schools will be uplifted

AND VPS staff and the Academy will strengthen alignment to school needs

LEADING TO PiRs experiencing improved pathways to contibute to schools and system improvement

AND revitalisation and increased retention of Principals

AND strengthened delivery of Academy legislated objectives and functions

Figure 1: PiR Theory of Change

Methodology

Data collection

Across both Phases of the evaluation, 11 semi structured individual interviews, and 4 focus group interviews were undertaken. This resulted a total of 24 participants being interviewed for this evaluation.

Informed consent forms were completed by all participants and interviews were conducted and transcribed through Microsoft Teams. The data was then collated, and an evidence matrix was utilised to analyse data against the key evaluation questions.

Phase 1 data collection

Desktop assessment of relevant data included:

> Review of existing PiR initiative documentation including

- position descriptions

- registration and application data

- demographic and geographic information about participants and

- an analysis of positions held pre- and post-involvement in the PiR initiative.

> Other key documents examined included:

  - an overview of the Department engagement process

  - PiR allocation across projects

  - allocation of PiRs across areas and regions

  - a TED schedule of PiR meetings.

> 5 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with:

  - two former Academy directors (one interview each)

  - the Academy CEO

  - two former PiRs (one interview each).

Phase 2 data collection

For Phase 2, a purposely selected diverse sample of stakeholders were invited to participate in an interview and/or focus group. The interview sampling strategy was based on guidance from the Academy's executive.

Phase 2 included:

> 6 semi-structured individual interviews involving:

  - two current Academy directors (interviewed separately)

  - TED Learning Design Manager

  - a LED PiR (who could not attend the LED focus group)

  - a TED PiR (who could not attend the TED focus group)

  - a Senior Education Improvement Leader (SEIL).

> 4 focus group interviews including:

  - A LED focus group involving 6 PiRs

  - A TED focus group involving 2 PiRs

  - A 'Pathways' focus group involving 2 PiRs

  - A principal association focus group interview with 3 representatives from principal association peak bodies.

Across Phases, there were a total of 24 participants across 11 semi structured individual

interviews and 4 focus group interviews.

Limitations

Given the recent establishment of the PIR initiative, there were limitations in documented evidence available to inform this evaluation. This included an absence of, or lack of access to, detailed initiative plans, a business case, activity logs, or program logics from the establishment of the initiative. This limited the ability for a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to triangulate and cross validate multiple lines of evidence, necessitating a strong reliance on interview and focus group data to inform the evaluation findings.

To mitigate these limitations, a broad sample of former and current PiRs, Academy staff and external stakeholders were interviewed. Focus group interviews were also used to leverage group discussion and consensus around key themes.

While every effort was made to ensure data collection was unbiased, there are inherent biases in all data collection methods. For this evaluation the EEC sought to reduce any biases through undertaking interviews with a breadth of internal and external stakeholders. To further limit bias, peer review of the report was undertaken.

Findings

Effectiveness / Impact of PiR Initiative

This section of the report considers the extent to which the PiR initiative is achieving its intended outcomes and associated impact.

Overview of findings

The evaluation found impacts of the PiR initiative across 5 major areas:

1. Contributions to Academy effectiveness and impact
2. Improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement
3. Principal development and pathways
4. Amplifying the impact of Expert Teachers in Residence
5. Principal reinvigoration and retention.

The findings related to each of these 5 areas are outlined in turn below.

1. PiR contributions to Academy effectiveness and impact

The evaluation found that the PiR initiative has evolved to become an integral contributor to Academy effectiveness and impact. Some of these are outlined in subsequent sections.

Contributions that were captured through interviews include that the complex work PiRs contribute to conflict resolution, stakeholder management, strengthening networks and partnerships and quality assurance of some Academy outputs such as podcasts and principal conferences. One senior Academy staff member commented,

> *"We've got a lot of excellent leaders in the VPS who aren't teachers, so they cannot speak through what is happening broadly in the school communities, and they don't have the connections and networks with SEILs and EILs and Regional Directors and improvement leaders to disseminate the work of the Academy. So, the PiRs are filling in a gap that, to my knowledge, cannot be filled by anyone else."* senior Academy staff member

It was evident that the experience and legitimacy that PiRs hold as key leaders within the teaching profession is valuable and lends credibility to the work of the Academy. This experience was helpful in vetting Academy communications and content and in being challenge partners for Academy PL development, for ETRs and for the development of key Academy frameworks such as the Academy Leadership Excellence Framework (ALEF). As one senior stakeholder explained,

> *"There's no way the ALEF would have been as good as it was without the Principals in Residence because they ...challenged it."* senior Academy staff member

Evidence emerged that PiRs contribute to Academy marketing and promotion. A pertinent example is the support a current PiR provided to lead the promotion and recruitment of 500+ teachers for TEP 2025. In 2024, enrolment numbers for this flagship program were well below target. The CEO decided to pivot the Academy's approach to leverage the expertise of a LED PiR to develop an 'amplifier' boost strategy. This new approach drove a huge increase in interest and then applications for the program, leading to the TEP surpassing its government Performance Target of 400 to achieve 499 enrolments for TEP 2025. As the relevant PiR explained when asked about the success of his approach and how he determined the approach he took,

> *" - I just feel like they weren't looking at... [*[TEP promotion] *from the perspective of teachers and principals. They were looking at it from a service organisation trying to deliver something. And so that's how we changed it. It was just looking at it from a different perspective."* Current PiR

Another commonly discussed theme is the legitimacy PiRs provide to the Academy. Within LED this was highlighted through the contemporary leadership excellence the PiRs bring into the Academy's VPS environment. A prime example is provided through Victorian Aspiring Principal Assessment (VAPA). The VAPA is a policy decision of government that the Academy implements, which determines whether an aspiring principal is suitably equipped for a principal role. The assessment has multiple components and is supported by PiRs. Interviewees of this evaluation regularly highlighted that PiRs have an instant rapport and legitimacy with applicants that comes from their experience as principals. As one Academy leader said.

> *"I think it's really difficult to be able to talk to principals and to have that instant rapport. As soon as someone says they're a principal, they've got it, like that. Whereas, if you and I listed our credentials for 20 minutes, we still wouldn't be in the club, wouldn't have the rapport. So that's the simple rationale of having principals in residence in the Academy..."* Academy Director

A further consideration of the effectiveness of the PiR initiative is the broader school and system benefits realised through their work in the Academy. The work PiRs contribute to improve Academy PL and resources has far reaching benefits over time across Victorian schools and students. For example, each year within TED up to 500 teachers participate in the TEP and take their learnings back to their schools. Victorian schools have an average

teacher to student ratio of 13 students per teacher[3]. Therefore, the work of PiRs on TEP PL alone potentially influences the outcomes of at least 6500 students per year.

In summary and as captured in the first finding below, the PiR initiative was found to be making integral contributions to the Academy effectiveness and impact.

> **Finding 1 –** The PiR initiative has evolved to become effective in delivering its intended outcomes and impacts that are integral contributions to the Academy's delivery of its legislated objectives and functions.

2. Improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement

Both current and former PiRs spoke of the extensive learning they have gained through their involvement in the Academy PiR initiative. This included lessons and insights from working in the VPS, including the complex role of the Department and the interplay between the Department and the Academy. A common theme that emerged was the value the Academy experience provides to PiRs in understanding the context and complexity that sit behind policies and processes associated with schools. Many PiRs and other stakeholders interviewed noted that this improved understanding of education governance, policy and VPS arrangements greatly supported them in returning to schools as more effective leaders. One explained,

> *"[The PiR initiative helped in…] developing my skills in understanding how you can influence and impact change. I was able to sit back while I was watching and make sense of what was needed at the time and to not be frustrated by it, but to actually understand how the system works within that governance…the learning was extraordinary….so much more knowledge and it has expanded my knowledge and expanded my skills."* Former PiR

Development of facilitation skills, deepened understanding of pedagogy and practice and improved leadership capabilities for PiRs were other highlights captured through the evaluation. As noted, this was often directly related to participating in and/or being directly involved in the design and delivery of Academy professional learning and associated frameworks. PiRs were involved in numerous Academy programs and initiatives including *Leading Quality Conversations*, *Literacy Pedagogy and Practice, Inspire, We Inspire System Excellence (WISE), the VAPA* and many others. One said,

> *"...what it has given me is so much more knowledge and it has expanded my knowledge and expanded my skills….[my current] school gets a very different leader from the one that [my previous school] had and my confidence is at the highest it's ever been because I understand what goes on. I understand what I need to do. I understand what supports are there."* – Former PiR

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[3] *https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/student-teacher-ratios#:~:text=The%20average%20student%20to%20teaching,students%20per%20teacher%20in%202014.*

Current and former PiRs discussed the improved leadership confidence gained through the regular upskilling and learning available through the Academy PiR experience. This was also attributed to the engagement and relationships built with executives, VPS staff, ETRs, external stakeholders and other subject matter experts. For example, one former PiR highlighted the insights and professional learning experienced through working closely with Emeritus Professor Viviane Robinson to develop the ALEF. Other examples included,

> *"The other highlights are working with great people in at the Academy, you know, and with the people beyond...[such as] Viviane Robertson and Lyn Sharratt."* Former PiR

> *"My curriculum knowledge has increased exponentially through the work with the master teachers [ETRs] and understanding ...[things] from a discipline perspective."* Former PiR

PiRs noted how the valuable capability development gained through their Academy experience could later be leveraged in their roles as school and system leaders. Such development also enabled a deeper understanding of the evidence-informed nature of Academy PL and included opportunities for some PiRs to engage directly in the research, development and delivery that underpins Academy evidence-informed PL. This again was noted as deepening their knowledge of pedagogy and practice.

A range of more specific examples were provided through interviews of how enhanced capabilities supported PiRs to be more effective school and system leaders. For example, several current and former PiRs noted that their improved system level understanding gained through the PiR experience enabled them, or would enable them, to better prioritise policy and procedural directions from the Department. This included enhanced understanding of how to ensure decisions supported their staff and the learning experience of students. This improved understanding of the interface between the Department and schools was highlighted as a key enabler to being a more effective school and system leader. As one former PiR explained,

> *"There are certain things you just have to go, 'Yep, OK. Going to do it. Don't necessarily agree with it, but I just have to do it. So how can I do it to the advantage of my school? How can I do it to the advantage of my staff? But most importantly, how can I ensure that that is influencing the learning experience of my students?'"* Former PiR

Another key benefit to school and system leadership was PiR understanding of how to teach adults. Many principals have a sound understanding of teaching students but were able to gain expertise in teaching and coaching adults through undertaking Academy professional learning such as through the *Leading Quality Conversations* program. The facilitation and coaching skills gained through this program were noted by several current and former PiRs and other Academy stakeholders as important enablers to better leading and supporting school staff. In addition, many current and former PiRs noted the improved system level understanding they gained of the networks and support systems available. They also noted that this understanding could in turn be communicated through to their own colleagues and staff to provide additional confidence in support structures for their roles. One explained,

> *"Oh, look, I feel like I am the luckiest person in the Victorian education system. I honestly believe it because I've had such an extraordinary experience at the Academy, and I am a much better leader as a result of it. So many levels – you know, from a personal perspective, but also from a professional perspective. I have a deeper*

understanding about how decisions are made, and I am much more accepting of policy." Former PiR

The improved advocacy PiRs provide for the profession and for the Academy was also highlighted through the evaluation. Interviewees discussed the broad influence that principals hold within their school and network, and their unique ability to advocate for the Academy as a provider of choice for PL. For example, interviews noted PiRs are much more likely to advocate for the Academy's PL offerings and for the profession after participating in the PiR initiative. As one said,

> *"In terms of advocating for the profession, you know, I'm your poster girl because what I now have is a very solid understanding of the Venn diagram. On one side it's the system expectations and requirements…and then the other is what has to happen at a school level, and then the bit that intersects is the bit where you get to have the autonomy, and that's the gravy!"* Former PiR

The improved school leadership capabilities and a 'much more system focussed lens' was provided as an of example of PiR benefits by a SEIL. The SEIL noted these improvements in the leadership provided by a former PiR back in their school and Community of Practice (COP). The former PiR's wealth of knowledge and understanding of the ALEF was highlighted as a key example, with the SEIL looking to engage their expertise of the ALEF within future network meetings. This SEIL explained,

> *"He has definitely grown, you know, in his leadership and his view of the system as a whole. He had an important experience, and we see that as beneficial overall."* SEIL

> *"How do we value that and allow them to continue to be recognised for the expertise and share it with others…It almost needs to be like a badge of honour, you know, to have in your footer...Principal in Residence."* Principal association representatives

Overall the evaluation identified that the PiR initiative has provided substantial benefits to participant's understanding and skills as summarised in Finding 2 below.

Finding 2 – The PiR initiative has impacted positively on participants' understanding and skills to bring about school and system improvement including:

> improved understanding of the broader Victorian education system

> deepened understanding of pedagogy and practice

> improved leadership capabilities and confidence

> improved coaching skills

> improved facilitation skills

> improved ability to advocate for the profession.

3. Principal development and pathways

Career pathways

A key aim of the PiR initiative is to support pathways for Victorian principals to contribute to school and system improvement, as per the Academy's legislated objective. As discussed later in this section, the PiR initiative provides a critical pathway for principals who may be considering exiting the system due to burnout to reinvigorate their passion to remain in the system. It also provides an important pathway to broadening horizons of principals to consider how they can best apply their enhanced capabilities to furthering their career goals and Victoria's education system. As such, a key element of the PiR pathways is to enhance PiR career trajectories within the Government education system. One senior Academy staff member said:

> *"We have that conversation about pathways. I can see ...what the role itself does to help people look up and out and think about what might be next for them, whether it's going back into their school with fresh eyes or whether they see a whole bunch of possibilities opening up, broadening horizons."* Current Director

To assess the impact of the PiR initiative on career pathways, the evaluation collected data on the roles of 26 current and former Academy PiRs (see Table 1 below).

Role prior to Academy	Current role
Student Achievement Manager, Department Initiative	Principal
Senior School Improvement Practice Lead	Executive Director
Principal	Director, Academy
Principal	Regional Director, Department
Executive principal	Principal
Principal	Principal
Principal	Principal
Principal	Retired
Principal	Instructional Student Services (ISS) Senior Leader, School Performance
Principal	Manager, Academy Regional Centre

Executive principal	Principal
Principal	Retired
Principal	Quality Assurance & Development Lead for Victorian Aspiring Principal Assessment (VAPA) initiative and Pathways to Principalship program, Academy
Principal	Assistant Principal
Principal	Retired
Principal	Academy Consultant, Academy
System level leadership, Catholic Education Commission Victoria	Principal in Residence, Academy
Principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Assistant principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Senior School Improvement Practice Leader	Principal in Residence, Academy
Principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Principal	Principal in Residence, Academy
Professional Learning Communities regional manager	Principal in Residence, Academy

Table 1: Prior and current Academy PiR positions

As Table 1 shows of the 16 PiRs who have completed the initiative since 2022:

> 7 secured more senior, or alternative, leadership roles within the education system to those they had held before being a PiR. These roles include:

- Department Regional Director

- Executive Director Department

- Instructional Student Services (ISS) Senior Leader (School Performance)

- Quality assurance and development lead for Academy's VAPA initiative and Pathways to Principalship program

- Academy consultant / advisor

- Director at the Academy

- Manager of an Academy Regional Centre.

> 6 returned to school leadership (5 principals and one assistant principal)

> 3 have retired.

The evidence highlights the positive impact the PiR initiative has had on supporting career progression for participating Victorian principals. Again, this highlights how the initiative is contributing to the Academy legislated objective to provide pathways for participants to contribute to school and system improvement.

Current PiRs are also experiencing the benefits of the PiR pathway opportunity, with a majority reinvigorated to either take their learning back to their substantive role or into other leadership roles within the education system. Interviews also confirmed that working in the Academy and the VPS broadens the horizons of PiRs to help identify opportunities they didn't know existed. As discussed further below, this expanded knowledge PiRs gain of the education system also supports PiRs and the Academy to further contribute to school and system improvement. As one current PiR said,

> *"I've never really looked at, you know, the regional office as an option for me. But this [PiR experience] has changed my perspective on that. I feel like that system level leadership is something that I could look at. So, it's sort of shifted my thinking and probably opened up a few more pathways for me."* Current PiR

Finding 3 – The PiR initiative has had a positive impact on career progression of participants, with a significant majority of participants either moving into higher level roles across Victoria's education system or returning to their substantive roles within schools.

4. Amplifying the impact of Expert Teachers in Residence

A key objective for the TED PiRs is to advise, mentor and line manage ETRs to be effective in their roles. ETRs are primarily focussed on supporting high quality learning design within TEP as well as high quality and sustainable Fellowships and Alumni programs. There are 16 highly regarded ETRs within the Academy in 2025, each chosen for their knowledge and

experience in a particular discipline area. This provides a multi-disciplinary team that work to enhance the effectiveness of TED.

For example, ETRs contribute expertise into the design and delivery of the TEP. The TEP is a year-long professional learning program provided by the Academy for skilled teachers focussed on delivering teacher excellence and improved outcomes for students. Structured around eight key disciplines (teachers choose one to focus on) it includes ten days of in-person professional learning across the year and involves a cohort of up to 500 teachers per annum.

Current staff noted the natural fit and legitimacy provided through PiRs line managing ETRs. Key successes of the PiR line management of ETRs noted through the evaluation included the support PiRs provide to ETRs to integrate into the VPS environment. This included the ability for PiRs to support a positive culture and help ETRs understand their roles as leaders within the system. For example, PiRs help ETRs understand the service role they provide the Academy and to their teaching profession to ensure a clear focus on supporting Academy participants and colleagues. As one current PiR put it,

> *"I feel like in supervising the work of expert teachers, [called] 'master teachers' last year, they're coming from schools. So, it's almost like we're a bridge...supporting their transition to a VPS environment and all of the standard operating procedures that that entails...all the understandings and insights beyond those processes that the expert teachers need to have."* Current PiR

PiRs were also seen as critical challenge partners to ETRs, providing the practical lens into school needs. For example, the collective work undertaken by PiRs and ETRs to develop the highly successful regional Artificial Intelligence (AI) roadshow run by TED was highlighted by several respondents. What was notable was the ability for PiRs to give deep insights into differences in school needs across the state. For example, PiRs could advise on the balance required between policy coverage and practical tools to ensure appropriate content for the target audience.

The ability for the PiR / ETR team to quickly mobilise an idea through design, development and delivery within 6 weeks was seen as a real *'gift'* to the Academy. This included accessing the networks of the PiRs and ETRs to promote the roadshow and achieve 1600 registrations. An Academy Director noted,

> *"It's really a gift. I didn't think it would be as impactful as it is, but it's such a gift to have this workforce and to be able to really quickly mobilise them around a new idea."* Current Director

Another important component of the PiR / ETR line management is supporting ETR career pathway progress. PiRs within TED noted regular discussions of professional development goals and aligning Academy learning and development with ETR career and leadership aspirations. One explained,

> *"We're having conversations with the expert teachers about what their professional goals are in the role and what they're doing to enhance the work of the Academy."* Current PiR

Finding 4 – PiRs are uniquely equipped to act as managers, leaders and challenge partners to amplify the impact of the ETRs.

5. Principal reinvigoration and retention

The role of school principal is very demanding. Many PiRs spoke about excessive work hours, complex and challenging situations with children and families (including abuse received from parents and carers), and the inability to switch off after work and on weekends. For example, some PiRs noted working 100-hour weeks and being worn down to the point where they were looking to exit the system due to burnout. PiRs also highlighted the impact their work was having on their families and loved ones. As one put it, while a principal in a school,

> *"I was at a bit of a crossroads to be honest. It started to impact me personally and to significantly impact my family as well. I realised I was paying far more attention to the 400 kids in my school than I was to the two in my living room."* – Current PiR

Despite the challenges it was also clear that principals value the rewards of the role due to their influence on improving the lives of students, families and teachers and the connections they develop with the school community. Several PiRs noted experiencing an initial sense of loss of connection when they commenced with the Academy, and a desire to not lose touch with the networks they had fostered. Many of the PiRs interviewed had been principals for many years, and the passion and depth of experience they collectively hold was highly evident. As one put it,

> *"...I realised that where I have the greatest autonomy and an opportunity for further growth and learning is taking what I've learned and applying that in the role of a principal, because I believe that the best role in the education system is that of a principal."* Former PiR

It was also clear that PiRs commencing with the Academy undertake a professional learning and development 'journey'. The evaluation captured a consistent theme of the empowerment experienced by principals in being recognised and valued as subject matter experts at the Academy. Several PiRs highlighted that the initiative offered them the opportunity to immerse themselves in various elements of Academy work to improve teaching and leadership and ultimately, student outcomes.

PiR individual and focus group interviews highlighted that some of the most impactful professional learning and development journeys of PiRs were experiential – having the time and space to engage in evidence-informed research on a topic, develop and facilitate the related PL offering, and experience the direct impact on teachers and school leaders. One explained,

> *"I feel much more reinvigorated as a leader, and I think that's time and space to think and reflect on rather than being stuck in the motions of the principal class and the busyness of all of that. I've been able to think about, you know, 'What I did and how I was doing it and what I would do differently?', and now I feel ready to go back and have a real impact at the school again."* Current PiR

PiRs and stakeholders also noted the importance of the initiative in building connections and networks, and in expanding their knowledge of the education sector. The positive culture of the Academy was identified as an enabler for their reinvigoration, with many referencing the trust and connections they had made, and of viewing the Academy as a supportive and wonderful place to work. A typical comment included,

> *"I feel really re-energised, like it's just been such an amazing experience for me and because of these people… who I feel like I've built a lot of trust and good relationships with."* Current PiR

Several current and former PiRs were keen to dispel the notion that you come to the Academy to recuperate and 'rest'. This perception was also highlighted by the focus group with principal association peak body representatives and may be, to some extent, a legacy from earlier iterations of the PiR initiative. For example, it was evident that some former PiRs came to the Academy as a stepping stone to retirement. However, it was clear that this approach to leveraging the PiR initiative as an exit strategy was now an exception rather than a norm and is not relevant to current PiRs. It was also clear that current PiRs, whilst experiencing reinvigoration for the profession, also found the role of PiR within the Academy to be challenging. One interviewee involved in recruiting PiRs explained,

> *"It's like a predictable chart now where they're coming in tired, they take a little bit of time to get going, but then once they hit their straps, they're an amazing workforce... They might have been going through some of the most challenging stuff in their professional career...They come here, there's a bit of recuperation and they feel valued again...they feel like they're contributing to school and system improvement again, which is what they want to do and by the time they leave, they're so inspired to take on a new challenge."* Current Academy Director

Current PiRs who had been experiencing burnout within their schools highlighted the ability to switch off after hours as an important element of their reinvigoration. A focus group with current PiRs captured the importance of the PiR role in reigniting a passion for education through valuing their expertise and enabling time and space to develop professionally again. Several PiRs, both current and former, noted that the reinvigoration impact of the PiR initiative enabled them to regain their passion to return to a principal role.

> *"The position reinvigorated me … where I feel comfortable to go back."* Current PiR

> *"I feel like I'm re-energised and ready to go back into my community because I do love the community."* Current PiR

Finding 5 – The PiR initiative has had a positive impact on the reinvigoration of some PiRs, enabling them to feel valued and inspired to continue working within the education system, including through returning to a principal position.

Many of the interviews highlighted the challenges associated with sustaining a principal role long-term. Participants also discussed workforce challenges in backfilling principal roles, especially in outer regional and remote areas, which was identified as a barrier for some potential PiR candidates. There was also discussion from principal association representatives and a SEIL around the increased prevalence of younger principals, and concern about their ability to sustain principal roles throughout their career.

> *"I've got a couple of really young principals, and it is a long time to be in that kind of a role I think. It's not getting easier."* SEIL

> *"How does the system support school leaders? We have more and more leaders who are coming, and I'll suggest at a far earlier age, and trying to sustain the career as a principal for 20 plus years is a pretty heavy ask of anybody just with the cognitive overload."* – principal association representative

One interviewee noted the benefits the PiR initiative can provide for principal reinvigoration and retention within the workforce. They also noted that, due to these benefits, principals at risk of exiting the system are potential candidates for PiR roles. This prioritisation may contribute to external perceptions that the initiative has sometimes been viewed as a principal 'respite' program.

The potential for the reinvigoration benefits of the PiR initiative to be considered more broadly across by the sector to support principal sustainability was raised in interviews. For example, there were suggestions to consider embedding the PiR initiative more formally as part of principal professional development learning and/or career pathway.

Another suggestion was the idea of supporting principals to undertake a sabbatical as a PiR after seven years in the role. It was noted that this point in time corresponds with the time when principals can access their long service leave *pro rata*. This was therefore seen as an appropriate period after which the Department could support principals with opportunities to step out, learn, share their experience with others and develop professionally before going back to their school.

The PiR initiative was viewed as an important example of the opportunity to reinvigorate the small number of principals the Academy might be able to support. These principals could share their knowledge with the system and ultimately provide additional sustainability to their roles to retain them in the workforce long-term. As one member of a focus group interview said,

> *"If you've been a principal at that school for seven years now, you need to go and do something else. Go and be a principal in residence. You've had all this experience as a principal now put that back into the system".* Principal association representative

Appropriateness of PiR initiative

This section of the report considers the appropriateness of the PiR initiative. Appropriateness is the extent to which the initiative aligns with stakeholder expectations and Academy requirements.

Overview of findings

The evaluation assessed the appropriateness of the initiative across two major areas:

1. Design and delivery
2. Access and participation.

The findings related to these 2 areas are outlined in turn below.

1. Design and delivery

Background

Since its inception within the Academy in 2022, there have been some key differences across the design and delivery of LED and TED PiR roles. The PiR role within LED focuses on developing and enhancing program participant's leadership capability, particularly supporting the progression from exceptional teacher leaders and assistant principals to school

principals. This work involves designing and delivering high-quality leadership programs, providing strategic advice, and contributing to other Academy initiatives such as frameworks, presentations and networks as required.

The PiR role within TED is dedicated to advancing teaching excellence by mentoring ETR staff and overseeing the design and implementation of teaching-focused PL as part of the TED. Their role also includes supporting the sustainability of emerging Teaching Impact (formerly 'Innovation') Fellowships and alumni programs, with a strong emphasis on maintaining program quality and impact over time. While both divisions aim to strengthen educational practice, the PiR role within LED is leadership-focused, while TED centres on teaching excellence and alumni / fellow development.

As the Academy has matured, so too has the PiR initiative. For example, former PiRs and directors interviewed noted that the initial cohort of PiRs had a developmental focus. This included TED PiRs working to support the establishment and design of the Academy's flagship TEP, which is now into its fourth year. Likewise, former LED PiRs noted a requirement during the early phase to navigate organisational restructures, and later to audit programs against the Leadership Excellence Management Framework introduced in 2023, which later evolved into the ALEF. There was also involvement of department executives early on to oversee the Academy's establishment, which lessened as the Academy was stood up and has lessened further as the Academy has matured and demonstrated its effectiveness as a Statutory Authority. As a former PiR noted,

> *"Master teachers had been employed, but they hadn't started. So really it was to establish the Teaching Excellence Program and knowing that there was a very close eye on the program from the Department."* Former PiR

A consistent design and delivery theme that emerged through the evaluation is the organic approach to refining the PiR initiative since inception. It was clear that during the developmental phase (years 1 and 2) there was a lack of clarity and documentation on the specific expectations of PiRs across both TED and LED. Likewise, former PiRs, former directors and the current CEO identified that, despite some direction provided through the position descriptions, there was little by way of documented PiR expectations. As is to be expected with an evolving and new entity, regular shifts and changes to the work have occurred as the PiR role as evolved.

Refinements delivered to PiR role design

Current PiRs are focussed on enhancing the impact and reach of the Academy's teaching excellence and leadership excellence work. The LED focus group noted they had seen increased clarity around the expectations the PiR role. For example, PiRs within TED are now provided with clear guidance and documentation about the role through the *TEP Teaching Service Handbook*. LED has also been working on the development of an enhanced PiR induction program and has established internal governance arrangements to further support the functioning of its PiRs. As the CEO explained,

> *"As we've matured in the Academy, the principals [in Residence have] benefited from us designing and implementing, and then continually refining, the orientation and induction program. We didn't have that [when the Academy commenced]."* Academy CEO.

Examples of improved governance include LED PiRs allocating a key leader within their cohort, a 'principal of principals', to provide a central point of contact, coordination and support. It was also noted that the CEO has held monthly PiR meetings combining TED and

LED PiRs for the past 2 years. These meetings have been established to formally bring TED and LED PiRs together regularly to highlight strategic priorities of the Academy, share lessons and insights and draw from the collective experience of all PiRs.

Documents reviewed reflect a structured and broad approach to LED PiR planning and engagement. The evaluation captured evidence of improved record keeping, with several spreadsheets and documents developed to support improved transparency and clarity of core PiR activities undertaken across both divisions. These documents provide an overview of the planning, responsibilities and engagement areas for the PiRs in 2025. They include a one-page document outlining the purpose of termly meetings between LED PiRs and the Department's metropolitan Executive Directors, aimed at strengthening communication, aligning priorities, building relationships and gathering feedback to support strategic planning. LED PiRs are responsible for leading these meetings, including preparing agendas and delivering presentations.

A work allocation document outlines the broad range of projects each LED PiR is connected to. Other materials include a presentation that provides context on the PiR role across several key domains: providing program support and mentoring, facilitating a range of PL offerings, contributing to strategic planning and stakeholder engagement, applying expertise in program design and evaluation, and acting as a conduit between local networks and the Academy.

Ongoing refinement of documentation would assist capturing input, output and outcomes (impact) associated with PiR initiatives, and in triangulating and cross validating the evidence captured through stakeholder interviews.

Finding 6 – There have been significant improvements to the PiR role clarity since inception and the development over of a shared understanding of the role's purposes and impact.

Potential future enhancements to PiR role clarity

Current PiRs highlighted a mismatch between what is documented in position descriptions for the PiR role, and what is required within the Academy, especially within LED. There was concern that people commencing in the role could have different expectations to what the role involves, and this could potentially lead to dissatisfaction. For example, LED PiRs reported that they were sometimes asked to 'plug gaps' as a result of staff vacancies and they had not expected to do this. While there was generally a positive view about doing '*what is required'*, it was noted that using PiRs for some tasks at times was perceived to be challenging to justify from a public expenditure perspective. Comments included,

> *"I think it's become like an organisational habit that when something's hard, oh, we've got this resource, and we can use it to plug a gap. But the risk is if we're not around and not a resource anymore, then the organisation needs to find different solutions."* Current PiR

> *"The last three weeks I've been flat out, but it is really low-level managing spreadsheets, filling in forms, setting up agendas, that sort of stuff."* Current PiR

Other comments pointed to the potential use of PiRs to undertake work outsourced to external providers:

"When we think about our professional services agreements and what we can do, and what we can't do, I actually think there's some things that we outsource that are actually, well within our Principals-in-Residence remit and that does challenge them. That work could be really interesting for PiRs to do. Yet we're given the low-level stuff." Current PiR

These comments and the perceptions that shape the views that underpin such comments demonstrate there is opportunity for the Academy to better explain the context and requirements of working effectively in public administration within the VPS and in particular, the impact of the Academy's short-term funding on task allocation.

Unlike in most schools, staff in the VPS move roles frequently and are encouraged to do so. Also, unlike in schools, all of the positions in the Academy have short-term funding, which also contributes to staff mobility. Frequent staff vacancies and the consequential need for all available staff to pick up whatever work is required are a normal part of the VPS and Academy's context. There is opportunity to explain this more clearly to potential PiRs when they are considering taking up a role in the Academy context so they are clear that this will likely be part of their experience.

Finding 7 – Further work is required by the Academy to ensure clarity of expectations of a PiR's role within the Academy and more broadly the VPS. This will benefit incumbents and support future evaluations of the PiR initiative.

Alignment of PiR initiative with Academy objectives and functions

It was evident that the intent and design of the LED and TED PiR roles continue to enable a critical advisory role into the Academy, and alignment of Academy programs with different school contexts and needs. The PiRs have consistently acted as challenge partners, with many respondents noting that PiRs are uniquely equipped to bring their practical expertise of what will and wont *"fly"* in a real-world context, as well as providing legitimacy and credibility to the Academy's role as a professional learning organisation. A strong theme across the evaluation was the critical importance of the PiR's practice-informed lens. The collective lens PiRs provide strengthens the relevance and impact of Academy professional learning through alignment with the contemporary requirements of Victoria's education system.

"They are saying 'This is relevant. This is credible. This would fly in a school. This wouldn't'". Current PiR

Finding 8 – The design and delivery of PiR initiative are appropriate to ensure the continued alignment of Academy professional learning with the contemporary requirements of Victoria's education system, and to provide legitimacy and credibility to the Academy's role as a professional learning organisation.

2. Access and participation

The diversity of current PiR participants and considers potential barriers and enablers that could be considered to ensure an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and experience is maintained are explored in this section.

Diversity

The Academy seeks to recruit a reasonably representative cohort of PiRs to facilitate a collective 'lens' on the diverse needs of Victorian schools and the students, stakeholders and communities they serve. As noted, this lens is critical to the work PiRs undertake to support the achievement of a range of Academy legislative objectives and functions and strengthens the academy's evidence-informed approach.

The evaluation highlighted that the Academy PiR initiative has been effective overall in recruiting a diverse and representative cohort of principals. For example, based on analysis of the demographics of schools from which current PiRs have been recruited, it was identified that current PiRs, at the time of reporting, are representative of metropolitan and regionally based schools, male and female genders (50:50 split), and both primary (7) and secondary (5) schools. There was also a balance of PiRs from schools ranking higher and lower on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)[4].

However, the regional schools were all inner regional (with no outer regional or remote schools) and the metropolitan schools were generally those that ranked higher on the ICSEA. Further, 2 of the 3 TED PiRs were from higher ICSEA rated inner regional primary schools, and the other TED PiR was the only non-government PiR with broad experience from the Catholic school sector. This highlighted a gap in the diversity of the school and system lens provided. It is also worth noting there have been no PiRs from specialist schools or the independent school sector to date and the mechanisms for engaging non-government PiRs have not yet been clarified.

There was a general view that there was diversity of experience and backgrounds across the PiR cohort. However, some respondents noted a lack of cultural diversity. It was also noted that the Academy has experienced barriers to recruiting principals from the western growth corridor, where there are highly complex challenges in schools, including in workforce. Some principals reflected on the difficulties inherent in leaving a school that is not stable and where there are no assurances of a high performing replacement principal:

> "I could never have in good conscience stepped out of [my school] when it wasn't stable. I just thought… that feels like the captain abandoning the ship." Current PiR

> "I just really worry that there's no one from one of those inner-city Western suburbs, …. they're just doing it so tough with behaviours and staffing." Academy Manager

Barriers to recruiting principals from some schools with a low ICSEA rating (regional and metropolitan) and from western growth corridor, outer regional and remotely located schools were identified as beyond the direct influence of the Academy but are worth noting. These barriers are also likely contributing to external perceptions raised by the principal association representatives that the PiR initiative can be viewed as a "*metro-centric*" initiative.

> "It is seen as the 'metro principals in residence' program. Our regional colleagues feel that there's too many barriers in terms of attendance requirements and so on, and it often requires them to relocate to partake in the program, and that's just not viable financially or for family reasons." – principal association representative.

Finding 9 – The design and delivery of the PiR initiative are broadly appropriate to ensure the recruitment of principals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. That said, there

[4] ICSEA – a scale assigned to a school based on the average socio-educational background of its students.

are barriers to attracting a diverse pool of applicants including those from outer regional and remote areas, the western growth corridor and lower ICSEA rated schools.

Barriers to participation

There were perceived barriers for regional PiRs posed by the requirements for metropolitan workplace attendance to deliver PL onsite. It was noted that the increased involvement of LED PiRs in facilitating Academy programs in metropolitan areas is creating a perceived barrier for existing regionally based PiRs, especially those with families and caring responsibilities. It was also noted by TED PiRs that leveraging regional centres was limited due to the face-to-face contact required for some aspects of ETR line management responsibilities in Melbourne.

These are difficult issues to manage across the state and particularly within an agency that has 9 locations that must be staffed and over 60 programs that have to be delivered on a cyclical basis to around 15,000 participants each year. The Academy has made the expectations of site attendance very clear for prospective PiRs and is also as flexible as possible within the requirements of the role for facilitation of PL programs onsite and for face-to-face line management in some circumstances.

Finding 10 – The necessary metropolitan attendance for professional learning facilitation and Expert Teacher in Residence line management are potential barriers for regional and remote PiR participants, especially those with caring responsibilities.

There was a perceived lack of awareness of the PiR initiative within some regions, networks, and their associated schools. Many of the current PiRs identified the PiR opportunity through word of mouth, and there were suggestions for increased promotion of the PiR initiative to further enhance state-wide awareness to achieve enhanced diversity and inclusion. The principal association peak bodies focus group suggested leveraging nominations from principals to increase awareness and regional and remote participation. That said, broader promotion has been difficult as the Department has not been supportive of wide scale promotion of the PiR initiative and has instead at times insisted on low key and short recruitment processes.

Finding 11 – There is a perceived lack of awareness and promotion of the PiR initiative within some regions, networks and their associated schools which may limit the exposure and subsequent involvement of some principals.

Some interviewees suggested further consideration of increased online (rather than onsite) attendance for PiRs, shorter duration (e.g. 6 month) placements and/or improved compensation for travel and accommodation to Melbourne. Each of these suggestions have merit and add challenge. For example, it is not possible to facilitate an onsite program from an online location. Shorter placements require more frequent recruitment, orientation and induction as PiRs come and go more often which would contribute to increased instability and risks to business continuity and quality and may reduce the efficacy of the PiR's impact. Further, the Academy is not funded to offer additional monetary compensation to PiRs. There are also limitations noted in achieving further cross sectoral PiR involvement, particularly due to industrial and stakeholder challenges inherent in a government authority employing a principal from a non-government sector, however this is the subject of further exploration.

Knowledge, skills and experience

PiRs across LED and TED are recruited for their leadership excellence, and this capability was acknowledged throughout the evaluation. The evaluation also captured some variation in the capability requirements across LED and TED PiR roles. The key difference, as noted earlier, is the requirement for TED PiRs to line mange ETRs. It was also emphasised that the TED role necessitates PiRs with a sound understanding of instructional leadership and what constitutes a high-quality teaching and learning experience.

Undertaking a PiR role within the Academy is challenging, requiring a significant adjustment from being a principal with extensive autonomy, to working in a bureaucratic VPS system that is hierarchical. PiRs discussed the need for additional transition support over several weeks to help them understand and adjust to this new environment and to learn the approval processes and policies of the VPS. The PiRs have been contributing to the design and documentation of improved induction and support.

Finding 12 – Participation in the PiR initiative requires a significant adjustment for individuals who have previously operated with greater autonomy and limited exposure to VPS hierarchies, processes, and policies. Recent development of more comprehensive induction and support processes by the Academy are enhancing the transition.

Additional recruitment considerations

It was noted that the PiR role necessitates a range of skills to ensure a successful transition to the VPS. While the Academy is responsible for supporting the transition of PiRs, there were also some PiR capabilities identified as important enablers for candidates. For example, PiRs need capabilities such as flexibility, open mindedness, curiosity and an ability to cope with varying degrees of uncertainty and change. Flexibility in particular enables PiRs to adapt to the changed and changing environment, and to accept the requirements (such as close line management) that come with joining a hierarchical system.

Further development of recruitment strategies and endorsement processes is warranted for the PiR initiative, including a clear outline of what represents an appropriate mix of skills and experiences to support the design and delivery of the PiR initiative and the effectiveness and impact of the Academy's work in schools and in the system.

There was anecdotal evidence that on occasion the timelines associated with PiR recruitment provides a relatively short notice period for schools to make backfill arrangements for the principal role. This is partly because of the Department's requirement to approve all Academy PiR appointments including through the Department's Schools HR area and through the Deputy Secretary Schools and Regional Services. These additional approval steps have often led to delays in decisions, and in subsequent communications to prospective PiRs and on a number of occasions to candidates having to decline an offer of a PiR role.

Finding 13 – Opportunity exists to refine position descriptions to more accurately reflect the nature and variability of the contributions expected of PiRs.

Key Findings

Finding 1 – The PiR initiative has evolved to become effective in delivering its intended outcomes and impacts that are integral contributions to the Academy's delivery of its legislated objectives and functions.

Finding 2 – The PiR initiative has impacted positively on participants' understanding and skills to bring about school and system improvement including:

> improved understanding of the broader Victorian education system

> deepened understanding of pedagogy and practice

> improved leadership capabilities and confidence

> improved coaching skills

> improved facilitation skills

> improved ability to advocate for the profession.

Finding 3 – The PiR initiative has had a positive impact on career progression of participants, with a significant majority of participants either moving into higher level roles across Victoria's education system or returning to their substantive roles within schools.

Finding 4 – PiRs are uniquely equipped to act as managers, leaders and challenge partners to amplify the impact of the ETRs.

Finding 5 - The PiR initiative has had a positive impact on the reinvigoration of some PiRs, enabling them to feel valued and inspired to continue working within the education system, including through returning to a principal position.

Finding 6 –There have been significant improvements to the PiR role clarity since inception and the development over of a shared understanding of the role's purposes and impact.

Finding 7 – Further work is required by the Academy to ensure clarity of expectations of a PiR's role within the Academy and more broadly the VPS. This will benefit incumbents and support future evaluations of the PiR initiative.

Finding 8 – The design and delivery of PiR initiative are appropriate to ensure the continued alignment of Academy professional learning with the contemporary requirements of Victoria's education system, and to provide legitimacy and credibility to the Academy's role as a professional learning organisation.

Finding 9 – The design and delivery of the PiR initiative are broadly appropriate to ensure the recruitment of principals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. That said, there are barriers to attracting a diverse pool of applicants including those from outer regional and remote areas, the western growth corridor and lower ICSEA rated schools.

Finding 10 – The necessary metropolitan attendance for professional learning facilitation and Expert Teacher in Residence line management are potential barriers for regional and remote PiR participants, especially those with caring responsibilities.

Finding 11 – There is a perceived lack of awareness and promotion of the PiR initiative within some regions, networks and their associated schools which may limit the exposure and subsequent involvement of some principals.

Finding 12 – Participation in the PiR initiative requires a significant adjustment for individuals who have previously operated with greater autonomy and limited exposure to VPS hierarchies, processes, and policies. Recent development of more comprehensive induction and support processes by the Academy are enhancing the transition.

Finding 13 – Opportunity exists to refine position descriptions to more accurately reflect the nature and variability of the contributions expected of PiRs.

Recommendations

This evaluation report makes the following recommendations to support ongoing enhancement to the PiR initiative.

Effectiveness

Principal development and pathways

1. That the Academy continues to:
   a. proactively communicate the PiR initiative as a professional learning pathway available to school leaders
   b. consider opportunities to ensure PiR initiative and experience can be shared back into the system by returning principals.
   c. develop ongoing understanding of the PiR initiative as a professional learning and personal development opportunity to better attract principals from a range of backgrounds.

Appropriateness

Access and participation

2. That the Academy continues to refine recruitment strategies for PiRs that consider:
   a. opportunities for further promotion of the PiR initiative to ensure state-wide awareness and engagement.
   a. diversity across the PiR cohort (e.g. PiRs from metropolitan and regional, and rural schools with higher and lower ICSEA ratings).
   b. clear communication of expectations of PiRs regarding metropolitan site attendance to deliver PL and supervise ETRs.
   c. continuing to work closely with the Department and heads of the principal association peak bodies around barriers and enablers to PiR recruitment.

Design and delivery

3. That the Academy continues to:

   a. clearly articulate expectations of individual and collective PiR contributions to ensure alignment to Academy legislative objectives and functions, including in PiR work plans and schedules.

   b. improve record keeping ensuring that the dynamic and wide range of activities and outcomes delivered across PiR roles are appropriately documented and recorded.

Conclusion

Since its commencement in 2022, the PiR initiative has continuously been refined to become a key contributor to the Academy's effectiveness and impact. The Academy has successfully integrated PiRs as key leaders and challenge partners, leveraging their expertise and experience of real-world education needs. PiRs have enhanced the development, design and delivery of Academy PL programs and resources and improved leadership of ETRs.

The quality assurance and legitimacy PiRs bring to the Academy was highlighted throughout the report as critical to the success of LED and TED portfolios. The evaluation highlights that the PiRs have delivered their intended short and medium-term outcomes including:

> Contributions to Academy effectiveness and impact.

> Improved understanding and skills to contribute to school and system improvement.

> Principal development and pathways.

> Amplifying the impact of Expert Teachers in Residence.

> Principal reinvigoration and retention.

The evaluation found that the PiR initiative is underpinned by an appropriate design to ensure ongoing success and refinement of the initiative. This includes:

> an appropriate diversity of skills and experience within the PiR cohort to support the interface between the Academy and the school system

> appropriate alignment between the initiative and the Academy's legislated objectives and functions

> improving support and resources to assist PiRs transition quickly and be more effective within their role at the Academy.

The evaluation highlighted significant and ongoing improvements to governance and induction processes that are increasing the support and role clarity provided to PiRs.