

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a parliament session. In the foreground, the backs of several people's heads and shoulders are visible as they sit in red wooden chairs. Some are wearing dark suits, while others are in white shirts. In the center, a person with two long, thick braids is visible. The background is filled with more people, mostly men in suits, seated in rows. A large, semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title and other text.

Systems and Support for Principal Performance

December 2020

Independent assurance report to Parliament
2020–21: 11

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Systems and Support for Principal Performance

Independent assurance report to Parliament

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Victorian Auditor-General's Office

The Hon Nazih Elasmr MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Melbourne

The Hon Colin Brooks MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my report *Systems and Support for Principal Performance*.

Yours faithfully



Andrew Greaves
Auditor-General

9 December 2020

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office acknowledges Australian Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land throughout Victoria. We pay our respect to all Aboriginal communities, their continuing culture and to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Audit snapshot

Does the Department of Education and Training support and manage principals' development and performance to optimise student outcomes?

Why this audit is important

The principal is the critical leader within a school community and directly influences its culture and learning environment. Principals are also accountable for their school's performance and progress towards the Victorian Government's Education State targets.

Who we examined

The Department of Education and Training (DET), which manages the performance and development (PD) process for principals.

What we examined

- How DET implements the principal PD model (the PD model).
- DET's expectations of principal performance and how it assesses it.

- DET's understanding of principal performance and principals' learning and development needs.

What we concluded

While some principals experience a constructive PD process, DET does not consistently implement its PD model to support and manage all principals' development and performance to optimise student outcomes. DET also does not systematically monitor principals' participation in the PD cycle. This means principals do not have equivalent performance expectations and assessment across Victoria.

DET also does not analyse PD outcomes to understand principals' performance or use information from the PD cycle to identify their professional learning and

development needs at a region or statewide level, although it has a better understanding at a local level. This limits its ability to target support to identified performance issues and learning and development needs.

DET's PD model is intended to be based on a whole-of-practice approach; however, in practice it focuses more on leading teaching and learning, and less on managing resources and leading the school community. As a result, not all principals' performance expectations and assessments are a balanced reflection of these key aspects of their role.

This also means their development may not focus on all the skills they need to perform their role effectively.

Key facts

Principal performance assessments 2019



1 340
principals were
assessed



1 326
met requirements



25–28
principals were assessed
by each senior education
improvement leader (SEIL)

What we found and recommend

We consulted with the audited agency and considered its views when reaching our conclusions. The agency's full response is in Appendix A.

Implementation of the principal performance and development model

The Department of Education supports principals to develop their instructional leadership but support for organisational leadership is inconsistent

A principal's role is to support student outcomes by leading effective teaching and learning (instructional leadership) and managing the resources that support teachers and students (organisational leadership).

The Department of Education's (DET) performance and development (PD) model aims to develop principals in all aspects of their role but it does not implement this consistently. DET gives different PD guidance material to principals than it does to its senior education improvement leaders (SEIL), who review principal performance. Guidance to principals emphasises instructional and organisational leadership, whereas guidance to SEILs, while noting each domain of principal practice, only provides explicit guidance and examples for instructional leadership.

Consequently, while principals generally align their PD goals across all aspects of their role, some SEILs require principals' PD goals to only reflect their school's goals and targets, therefore excluding goals reflecting the principals' organisational leadership development. This means that DET's principal PD model is not as effective as it could be in assessing performance and developing principals' professional growth and career development in all aspects of their role.

DET cannot assure that PD practices are equivalent across its regions

It is important that DET assesses principals consistently to ensure that PD outcomes in each area and region are equivalent. However, DET has not set clear assessment criteria or documented the moderation process, and it does not routinely monitor how SEILs implement the PD model and assess professional development plans

(PDP). Consequently, there is variation in goal setting, assessment and moderation practices across the state. This variation means that a principal's experience of the PDP process can be strongly influenced by their particular SEIL. As DET does not ensure that PD practices are implemented consistently across its regions, it cannot assure itself that principals experience an equivalent process.

It is not clear if PDPs should include Schedule B accountabilities

DET's PD guidance states that its model focuses on principals' development and assessment of PDP goals rather than their contractual Schedule B accountabilities. However, DET includes these accountabilities in its PD process without guidance on how to measure or assess them. This leads to varying practices among SEILs and an inconsistent assessment experience for principals across the state.

DET's lack of guidance and inconsistent practices in assessing Schedule B accountabilities contributes to principals being uncertain about their performance expectations and assessment criteria.

Schedule B is a section in the standard principal employment contract that outlines principals' contractual accountabilities. It includes leading teaching and learning, school planning and governance, and financial and human resources management.

Recommendations about the PD model

We recommend that:		Response
Department of Education and Training	1. in its performance and development process guidance for principals and Department of Education and Training staff, clarify and communicate expectations for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development of goals, and assessment against them, for both instructional and organisational leadership the extent to which a principal's performance and development should align with their school's annual implementation plan how to use performance development plan goals to support individual professional growth in all aspects of the principal role (see Section 2.1) 	Accepted
	2. develops clear guidance and routine practices for its regions on the implementation of the principal performance and development model, with particular reference to assessment criteria and decisions, to ensure it is consistent and equitable (see Section 3.1)	Accepted
	3. in relation to the inclusion of Schedule B accountabilities within the principal PD model, reviews each Schedule B accountability and determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> if the accountability should be assessed through the principal performance and development model or an alternate process criteria to use when assessing performance against the accountability (see Section 2.2). 	Accepted

Understanding principals' performance and their learning and development needs

DET has a limited understanding of principal performance across the state

DET does not systematically monitor implementation of the PD model for timeliness and completion. In the 2019 cycle, most principal PDPs did not meet deadlines for milestones such as goal-setting, mid-cycle and end-cycle reviews. This means that goals and feedback are not timely, which limits the effectiveness of the PD process.

Information is available to DET about the range of principal performance through the PDP module in eduPay and the local knowledge of SEILs and executive staff at area and regional levels. However, DET does not use this information to analyse principal performance across the state: for example, to identify whether particular issues exist across regions or principal types, or if systemic issues exist. Doing so could help inform DET's approach to principal professional development.

Principals' individual PDP goals are assessed according to a three-point scale of 'meets requirements', 'partially meets requirements' and 'does not meet requirements'.

Use of the three-point scale for PDP goals varied markedly between SEILs, despite each having a similar principal cohort to assess. Many SEILs do not use the 'partially meets' rating and therefore some principals are less likely to receive specific feedback on their performance and development against individual goals. This practice also indicates that principals' assessment experience is significantly dependent on the approach of their SEIL.

DET can do more to respond to principals' learning and development needs

DET's professional development support focuses on principals' instructional leadership skills. There is evidence that informal processes at area and regional level mean that DET is able to identify and respond to some learning needs highlighted through the PD process. DET also encourages principals to continue their professional reading and undertake external learning where relevant. We found that principals do this.

While DET gathers and has access to information relating to the learning and development needs of principals, it does not combine and analyse this information at a system level. Further, DET's focus on professional development in instructional leadership means that principals are not always given the opportunity to develop their organisational leadership skills.

The 2019 PDP module within eduPay delivered a poor user experience

Principals told us that the user experience for eduPay's PDP module was 'cumbersome' and time-consuming in 2019. DET responded to this feedback and has made changes to the module for the 2020 PD cycle. These are likely to lead to improved user experience in the 2020 cycle.

eduPay is DET's online tool for human resources management. The PDP module within eduPay manages PDPs and the performance review cycle. All of DET's staff, including principals and teachers, use eduPay.

Recommendations about principal performance and learning and development needs

We recommend that:	Response	
Department of Education and Training	4. ensures major changes to the professional development plan module in eduPay are subject to user testing by principals, and regularly monitors system improvements and user feedback (see Section 2.7)	Accepted
	5. uses reporting functionality in eduPay's professional development plan module at an area and regional level to regularly monitor and ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none">the timely completion of key steps in the principal performance development cyclethe compliance of performance development plans and assessments with Department of Education and Training guidance (see Section 3.1)	Accepted
	6. advises the Minister on options to recognise high-performing principals, including consideration of modifying the current assessment scale to capture the full range of principal performance (see Section 3.1)	Accepted
	7. ensures that principals' learning and development needs for both instructional and organisational leadership are regularly captured, including from eduPay's professional development plan module and performance and development process, to inform the design and delivery of principal professional learning activities (see Section 3.2).	Accepted

1.

Audit context

The principal is the critical leader within a school community and directly influences its culture and learning environment. Principals are also accountable for their school's performance and progress towards the Victorian Government's Education State targets.

DET manages the principal PD process. It aims to develop principals' capabilities in all aspects of their role and promote consistency in support and performance assessment across the state.

This chapter provides essential background information about:

- The principal's role
 - Requirements of the principal role
 - DET's approach to principal PD
 - The principal PD cycle
-

1.1 The principal's role

DET's *Performance and Development Guidelines for Principal Class Employees* describes a principal's role as providing effective instructional and organisational leadership to:

- promote effective teaching practices
- ensure that students are supported to do well
- ensure that the school community is working together.

Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership involves understanding which teaching strategies have the most impact on students in a school. Principals use this knowledge to support their staff to apply these strategies and provide an environment where students are engaged in learning.

When principals are effective instructional leaders, they:

- lead the implementation and improvement of highly effective teaching models
- participate in teachers' learning and development
- plan and evaluate the curriculum
- establish clear goals and expectations
- support students' engagement, wellbeing and achievement.

Organisational leadership

Organisational leadership involves managing all of a school's available resources to sustain effective teaching, learning and engagement. Principals use the skills and knowledge of all school staff to build a positive and safe learning environment. They also manage financial and non-financial resources provided by DET and the school community to ensure that school buildings and programs support effective teaching and learning.

When principals are effective organisational leaders, they:

- secure and allocate resources that are aligned with the school's teaching and learning goals
- create and maintain a respectful school environment that manages conflict and enables learning
- create connections within the school community so staff, students, parents and carers can work together to improve student outcomes
- build networks beyond the school community and contribute to the education system.

Professional leadership

DET recognises that principals can positively impact students' engagement, wellbeing and achievement through 'professional leadership'. This is one of the four statewide priorities in DET's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), which we discuss in Section 1.2.

As Figure 1A shows, effective professional leadership, which can be exercised by principals and other school leaders, has four dimensions each including instructional and organisational leadership.

FIGURE 1A: **The dimensions of professional leadership**



Source: DET.

1.2 Requirements of the principal role

Principals are employed by DET and are responsible for implementing DET’s policies. DET expects principals to lead improvements in student outcomes, teaching quality and their school’s overall performance. Principals work autonomously and are supported by SEILs.

Principals are accountable to their school council and DET for their school’s performance and progress towards the Victorian Government’s Education State targets. DET expects principals to align human, financial and intellectual resources within their school to achieve the school’s goals and priorities.

School councils play a role in appointing principals but are not involved in the annual principal PD cycle. DET is responsible for establishing and maintaining performance expectations and conducting assessments.

Principals' contract of employment

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* is the legislative foundation that DET uses to employ principals.

DET employs principals through a contract of employment that lasts for up to five years. This contract requires principals to:

'lead and manage the planning, delivery, evaluation and improvement of the education of all students in a community through the strategic deployment of resources provided by the Department [DET] and the school community.'

Schedule B in the principal contract of employment describes the duties and core accountabilities of the role across 10 areas. Principals must perform these duties in line with statewide guidelines and government policies.

The contract also requires principals to participate in a performance review process relating to the 10 core accountabilities.

Figure 1B shows the core accountabilities described in Schedule B aligned to instructional and organisational leadership requirements.

FIGURE 1B: 10 core accountabilities described in Schedule B sorted by leadership type

Instructional leadership	Organisational leadership
Ensure the delivery of a comprehensive, high-quality education program to all students	Be executive officer of the school council
Contribute to system-wide activities, including policy and strategic planning and development	Implement decisions of the school council
Appropriately involve staff, students and the community in the development, implementation and review of school policies, programs and operations	Establish and manage financial systems in accordance with DET and school council requirements
Report to DET, the school community, parents and students on the achievements of the school and of individual students as appropriate	Represent DET in the school and the local community
	Effectively manage and integrate the resources available to the school
	Comply with regulatory and legislative requirements and DET policies and procedures

Source: DET.

The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes

The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes model (FISO model) is DET’s policy for leading and delivering school education in Victoria. It provides the context for DET’s principal performance expectations and shapes the content of principals’ PDPs.

DET expects principals to implement school improvement strategies consistently with the FISO model. The FISO model is made up of four statewide priorities that are enacted through 16 dimensions of school practice. The four statewide priorities are:

- excellence in teaching and learning
- community engagement in learning
- positive climate for learning
- professional leadership.

Schools use the FISO model to develop their school strategic plan (SSP) and annual implementation plan (AIP).

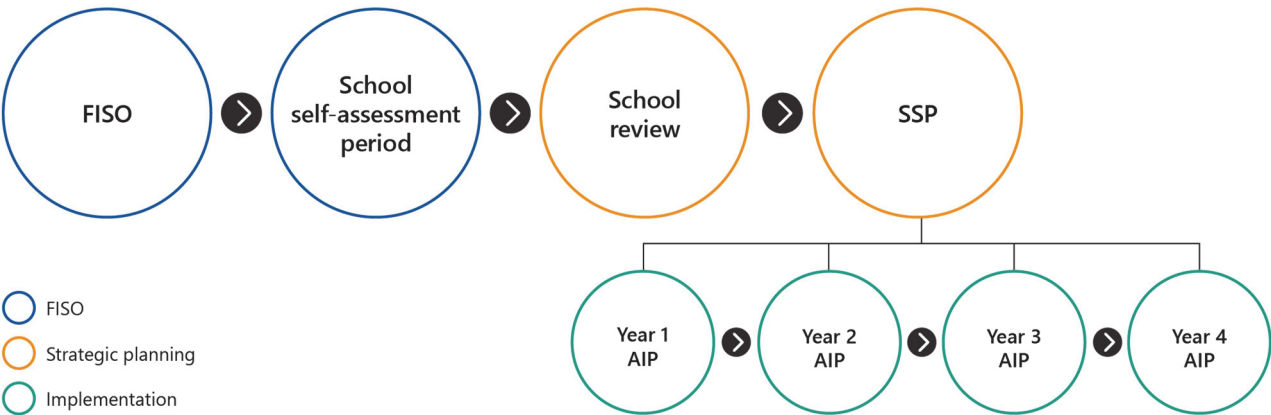
Each school undergoes a four-year review and planning cycle. In each review year, the principal leads their school through a self-assessment against the FISO Continua of Practice for School Improvement, which is a tool that assists principals and teachers to review and refine what works in their school. An independent review team authorised by DET works with each principal to evaluate their school’s performance against the goals and targets in their current SSP.

During this review process, schools create a new SSP for the next cycle, which enables them to develop their next AIP. Figure 1C shows the review and planning cycle.

SSPs describe schools’ high-level goals and targets over four years. Key improvement strategies set out how schools will achieve these goals.

AIPs outline the actions that schools will take that year to achieve the goals and targets in their SSP.

FIGURE 1C: **School review and planning cycle**



Source: VAGO, from DET information.

DET expects the goals, strategies and targets in SSPs and AIPs to inform the work and professional learning of each staff member at a school.

1.3 DET's approach to principal PD

In 2015, DET introduced the PD model, which aligns principals' performance with their school's strategic priorities for overall improvement and student learning outcomes.

The PD model requires principals to set goals across the following three domains of principal practice:

- leadership of quality teaching practices and lifelong learning
- strategic resource management
- system and community engagement.

Principals set an additional goal against 'school and student outcomes'.

The PD model also includes assessment of Schedule B core accountabilities.

DET adopts a whole-of-practice approach to its PD model. It recognises that the totality of principals' work and leadership within their school context contributes to improvements in student engagement, wellbeing and achievement.

Strategic and annual planning

DET expects principals' PDPs to be informed by their school's AIP goals, key improvement strategies and targets. This alignment happens when a principal's PDP goals, strategies and targets are taken directly from their school's AIP or clearly support the work described in the AIP.

Each AIP includes a professional learning and development plan (PLDP) that:

- identifies professional learning priorities for the school
- describes who will participate in these learning priorities, when the learning will occur and what expertise the school will access.

DET expects the contents of a school's PLDP to flow into each staff member's PDP, including the principal's. DET's intention for this is to unite school staff towards achieving the priorities in its SSP.

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals

DET's whole-of-practice approach is based on the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (the Standard). The Standard is published by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

The Standard is based on the following three leadership requirements:

- vision and values
- knowledge and understanding
- personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills.

It states that principals enact these leadership requirements through five professional practices:

- leading, teaching and learning
- developing themselves and others
- leading improvement, innovation and change

- leading the management of the school
- engaging and working with the community.

The Standard outlines leadership profiles and development pathways against each of the professional practices. While not intended for use as a performance assessment framework, principals are encouraged to use it for reflection on their professional growth and development.

DET's PD model supports principals to incorporate these professional practices into their PDPs. It does this by aligning three goals in its PDP template with the professional practices (see Figure 1D).

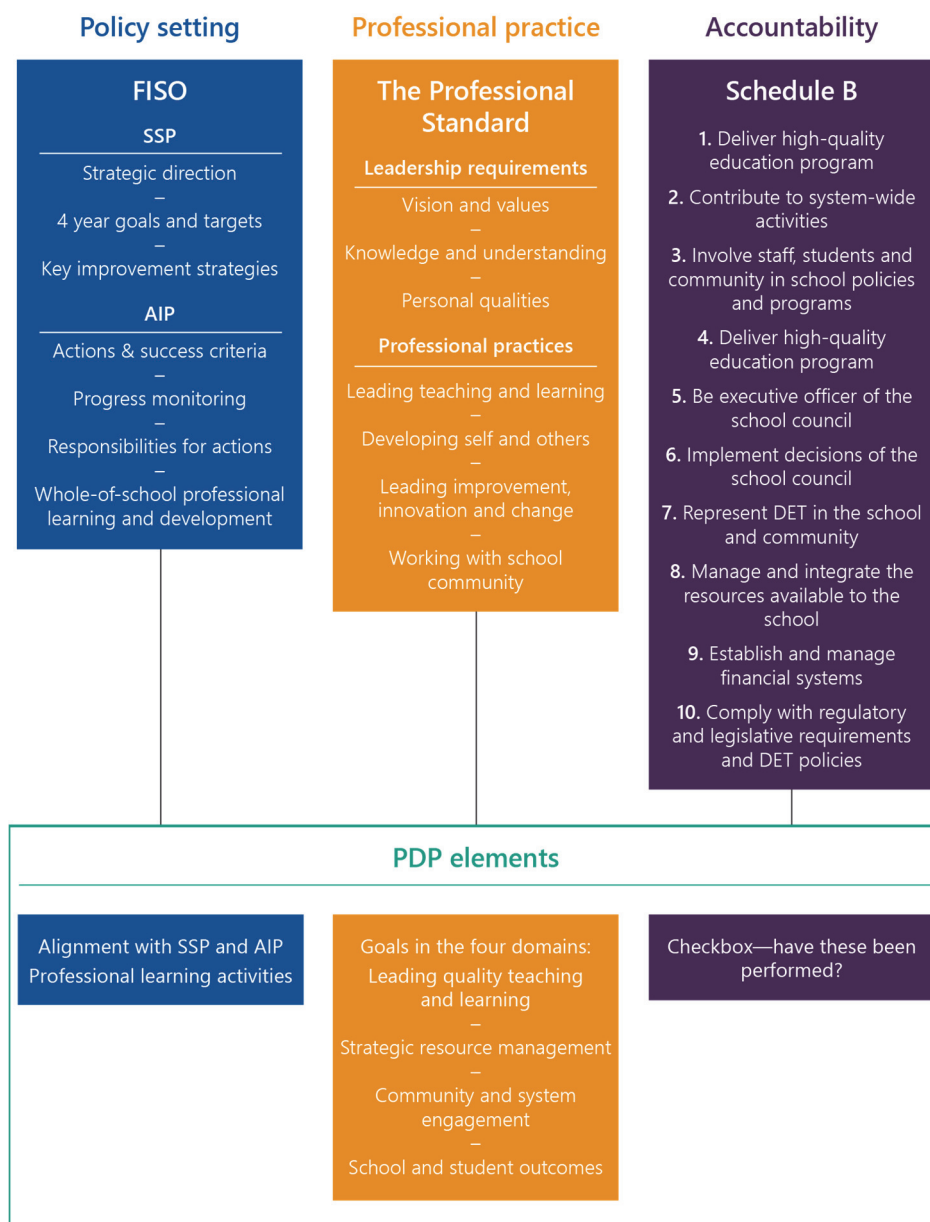
FIGURE 1D: Alignment between DET's three domains of principal practice and AITSL's five professional practices

DET domain of principal practice	DET description	AITSL professional practices
Leadership of quality teaching and lifelong learning	Principal-class employees are the leaders of high-quality teaching and learning in the school community. They set high expectations for everyone in the community and develop students, teachers and themselves through building a culture of lifelong learning, challenge and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading, teaching and learning • developing themselves and others
Strategic resource management	Principals effectively optimise resources and lead innovation and change to deliver high-quality educational outcomes for all students. Principals lead evidence and data-based improvements to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of school resources (including human, financial and physical resources) to achieve the school's priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading the management of the school • leading improvement, innovation and change
Strengthening community and system engagement	Principals develop and maintain positive and purposeful relationships with students, parents/carers and the broader school community. This includes using multiple sources of feedback from the community to drive improvement, ensuring a culturally rich and diverse school environment and contributing to the school system through engaging and collaborating with other schools and external organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging and working with the community

Source: DET's *Performance and Development Guidelines for Principal Class Employees*.

Principals set their PDP goals, strategies and targets to align with their school's SSP and AIP and the Standard's framework. Figure 1E shows how these elements combine to make up a complete PDP.

FIGURE 1E: Elements of DET's principal PDP



Source: VAGO.

Professional learning and development

DET provides a professional learning and development framework for principals. The content of this framework focuses on implementing the FISO model. DET delivers the framework through forums and activities for principals throughout the school year and at various levels of the education system, such as:

- communities of practice meetings, which occur approximately monthly at a network level

- area principal forums, which take place in terms 1, 3 and 4 and occur at a region and area level
- the Education State School Leadership Conference, which is a system-level event that occurs annually in Term 2.

In 2019, these professional learning activities focused on:

- strengthening instructional leadership
- developing an evaluative mindset
- creating collective responsibility and collective efficacy
- embedding structures, processes and culture
- leading improvement.

Principal professional learning can also occur through professional reading, embedded learning within schools, small-group actions and formal courses. For example, DET's Bastow Institute of Education Leadership delivers a range of courses to support the development of emerging and new principals.

1.4 The principal PD cycle

Roles and responsibilities

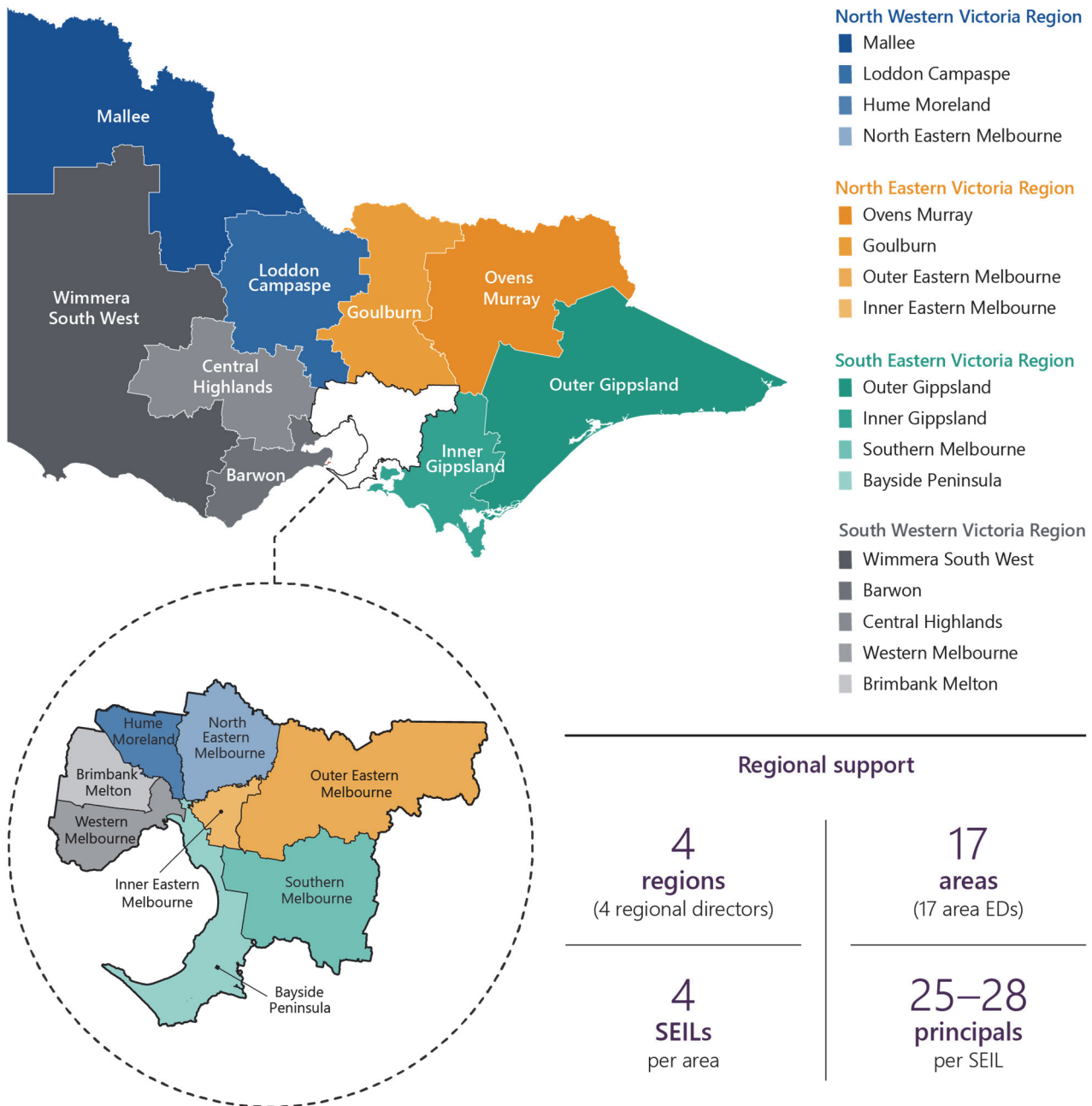
DET has a regional operations model, which means that it delivers support to schools and principals through its regions, areas and networks.

DET has four regions and each region has approximately 400 principals. A regional director manages principals in each region. Regional directors authorise SEILs to manage principals on a day-to-day basis.

Sixty-eight SEILs operate within 17 areas and each work with a network of approximately 25 to 28 principals. SEILs work closely with key executives in their area; the area executive director (ED) and the ED, school improvement.

Figure 1F shows DET's region-based support for schools and the distribution of senior staff that support the PD model.

FIGURE 1F: DET's region-based support and distribution of staff supporting the PD model

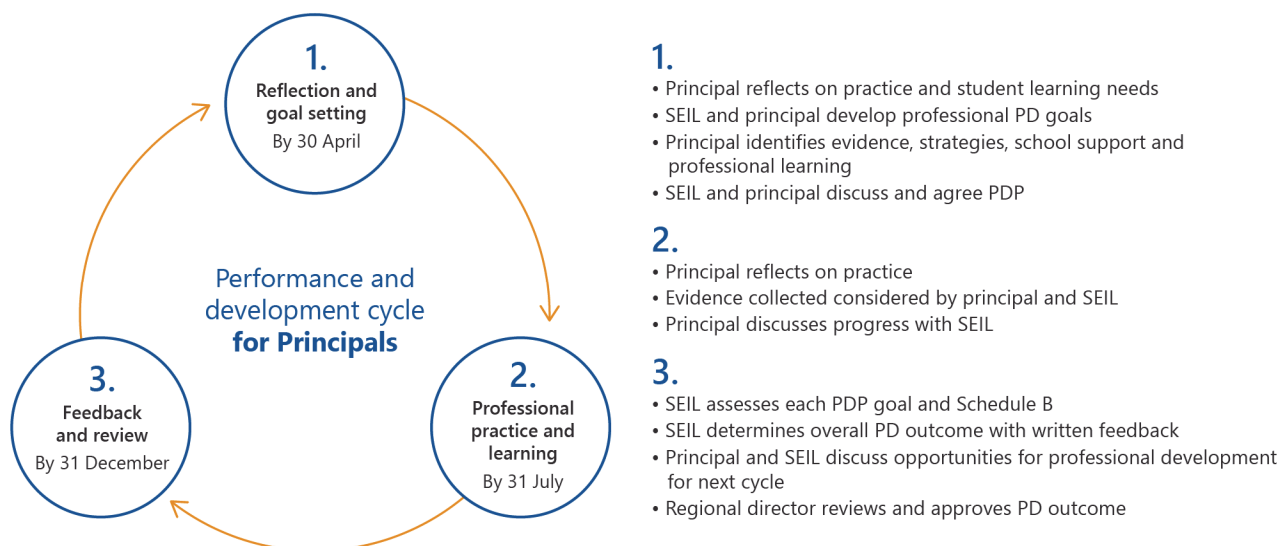


Source: VAGO, from DET information.

SEILs are authorised by regional directors to review their principals' performance. This means that they approve PDP goals, have performance conversations with principals and recommend an outcome for each PD cycle. Regional directors are responsible for approving the outcome of each principal's performance review.

Figure 1G shows the key stages of the PDP process and who is involved in each stage.

FIGURE 1G: **Key stages and roles involved in PD cycle**



Source: VAGO, from DET information.

By 30 April, each principal must be advised of their final PD outcome from the previous year so that any remuneration progression can occur on 1 May. For example, principals participating in the 2019 PD cycle will know their final outcome by 30 April 2020 so that progression can occur from 1 May 2020.

Implementing the PD cycle

DET provides guidance material to help principals, SEILs and regional directors move through each stage of the PD cycle. Principals enter their PDP goals into eduPay's PDP module, which allows SEILs and regional directors to view PDPs and provide feedback.

The purpose of eduPay is to streamline human capital management within DET. The tool can monitor timeliness, completion rates and review outcomes for PDPs. DET rolled out eduPay to all of its non-teaching staff in 2016 and to schools in 2017 and 2018.

DET set up eduPay securely to ensure that PDP content and assessment outcomes can only be seen by the principal, reviewer (SEIL) and approver (regional director). Principals can see the comments made by their SEIL and regional director and the final approved outcome of the PD cycle. SEILs can see the PDPs of each principal in their network and regional directors can see the PDPs of each principal in their region.

The ED of DET's People Division receives annual reports of PDP outcomes. These reports contain the results of all teaching services' performance outcomes, including outcomes for principals. DET's People Division uses this data to administer salary progression.

DET has committed to using PDP data at an 'aggregate level and not at an individual level (that is, the data contained in an individual employee's performance and

development plan will not be used beyond the school)'. This is one of DET's commitments in the *Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 Additional Commitments* (VGSA 2017). DET interprets this to mean that any data in an individual employee's PDP, whether teacher or principal, will not be used or referred to for purposes beyond the school. While DET staff use individual data to implement the PD model, the People Division does not undertake analysis of this data.

Guidance material for principals and reviewers

Materials for principals

DET has a suite of guidance materials for principals that describe its approach to principal PD and the PDP process. The key document is the *Performance and Development Guidelines for Principal Class Employees*. This document describes:

- DET's whole-of-practice approach to principal PD
- the relationship between the FISO and principal PD
- the Standard and how it aligns with PDP goals
- the goal-setting process
- the PD cycle
- the role of professional learning
- links to other resources.

Other resources include guides about setting goals, selecting evidence to prepare for mid and end-of-cycle review conversations and how to use the PDP module in eduPay.

DET's mid and end-of-cycle guidance to principals states that while PDPs must incorporate elements of their school's SSP and AIP, they should also incorporate goals that are relevant to individual professional development.

Materials for SEILs

DET provides SEILs with a guidance document that describes their role in school planning. This document also defines their role and responsibilities for the principal PD cycle, including approving PDP goals and providing feedback at the mid and end points of the review cycle.

DET's guidance for SEILs describes how it expects principals' PDPs to align with school planning and professional learning. It notes that the Standard outlines the quality, practice and professional expectations for principals.

The eduPay PDP module

DET introduced the PDP module in eduPay to schools in 2017 to replace its existing paper-based PDP system. It finished rolling out the module in 2018. The module gives DET a greater ability to oversee principals' compliance with PDP requirements, timeliness and completion. The 2019 PDP cycle was the module's first full cycle of operation.

DET adopted the module to improve the efficiency of the PD process and PDP documentation. The tool holds a single up-to-date version of each principal's PDP and has reminders and a built-in workflow for users and reviewers. It acts as a central repository for PDP goals, evidence and feedback.

DET matches outcomes data from eduPay with data on employees' eligibility for salary progression. The results of this process flow through to DET's payroll staff to administer.

The module has specific functions and views for each participant in the PDP process. An employee, such as a principal, fills out their PDP online and attaches electronic files to show evidence of their achievements. Reviewers (SEILs) view the PDPs of their direct reports and complete review steps, such as providing feedback, online. Approvers (regional directors) can see PDPs and reviewers' comments.

Batch approval is available to regional directors, who have large numbers of PDPs to approve. This means that they can approve multiple PDPs at once.

2.

Implementation of DET's PD model

Conclusion

DET has limited oversight of the principal PD model and there are inconsistencies in its guidance materials about it. As a result, some principals' PDPs lack:

- focus on organisational leadership, which is fundamental to the principal role
- individual development goals because they focus more on the school's overall goals
- consistent assessment of the Schedule B accountabilities.

Principals play an important role in improving their school's learning outcomes, so it is vital that DET takes a more holistic and consistent approach to implementing the PD model.

This chapter discusses:

- How the PD model is implemented
 - How DET manages Schedule B accountabilities and performance expectations
 - Goal setting and professional development
 - The eduPay PDP module
 - How DET assesses principal performance
 - How DET oversees principal PD
-

2.1 Guidance on the principal PD model's purpose

DET's principal PD process complies with legislative requirements and the approach outlined in the VGSA 2017. During the process:

SEILs ...	Principals ...
Review school data and their region's priorities for school improvement	Set goals with their reviewer and submit their PDP in eduPay
Coordinate the PDP process by sending reminders and prompts to their principals to start the reflection and goal-setting processes. They also organise mid and end-of-cycle review conversations	Gather evidence for mid and end-of-cycle review conversations
Endorse PDPs and complete other review and endorsement steps in eduPay	Participate in mid and end-of-cycle review conversations
Provide feedback throughout the principal PD cycle and exercise their professional judgement while assessing PDPs	

However, DET does not consistently implement or provide clear guidance on some parts of the process.

DET's guidance material for principals and SEILs about the PD model's purpose is unclear and inconsistent. This means that principals and SEILs approach the PD cycle with different expectations.

DET's guidance material for principals describes its whole-of-practice approach, the Standard's professional practices and development pathway and how PDP goals need to align with SSPs and AIPs. It also encourages principals to set goals that are relevant to their individual development.

However, DET's guidance material for SEILs refers only briefly to its whole-of-practice approach. Instead, it emphasises that a principal's PDP goals should closely align with their school's SSP and AIP.

As a result, principals, SEILs and area EDs have a different understanding of the PD model's purpose. Our interviews with 16 principals, seven SEILs and four area EDs found that in practice:

Principals think the PD model's purpose is to ...	SEILs and area EDs think the PD model's purpose is to ...
Manage Schedule B accountabilities	Be a lever for school improvement
Improve their instructional leadership	Achieve a school's AIP targets
Reflect all aspects of their role, including organisational leadership and their individual development needs	

Two area EDs and four SEILs reflected that the current PDP process does not adequately capture all aspects of the principal role, including organisational leadership. This was reiterated by interviewed principals, who explained that they did not feel supported through the PDP process to develop their organisational leadership skills.

The lack of shared understanding about the purpose of principal PD has a negative impact on PD practices and outcomes. It means that principals can experience a PD cycle where their goals are largely irrelevant to their development needs or their performance assessment does not focus on all aspects of their role.

2.2 Managing Schedule B accountabilities and performance expectations

The Schedule B accountabilities are the minimum expectations of the principal role. The principal contract of employment expects principals to be 'honest and diligent' in performing these accountabilities. In its guidance materials for SEILs and principals, DET states that 'satisfactory performance' of these accountabilities is necessary to determine that a principal has met their PD requirements.

DET's guidance material does not clearly explain how Schedule B accountabilities should be managed in the PD process. This can make principals feel uncertain about their performance expectations and assessment criteria for Schedule B.

DET only briefly discusses the Schedule B accountabilities in its guidance materials. It also does not provide assessment criteria, examples of relevant evidence or performance benchmarks for them. While DET's guidance infers that principals are accountable for performing their duties and responsibilities at all times, it does not describe how to assess this.

DET's PDP template includes a checkbox for SEILs to confirm that a principal has met all of the Schedule B accountabilities. However, interviewed SEILs agreed that they do not have clear guidance on how to assess this. Instead, SEILs said that they use their professional judgement and knowledge of each principal and their school to determine if a principal has met these accountabilities.

The Victorian Public Sector Commission's (VPSC) *Executive Performance Management Framework* (the VPSC Framework) describes role accountability as one of the 'foundation principles' of PD models. Better practice PD models explicitly explain this in their guidance material and state that poor performance, or an employee's failure to perform these duties, should be addressed immediately. See Appendix E for more information on what better practice PD involves.

DET's unclear guidance about Schedule B accountabilities limits the PD model's effectiveness. It also means that principals across DET's regions and the state are likely to experience inconsistent assessment practices.

Role accountability involves routinely holding an employee accountable for performing the duties of their role.

2.3 Goal setting and professional development

Goal setting has two functions in a PD model. It identifies areas for professional development and describes targets and strategies to measure progress towards those goals.

In DET's PD model, goals and targets form the basis of performance assessments. These are additional to the Schedule B accountabilities.

DET's guidance for principals states that they will use their school's priorities, as stated in the SSP and the AIP, to reflect on their practice and inform their PDP goals. DET's guidance states that a principal's goals should aim to improve their school and student outcomes and reflect their development needs.

Balancing school-focused and individualised PDP goals

The process for setting principals' PDP goals is less effective in supporting personal professional growth when SEILs:

- suggest goals and targets that are relevant to their region rather than goals that are specific to the individual school and principal
- expect very strong alignment between PDPs and AIPs
- do not approve PDP goals related to organisational leadership.

DET's guidance to principals emphasises that the PDP is an individual document for professional development, but this does not reflect many principals' experience. The strong focus on school improvement means that DET's PD model is not implemented as effectively as it could be to promote principals' individual professional growth and career development. There is therefore a risk that principals experience a depersonalised PD cycle that does not help them develop in all aspects of their role or become the education system leaders they would like to be.

For example, three interviewed principals said that their SEIL had refused organisational leadership goals because they were not directly aligned with their school's AIP. One principal gave us an example of a goal they proposed about learning to lead change when introducing a new instructional model at their school, which their SEIL did not agree to include in their PDP.

Alignment of PDP goals with school AIPs

There is a strong alignment between principals' PDP goals and their school's SSP and AIP when goals relate to instructional leadership and student achievement. There is

“ There is a standardised approach to goal setting regardless of school size and 'network goals' are now becoming evident in preliminary PDP discussions for the new year.

—Survey respondent

weaker alignment for goals relating to strategic resource management and community and system engagement, which involve organisational leadership.

SEILs implement the PDP process with a focus on each school's AIP and SSP. They do this during their goal-setting conversations with principals and by aligning school improvement meetings with performance review conversations.

Each interviewed SEIL said that they prepare for the principal goal-setting process by identifying relevant goals based on regional school improvement data and school-specific student achievement data. They communicate this information to the principals they manage.

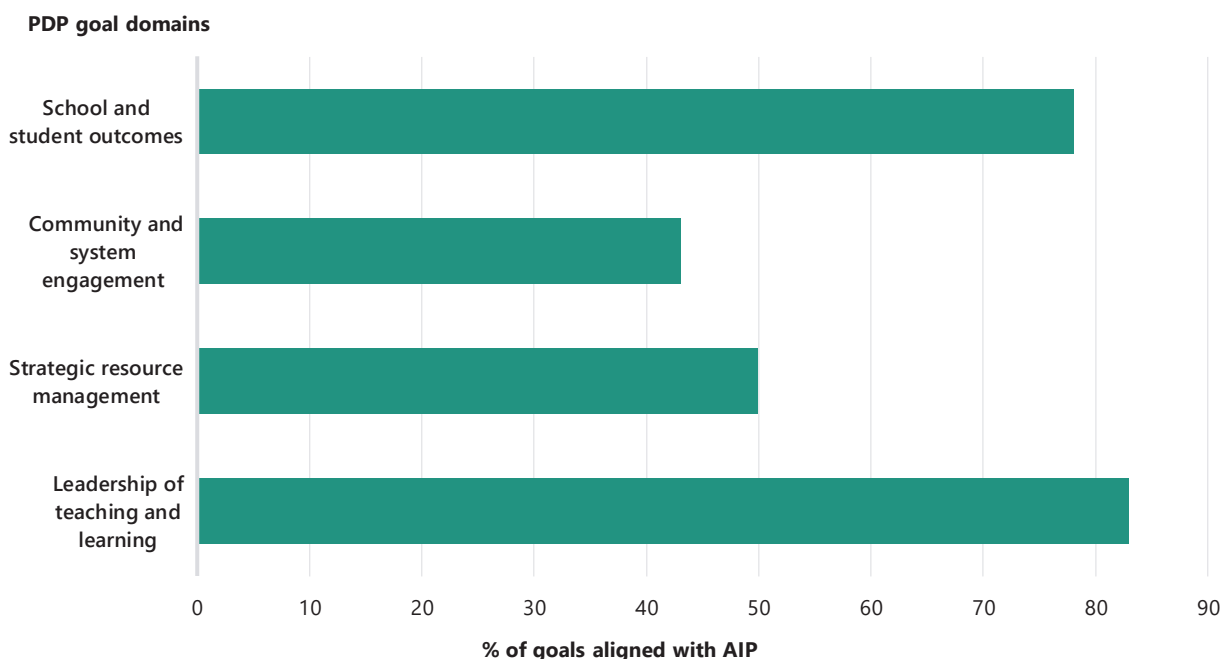
Not all SEILs see the principal PDP process as exclusively related to assessing the principal's delivery of the school's AIP. Three interviewed SEILs expressed the view that the current PDP process has room for personal professional development goals and that it is ideal for each principal's PDP to have these.

During this audit, we surveyed 1 332 principals and received 479 responses. 96 per cent of survey respondents agreed that their PDP aligned with their school's SSP and AIP. All interviewed principals agreed with this statement. Refer to Appendix D for further information about our survey method and the margin of error for all results.

By aligning principals' PDPs with schools' AIPs, SEILs focus on school improvement when assessing principal performance. Across a sample of 40 de-identified principal PDPs and their schools' SSPs and AIPs, 60 per cent of these 40 PDPs aligned with their school's corresponding SSP and AIP, which is in line with DET's policy and guidance. Only six contained goals that were relevant to other aspects of the principal role, such as organisational leadership.

Figure 2A shows the percentage of goals in this sample of PDPs, grouped by goal domain, that align with the corresponding school's AIP.

FIGURE 2A: **Alignment between PDP goals and school AIPs**



Source: VAGO, from DET's 2019 eduPay dataset.

As Figure 2A shows, there is a weaker alignment between PDP goals and the school's AIP in the domains of 'strategic resource management' and 'community and system engagement'. For eight PDPs, these were not aligned because the school was going through the school review process. These principals' PDPs focused on the review process rather than the AIP or their own professional development. This approach works with the FISO model, but without clear guidance there is a risk that a principal's PDP goals will not be balanced across all aspects of their or reflect their individual development needs.

PDPs that were less closely aligned to the school's AIP reflected a better balance of the school's context with individual goals for professional growth from a whole-of-role perspective.

DET's strong focus on aligning principals' PDPs with their school's AIP means that some SEILs and principals use goal domains for organisational leadership to add student achievement goals. Within the domain of 'strategic resource management', 40 per cent of the sample PDPs had goals specific to student achievement outcomes or instructional leadership. In the domain of 'community and system engagement', 43-per cent of these PDPs described student wellbeing, instructional leadership or school review goals. When goal domains for organisational leadership are used for instructional leadership outcomes, the opportunity for principals to develop in all aspects of their role is undermined

When principals' have a lack of individual goals, they often see their PDP as less necessary. One in five surveyed principals stated that the alignment between AIPs and

PDPs is so strong that the AIP should replace the PDP to ease the administrative burden. Four of the 16 interviewed principals also expressed this opinion.

Surveyed and interviewed principals cited several reasons why they would prefer to reduce their workload by replacing their PDP with the AIP, including:

- they have a heavy workload
- there is already a sustained focus on school improvement outside of the PDP process
- the PDP module in eduPay delivers a poor user experience
- their experience of the PD cycle varies substantially.

As expressed by these surveyed and interviewed principals, strong alignment between PDP and AIP goals means that, in practice, school improvement targets also become the principal's performance expectations.

While there should be a clear relationship between principal performance and school performance, there is a separate and specific process designed to assess school performance. The principal PD model is most effective when linked to this and it allows each principal to identify individualised goals and development actions to achieve wide school objectives.

SEILs' recognition of school leadership work

Because DET's current approach can overlook the organisational leadership aspects of the principal role, there is a risk that a principal's effectiveness in, for example, financial or human resource management or leading their school community may not be recognised or further developed.

Feedback from surveyed and interviewed principals indicated that while their instructional leadership work is visible to their SEIL, the work they do to manage their school community is not. Eighteen per cent of survey respondents commented that their SEIL does not recognise this type of leadership work. These principals attributed this to their SEIL's heavy workload from having a large span of control, high turnover in the SEIL role or DET overemphasising school data as an indicator of performance.

Half of the interviewed principals described a PD process that overlooks their school leadership work. One interviewed principal felt that their SEIL does not see the work they do to lead their school, which has a complex context. This principal experienced a PD process that did not recognise the entirety of their role. Another principal described the PD process as overlooking the 'everyday work' of school culture, community support and student and family engagement.

Span of control refers to the relationship between managers and the number of people they supervise. Best-practice spans of control for Australian public sector agencies range between five to 12 employees per supervisor.

2.4 Assessing principal performance

DET assesses principal performance based on whether a principal has met the Schedule B accountabilities, achieved their PDP goals and provided evidence of improved practice and their impact on school and student outcomes.

Each principal agrees on their PDP goals, targets and evidence with their SEIL. DET's *Principal Evidence Guide* describes the types of evidence that principals can use to support their performance and achievements, such as:

- student achievement data
- school survey data
- curriculum documentation
- other documentation relating to professional learning, school management or communication with the school community.

This list is not exhaustive; principals may choose other types of evidence if their SEIL agrees.

How SEILs assess principal performance

As Figure 2B shows, a SEIL gives an overall assessment of principal performance by assessing whether a principal has met their PDP goals and Schedule B accountabilities.

FIGURE 2B: **Assessment criteria for principal PDPs**

PDP goals x 4	+	Schedule B	=	Overall performance assessment
Meets requirements		Meets requirements		Meets requirements
–		–		–
Partially meets requirements		Does not meet requirements		Does not meet requirements
–				
Does not meet requirements				

Source: VAGO, from DET.

DET provides definitions for a three-point scale for PDP goals. These definitions are based on if a principal meets (or partially meets or does not meet) 'the goal set in their PDP, and therefore demonstrates the required performance and professional growth and improvement of practice at this stage of career development'. DET's guidance uses the Standard to frame performance, growth, professional practice and career stages but does not provide advice on how SEILs should apply this in practice.

SEILs assess whether principals have honestly and diligently performed the Schedule B accountabilities. They are required to report this using a two-point scale of 'meets' or 'does not meet' requirements. In the absence of specific guidance or assessment criteria, they use their professional judgement and knowledge of each principal and school to assess if a principal meets the Schedule B accountabilities. However, this approach may be insufficient to assess performance of some accountabilities, such as financial and human resources management or school governance, as this work may not be visible to all SEILs.

Interviewed SEILs were aware of the need to ensure that principals are accountable in all aspects of their role. Some practices for assessing principal performance were consistent for all interviewed SEILs. This included tracking a principal's progress and achievement through careful use of evidence in their PDP and making the time to visit each principal at work in their school.

DET's guidance to SEILs and principals does not explicitly say how SEILs should assess a principal's overall performance. It is inferred, rather than stated, that a principal

needs to get an assessment outcome of 'meets requirements' for the Schedule B to receive an overall performance outcome of 'meets requirements'. DET's guidance does not state if a minimum number of PDP goals need to be assessed as 'meets requirements' and it is not clear how the 'partially meets requirements' rating contributes to a principal's overall performance assessment.

This lack of clarity around assessment criteria means that a principal's performance assessment relies on the goals and targets agreed in their PDP and their individual SEIL's professional judgement.

How SEILs use the three-point scale to assess PDP goals

Interviewed SEILs were aware of the need for nuance when assessing principal performance. In this context, nuance can involve assessing one or two individual PDP goals as 'partially met' or 'not met', while giving an overall assessment of 'meets expectations'. This approach is in line with DET's policy and guidance.

Feedback from the interviews we conducted suggested that SEILs are somewhat reluctant to use the 'partially meets expectations' rating for PDP goals. Three SEILs said that they rarely give 'partially meets expectations' ratings, or only in circumstances where a PDP goal has been 'derailed' by factors outside of the principal's control. As one SEIL said, 'Principals work really hard and can see it as a real whack if you give them a partially met'. This feedback may also reflect a culture that is reluctant to address underperformance and hold difficult performance conversations.

While two interviewed principals were more accepting of this nuanced approach, others were not. Most principals experienced their PD as a binary assessment and associated a 'partially met' rating with negative perceptions of their work. This may inhibit their goal setting and targets so that they can be sure of a 'meets requirements' assessment.

Only one interviewed principal mentioned that their SEIL used a 'partially met expectations' rating for their PDP goals. This early-career principal said that they did not think the PD process would be used punitively and was 'not afraid' of a goal being assessed as partially met. This is because they consider their PDP goals as aspirational and that 'what is important is the strategy and effort brought to trying to meet that goal'. We discuss how SEILs used the 'partially meets requirements' rating in the 2019 PD cycle in Section 3.1.

“ The meet/does not meet option has meant that if you do not meet the target 100% when you have set stretch goals for yourself and your school, you run the risk of being labelled as 'not met' even though significant growth has been made professionally and for your school.”

—Survey respondent

2.5 Principals' experiences of performance assessments

Performance assessments are more effective when employees perceive them as fair, consistent, accurate and open to their input. When this happens, employees tend to accept constructive feedback and their performance is more likely to improve.

Our interviews with principals and SEILs and the results from our principal survey showed that:

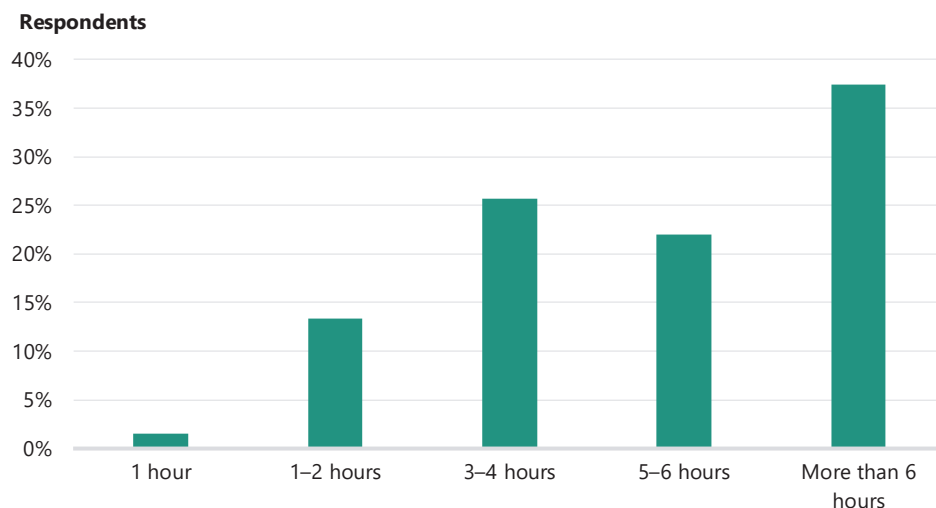
- most principals put significant effort into the PD cycle
- most principals are confident that their SEIL understands their school's context and performance data
- large spans of control and the narrow focus on school improvement increases the risk that DET will not identify principals who do not meet the organisational leadership expectations of the role

- in the absence of a documented process, area EDs informally moderate performance assessments, which leads to inconsistent practices across the state.

How principals engage with the PD cycle

Figure 2C shows that surveyed principals most commonly spent over six hours on the 2019 PD cycle.

FIGURE 2C: Time principals spent on the 2019 PD cycle



Source: VAGO.

Our analysis of 1 425 principal PDPs from the 2019 PD cycle found that principals concisely describe their goals. The mean word count across all goals was 4.6 and the maximum word count was 14.

Closer examination of a sample of 40 PDPs confirmed this result. While the goals themselves were brief, each PDP described the strategies and evidence required to demonstrate the achievement of goals in greater detail.

Additionally, 93 per cent of principals engaged with eduPay's PDP module in 2019 and 91 per cent recorded goals against the three domains of principal practice and school and student outcomes. Seven per cent of PDPs were recorded as blank and were not included in our analysis. We discuss these PDPs in Section 3.1.

Two per cent of PDPs recorded in the eduPay module were inactive for 2019. This was due to unintentional duplication, the principal moving to another role for the year or the principal being on leave.

SEILs' understanding of school context

Figure 2D shows that nearly all surveyed principals think that their SEIL understands their work and their individual school's context.

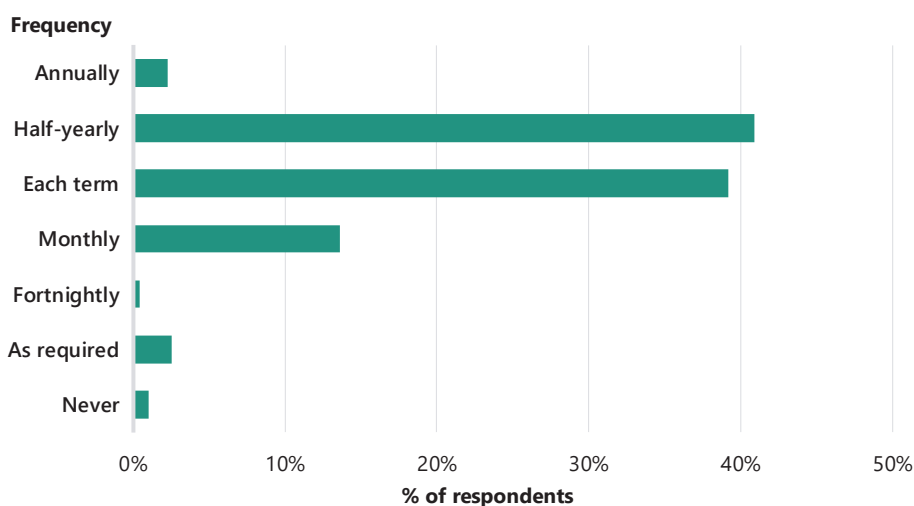
FIGURE 2D: **Principal perceptions of how SEILs understand their work and context**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My reviewer understands my school context	61%	29%	6.5%	3.5%
My reviewer has a good understanding of my work as principal	66%	23%	8%	3%

Source: VAGO.

As Figure 2E shows, nearly 80 per cent of respondents see their SEIL between two to four times a year. We found no relationship between meeting frequency and a principal's confidence that their SEIL understands their school's context and performance data.

FIGURE 2E: **Frequency of principal meetings with SEILs**



Source: VAGO.

Moderation processes

It is important that PDPs are assessed consistently across the state to ensure that all principals are treated fairly. However, DET does not have a documented moderation process or guidance for SEILs to ensure that this occurs.

Interviewed area EDs and SEILs described the importance of a cohesive approach to principal performance and the informal moderation processes they use to help achieve this. These processes usually involve regular conversations between SEILs and area EDs through meetings at relevant points throughout the PD cycle. Area EDs and SEILs advised us that these moderation conversations focus on performance expectations and consistency of assessment.

Despite this, there is no evidence that moderation occurs consistently across or within DET's areas or regions. There is also no evidence that the outcomes of moderation conversations result in consistent assessment processes across the state.

Only 35 per cent of surveyed principals felt confident or very confident that the PD process assesses their performance fairly and consistently.

2.6 Identifying and supporting underperformance

DET's guidance to SEILs states that the mid-cycle review is an opportunity to raise concerns about performance and expectations for improvement. It also states that such concerns should be raised as soon as they are identified. DET's guidance to principals and SEILs on the PD cycle does not describe the procedures for managing poor performance or what happens if the overall assessment outcome is 'does not meet requirements'.

Where unsatisfactory performance is identified, the principal contract of employment and Schedule 4 of the VGSA 2017 require DET's secretary to provide a written notification to the affected principal. Schedule 4 also describes a support period with a focus on feedback and progress. A decision on employment is made at the end of this support period.

DET's guidance to SEILs and principals explains that the mid-cycle review conversation is an opportunity to identify if a principal may be at risk of not reaching their targets. If this is the case, then the principal and SEIL are encouraged to discuss progress and evidence, possible practice improvements and refine the goal if appropriate. The SEIL confirms expectations for improvement prior to the end-of-cycle review. Interviewed SEILs and principals agreed that this happens in practice. Interviewed area EDs stressed that they work with SEILs to identify and support principals who may need it.

Three interviewed SEILs advised us that there is a lack of consistency across regions in assessing performance against the Schedule B accountabilities. In particular, they said that they lack guidance on how to define and identify underperformance in relation to these accountabilities and how to manage it effectively. In the absence of guidance, they said that they use their professional judgement to identify cases where they think a principal may need support to meet the Schedule B accountabilities. SEILs also draw on resources available through DET's area and region offices, including DET's Differentiated Support for School Improvement initiative.

The **Differentiated Support for School Improvement initiative** has four initiatives to help schools build teaching or leadership capabilities to improve school performance and student outcomes.

2.7 User experience of eduPay's PDP module

DET provides a range of technical support, quick reference guides and e-learning modules about eduPay's PDP module. DET's guidance materials are clear, comprehensive and consistent with its other guidance materials. The e-learning modules provide real-life examples of principals and their approach to the PD cycle.

However, principals rarely interact with DET's support materials for eduPay's PDP module. Over half of the principals we surveyed described DET's PDP technical guidance as 'not at all helpful'. Interviewed principals said that they engaged with the module as little as possible. Analytics for DET's People Division website show no

engagement with the e-learning modules. The People Division has a communication plan to increase principals' awareness of and engagement with e-learning modules.

Interviewed SEILs and principals consistently described eduPay's PDP module as 'clunky'. In particular, interviewed principals and SEILs cited issues in accessing or using the module. This included instances where SEILs who were new to the role or temporarily acting in it experienced considerable delays in gaining reviewer access to principals' PDPs. They advised us that this caused delays or an inability to complete the PDP process.

Some interviewed and surveyed principals also experienced time-out issues while filling in the module's online fields. To work around this problem, some reported completing their PDP in a separate document and uploading it as an attachment. Our analysis of the 2019 eduPay dataset found that 100 of 1 326 PDPs were blank but had attached documents, which indicates use of this workaround.

Interviewed principals and SEILs were critical of the number of check and acknowledgement steps in the eduPay PDP process. Some interviewed SEILs and principals described working around this by waiting until mid or end-of-cycle review meetings to complete multiple steps at once. While these principals and SEILs are still completing all of the required steps, they delay recording these steps in the eduPay module and may instead keep records via email.

Ten per cent of surveyed principals provided open text comments stating that the 2019 PDP module was difficult to use. Eighty-three per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement that the current performance review process, including eduPay, minimises the administrative burden of preparing PDPs.

Our analysis of the 2019 eduPay dataset found that 8 per cent of principals did not use the eduPay module as intended in 2019. In these cases, principals did not use the module's template and instead maintained personal records. This impacts the tool's usefulness for reviewers and approvers.

Improvements for the 2020 cycle

DET advised us that it reviewed the online PDP process for 2019 and has implemented improvements for the 2020 cycle. It identified the 2019 process as time-consuming and difficult to navigate, and found that multiple steps led to repetitive exchanges between principals and SEILs. Other steps were confusing or easily missed.

DET also advised us that it consulted with principal representative associations in December 2019 and demonstrated proposed process improvements to them. These improvements are aligned with DET's principal PD policies. Some of these changes include:

- reducing the number of steps from 12 to 10 and making two of them optional
- simplifying the processes for filling in the goal template and sharing comments between principals and SEILs.

DET has also connected LearnED, which is its electronic document management system, to eduPay's PDP module. This means that when a principal completes an e-learning module it is automatically recorded to their PDP. Principals can add any

learning that they complete in an external environment to LearnED. So far, this functionality has not been widely used.

DET advised us that some of the performance issues with eduPay's PDP module were due to some employees attaching large documents to their PDPs. There is now a limit on attachment size and DET reports that no further performance issues have been raised.

DET has also addressed issues with reviewers being unable to access PDPs. The system now allows a current reviewer to transfer PDPs to a new reviewer. SEILs have advised DET that they are using this function. Administrator users, such as business managers within schools and support officers in DET's area and regional offices and People Division, can also perform these transfers.

2.8 Monitoring the PD cycle

Regional directors, area EDs and SEILs implement the PD cycle and support principals to meet PDP timelines. They do this by providing advice about goal setting, prompting principals about PDP milestones and scheduling review conversations.

DET's area offices

Our interviews with DET's regional directors and area EDs showed that area EDs play an important role in the principal PD process including:

- communicating principal performance expectations, approaches to goal setting and targets, and evidence types to support PDP assessments to SEILs
- chairing regular meetings with SEILs to discuss school and principal performance, the type of advice and support that DET can provide to principals and moderating assessment outcomes
- supervising the completion of the principal PD cycle, particularly ensuring timely completion of PDP milestones.

One way that area EDs perform this support role is through participating in regular meetings with their region's executive team to discuss the principal PD cycle. For example, one region provided us with documents that outlined their 2020 agenda for monthly strategic meetings with area EDs. Principal PDPs were discussed in January, with a focus on goal setting, targets and managing Schedule B accountabilities. In September, the discussion focused on the end-of-cycle review.

Area EDs have an impact on the content and timing of the principal PD process and influence when principals complete PDP milestones. For example, in the 2019 PD cycle, 97 principal PDPs (or 7 per cent) recorded completion of the mid-cycle review milestone by the 31 July due date. One area office accounted for 42 PDPs (or 43 per cent) of the completed mid-cycle reviews. The local government areas within this area had mid-cycle review completion rates between 44 and 83 per cent. The mean completion rate for this milestone was 61 per cent.

The rate of PDPs completed by the 2019 deadline (31 December 2019) was also highly localised. Of the 362 PDPs completed by this milestone, 65 per cent came from two of DET's areas in the same region. The mean completion rate for these two areas was 89 per cent compared to the statewide completion rate of 27 per cent.

Local government areas are equivalent to networks in DET's regional operations model. DET groups networks into area offices.

This indicates that area EDs are well placed to support consistent practices for the principal PD cycle across the state. However, DET's policy and procedure documents do not recognise and outline the role of area EDs in the PD process.

3.

Understanding principals' performance and learning and development needs

Conclusion

DET does not have a comprehensive understanding of principal performance or learning and development needs across its regions or the state. It does not analyse performance outcomes, systematically monitor how principals participate in the PD cycle or routinely analyse principals' professional learning and development needs.

This is a missed opportunity to take a more evidence-informed approach to improving principal performance through tailored and targeted performance and professional development.

This chapter discusses DET's understanding of:

- Principal PD participation and outcomes
 - How principal performance ranges across the state
 - Principals' learning and development needs
-

3.1 DET's understanding of PD participation and outcomes

Completing a PD cycle provides employees, their manager and the organisation with a range of information. This information helps fulfil some of the PD cycle's purposes, such as:

- using outcomes data to administer salary progression
- using individual performance assessments to foster future talent and career development
- providing assurance that individual work contributes to the organisation's strategic goals.

DET does not sufficiently monitor or report on the progress and outcomes of the principal PD cycle. Our analysis also revealed poor timeliness and completion rates for each of the PD milestones.

How DET monitors the PD cycle

DET's eduPay PDP module records each principal's PDP from development through to their assessment outcome. It captures time and date stamps for completed steps within the PD cycle. It also captures identifying data, such as DET branch, school, reviewer and approver data. We analysed this data from the 2019 PD cycle.

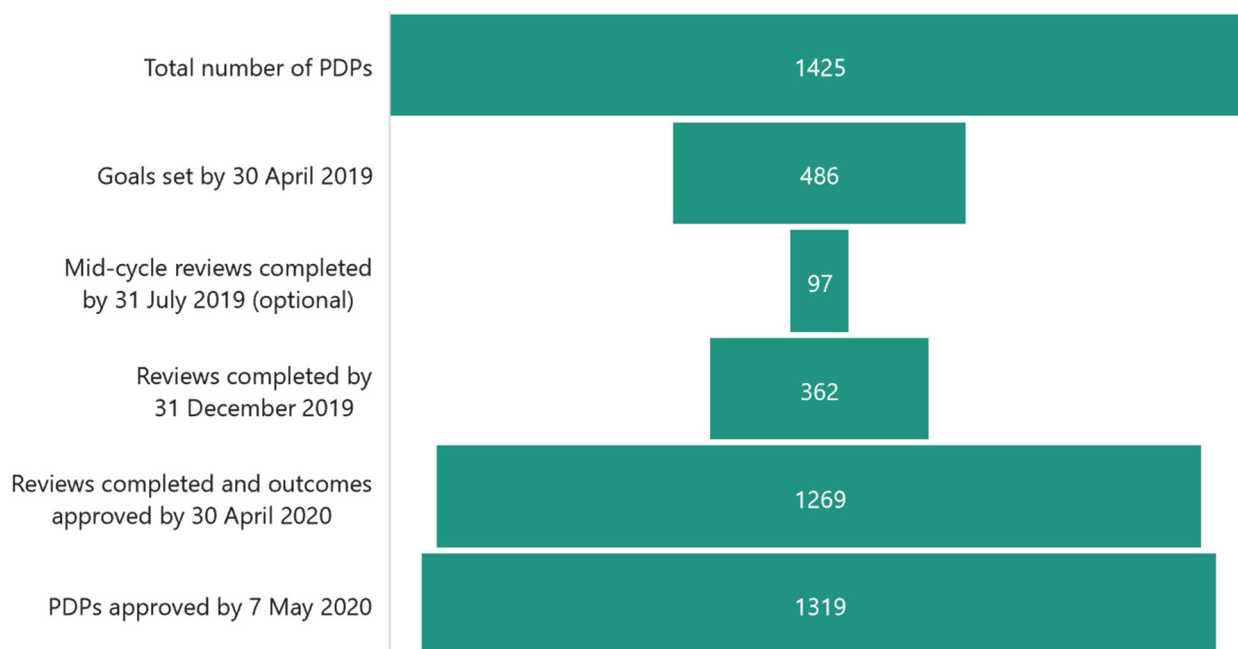
DET's People Division does not make use of this data to monitor or report on the timeliness or completion rates of principals' PDPs. It also does not undertake a quality assurance process to test compliance with DET's PD policy.

Interviewed regional directors, area EDs and SEILs described a regular communication process with principals to ensure compliance with PDP timelines. Regional directors and SEILs have access to reporting views and tools in the PDP module that identify each PDP's status at a point in time. Interviewed SEILs and regional directors confirmed they use these tools, with SEILs more likely to monitor progress through the PD cycle.

Timeliness and completion rates of principal PDPs

Our analysis of the 2019 eduPay dataset found that timeliness and completion rates for principal PDPs and PDP milestones are significant issues. Figure 3A shows these results.

FIGURE 3A: **Timeliness and completion rates of 2019 PDP milestones**



Source: VAGO, from DET's 2019 eduPay dataset.

In Figure 3A, 'Total number of PDPs' represents the number of principals in the 2019 PD cycle. Only 34 per cent of PDPs met the goal-setting milestone (30 April 2019) and only 25 per cent met the PDP review completion milestone (31 December 2019).

Our survey of principals (see Appendix D) asked about their participation in the optional mid-cycle review. In our survey, 97 per cent of survey respondents reported a mid-cycle meeting with their SEIL. This indicates at least 476 principals, or one third of the 1 340 principals assessed in 2019, had a mid-cycle review in 2019.

For 72 per cent of respondents, this meeting was an individual, face-to-face meeting and for 21 per cent, it was a group face-to-face meeting. Three per cent of respondents reported meeting online or via telephone and 1 per cent reported only receiving written feedback. Three per cent of respondents reported not having any type of mid-cycle feedback.

The discrepancy between eduPay data and survey data may be explained by the poor user experience of the PDP module in 2019 (see Section 2.7). Feedback from interviewed principals and SEILs also indicates that recording PD milestones in eduPay may not have occurred at the same time PD activities were conducted. In these circumstances, SEILs and principals described sharing PDP information via email.

Completion rates for 2019 PDPs increased to 89 per cent by 30 April 2020 and 93 per cent on 7 May, which is the date that DET retrieved PDP data for this audit. This means that most principal PDPs are completed according to progression cycle milestones, rather than PD milestones throughout the year. The progression cycle runs from May to April the following year. All principals must be advised of their final outcome by 30 April and salary progression occurs on 1 May.

Responses we received from SEILs and principals indicate that goal setting and other PD milestones likely occurred during the 2019 PD cycle, even if they were not recorded in the eduPay module in a timely manner. This means that DET's view of participation and timeliness in the PD model is limited and hampers its ability to monitor implementation and ensure meaningful engagement with the PD process.

DET does not have a comprehensive understanding of principal performance

While DET has an aggregate view of principal performance outcomes at a regional and statewide level, it does not analyse performance outcomes data to ensure that assessments are conducted consistently or to better understand principal performance.

Each role in the PD model has access to different types of data or performance information produced by each PD cycle. All roles have access to the PDP module in eduPay, except for the area ED.

If your role is ...	Within the eduPay PDP module you can ...
Employee/principal	Review your own PDP, attachments, SEIL comments and assessment outcome
Reviewer/SEIL	Review the PDPs of principals in your network, their attachments, your comments and their assessment outcomes
Approver/regional director	View the PDPs of principals in your region, their attachments, reviewer comments and record assessment outcomes
People Division staff	View overall performance assessment outcomes for principals

The area ED does not have access to principals' PDPs within the eduPay module.

This has significant implications for how DET understands principal performance. SEILs and area EDs have important roles in implementing the PD model but the area ED plays this role without access to information in the eduPay PDP module. This means that while detailed knowledge of principal performance is strongest at the local or area level, this information is not formally gathered or analysed at this level.

Assessment outcomes

For 2019, 14 principals, or 1 per cent of Victorian principals, were assessed as not meeting expectations for their overall performance. Nine of 76 reviewers made these 'not met' determinations, four reviewers each assessed one principal as not meeting expectations and five reviewers each assessed two principals as not meeting expectations.

The remaining 99 per cent of principals were assessed as meeting expectations. If a principal is assessed as 'meets expectations' and they are not presently at the top of

their salary band, they receive a salary progression. Principals at the top of their salary band do not receive a salary progression.

DET advised us that due to its VGSA 2017 commitments, it does not examine the range of performance for principals who do meet expectations. DET's People Division does not conduct analysis into assessment outcomes at the level of individual PDP goals.

Such analysis would uncover whether SEILs make use of the three-point scale, whether this use is consistent and patterns in principal performance that will enable it to address systemic performance issues or development needs. Analysis of de-identified data would yield these insights without compromising DET's commitment under the VGSA 2017.

We analysed the 2019 eduPay dataset to also understand if SEILs make use of the three-point scoring system available for individual PDP goals. This information, which is available to SEILs and regional directors, could provide DET with more insight into the range of principals' performance, if they were to use this information.

SEILs rarely used the 'partially meets expectations' rating for the four PDP goals. Of the 76 reviewers in the 2019 PD cycle, 44 per cent did not use the 'partially meets expectations' rating on any PDP goals.

The SEILs who used the 'partially meets expectations' rating are not distributed evenly across DET's four regions. Figure 3B shows the number of reviewers in each region who used this assessment rating.

FIGURE 3B: **Number of reviewers who used the 'partially meets expectations' rating in 2019 by DET region**

Region (and total number of reviewers)	<i>Used 'partially meets expectations' less than 10 times</i>		<i>Used 'partially meets expectations' more than 10 times</i>	
	Number of reviewers	Number of principals they collectively review	Number of reviewers	Number of principals they collectively review
Region 1 (22)	6	126	1	19
Region 2 (18)	8	151	5	109
Region 3 (18)	9	189	2	40
Region 4 (18)	15	126	1	16

Source: VAGO assessment of DET's 2019 eduPay dataset.

Region 4 has the highest number of SEILs who used 'partially meets expectations' which is nearly double the number who did in Regions 1 or 2. There is also an uneven distribution of reviewers who use this rating frequently (more than 10 times).

This analysis indicates that SEILs vary significantly in their performance assessment approaches and that principals experience a performance assessment based on the approach of their SEIL rather than a consistent method across the state.

Analysing SEILs' use of 'partially meets expectations' ratings would provide DET with an understanding of how principals and SEILs approach the PD process and if SEILs are taking the opportunity to provide a more nuanced assessment of principal performance. Expanding the analysis would also help DET understand patterns in principal performance, monitor consistency of assessment and identify areas for targeted support.

Adopting a different assessment scale

Our survey asked principals to rank their preference for three different scales to assess their overall performance (not just individual PDP goals). We asked them to rank the following:

- a four-point scale (does not meet requirements, partially meets requirements, meets requirements, exceeds requirements)
- a three-point scale (does not meet requirements, meets requirements, exceeds requirements)
- a two-point scale (does not meet requirements, meets requirements), which is the scale currently used to assess overall performance.

Forty-eight per cent of respondents ranked the four-point scale as their first preference, 6 per cent preferred the three-point scale and the remaining 46 per cent chose the current two-point scale as their first. As 54 per cent prefer a more nuanced scale than 'meets' or 'does not meet', this suggests that a more nuanced assessment of principals' overall performance may be widely acceptable.

The preference for a ranking scale that includes 'exceeds requirements' reflects the views of most principals we interviewed. These principals did not experience a celebration of their achievements in school improvement or leadership. One SEIL we interviewed made a similar comment, observing that there were 'a lot of high performers who live in the absence of being told they're doing a good job'.

Adopting a four-point rating scale would also be in line with the better practice VPSC Framework (see Appendix E).

Reviewers' feedback practices

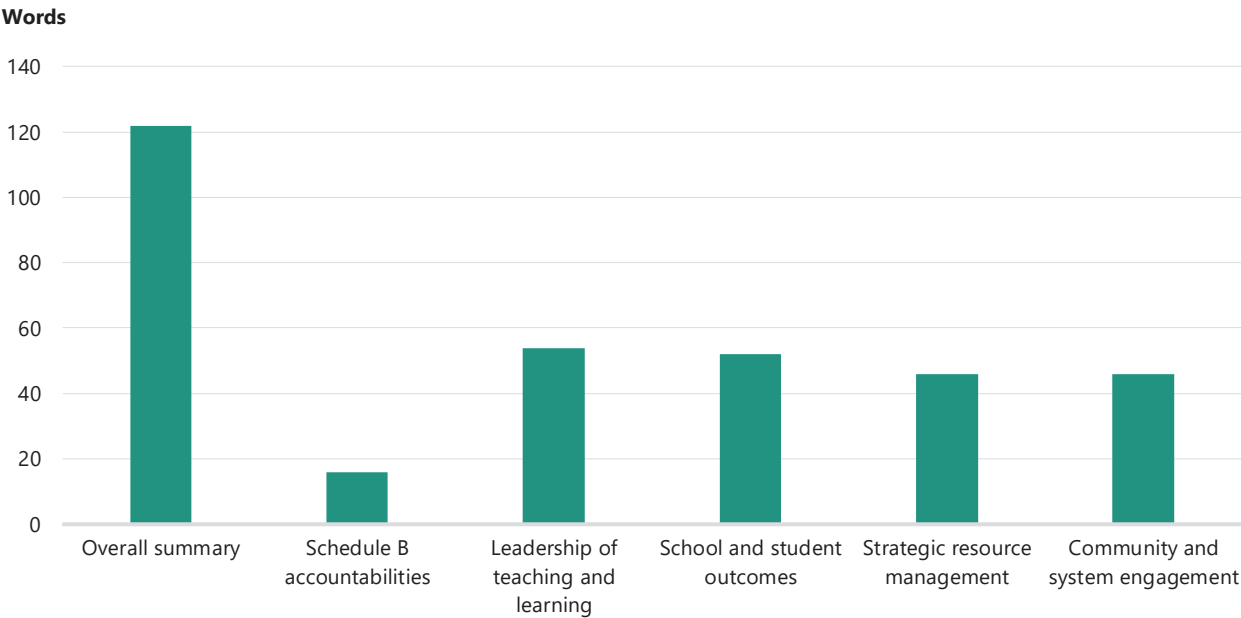
DET advises SEILs to give principals feedback to explain their assessment outcomes and provide guidance for future development. Its guidance materials state that SEILs must provide principals with written feedback but does not specify if this is required for each goal and Schedule B accountability.

Of 1 319 PDPs approved by 7 May 2020:

- 96 per cent had reviewer comments in at least one of the six sections
- 56 per cent had reviewer comments in all six sections.

As Figure 3C shows, the length of reviewers' comments varied by section. Reviewer feedback was longest in the overall summary section. Here, the mean word count was 121 words and the maximum word count was 1 321. The Schedule B accountabilities section had the least feedback. Our analysis indicated that this section is most likely to hold an affirmative statement that the principal met these accountabilities.

FIGURE 3C: Mean word length of reviewer feedback by PDP goal domain, accountability and summary assessment



Source: VAGO, from DET's 2019 eduPay dataset.

Reviewers gave more feedback for goals that were strongly associated with AIP goals. The mean word count for the 'leadership of quality teaching and learning' and 'school and student outcomes' sections were similar at 54 words and 52 words respectively. The mean word count dropped to 46 words for the 'strategic resource management' and 'strengthening community and system engagement' sections.

The relationship between SEILs and principals

SEILs are responsible for identifying and responding to principal performance outcomes based on performance evidence and their knowledge of individual principals' conduct and school contexts.

SEILs are generally confident that they can identify underperformance or circumstances where a principal is struggling. Interviewed SEILs stressed the importance of taking a constructive approach to working with principals so relevant support is offered and accepted.

This support may include coaching, additional support from the region's school improvement resources or a referral to programs, such as DET's Differentiated Support for School Support Improvement initiative.

SEILs are aware that they need to have evidence to support performance concerns and that their understanding of what is happening within a school should complement this evidence. Interviewed area EDs and SEILs stressed the importance of PDP goals that include clear targets as a basis for assessment.

Most of the SEILs we interviewed described the importance of trust in their relationships with principals. One stated that:

‘SEILs have a significant role around principal wellbeing and support and we need to have trust and credibility as a mentor ... It would not be hard for a principal to hide difficulties. Unless you have trust, you won’t know about difficulties.’

This sentiment was repeated by other SEILs, with one describing this trust as a strength of the current system: ‘It’s about building a relationship, trust and a preparedness to have constructive challenging conversations over time’.

Interviewed principals tended to share this view, and one explicitly noted that a good PD experience relies on a good relationship with their SEIL. Interviewed principals who reported a positive PD experience were more likely to comment on their SEIL’s depth of understanding. For example, some comments included:

- ‘[My] current SEIL is fantastic, she learns about the school, she’s on the phone if she thinks she can help.’
- ‘My reviewer is getting to the chalkface—it’s the first time in years I’ve had a reviewer who is particularly interested in this [PD].’
- ‘My chat with my SEIL is from a like-minded perspective and there’s mutual professional respect. I’m fortunate that my conversations are beneficial [and] based on shared understanding and experiences.’

One principal commented that their SEIL’s ‘situational understanding’ helped them contextualise their PD goals and focus, which makes their PD more meaningful.

Over 85 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they feel comfortable talking about their performance with their SEIL. One survey respondent summarised the impact of their SEIL when they identified the most important aspects of their PD process:

- ‘the quality of the SEIL and richness of the professional conversations’
- ‘school context and community challenges impacts on school data and also principal performance. A SEIL who identifies these realities makes a difference’.

Our survey and interviews showed how the relationship between SEILs and principals influences the PD process.

“ The trust that is built up with your SEIL makes a world of difference with your PD process.’
—Survey respondent.

If ...	Then ...
A SEIL has a trusting relationship with a principal and a deep understanding of their school’s context	The principal will speak openly about their PD and are more likely to have a positive experience
The SEIL has limited time, availability or understanding of a principal’s school or focuses solely on school improvement	The principal does not feel supported and does not perceive any benefit from the PD process

Feedback from interviewed and surveyed principals also found a risk that not all principals:

- receive sufficient feedback to build on for their next PD cycle
- feel confident that they know what success looks like in their role
- receive support for career development.

Principals reported that they have a poor PD experience when their SEIL focuses exclusively on school improvement and accountability, is not easily accessible or available or there is high turnover in the SEIL position. This was the case for 20 per cent of survey respondents.

Most interviewed principals advised us that their SEIL's workload had a negative impact on their SEIL's capacity to understand principal performance beyond school improvement data. Each SEIL manages 25 to 28 principals and this can limit their capacity to be deeply familiar with each principal and their school.

Opportunities for improvement

Using network and area knowledge

SEILs and area EDs have the most comprehensive understanding of principal performance. SEILs have detailed knowledge about principal performance in their network and the type of support that helps their principals develop professionally.

Each of the four area EDs we interviewed said that they have regular meetings with their team of SEILs to discuss the PD cycle. Area EDs described weekly or fortnightly group meetings as well as meetings with individual SEILs. They advised us that during these meetings they discuss support for principals and their school improvement goals and strategies and make the decision to offer additional support if needed. These discussions take place within the broader context of school improvement strategies implemented through the FISO model and with the use of extensive school performance data.

Area EDs and SEILs said that they distribute support by identifying principals that need a 'greater level of intervention'. One area ED commented that:

'SEILs will discuss principal performance with me, their concerns and identify ... the type of support [required]. We look to differentiate that support based on the principal and school needs. We try to intervene early, and that means taking a close look at the mid-cycle [review] and seeing if there are any emerging issues.'

This comment reflects the views of all the area EDs and SEILs we interviewed. However, as outlined in Section 3.1 only 7 per cent of principals had a mid-year review in 2019 that was recorded in eduPay's PDP module by the deadline (97 of 1 340 assessed principals). Our survey of principals indicates the number of mid-cycle reviews is at least 33 per cent in practice. While mid-year reviews are not compulsory, if only a small number occur they cannot be effectively used as an opportunity for SEILs to intervene early to provide support.

Regional directors advised us that their area EDs alert them to instances of poor principal performance and the risk of poor performance. Regional directors also told us that they are involved in discussions and strategies about these principals and may deal directly with the principal in some circumstances.

“ The PDP is not pulling you forward into what's next; it's only a portion of the work and possibly not the most challenging.”

—Interviewed principal

Our interviews with regional directors and area EDs also indicated that regional directors are likely aware of excellent performance. Area EDs told us that they highlight principals who have led significant school improvements or successfully managed a difficult situation in their school community to their regional director.

Our interviews with SEILs and area EDs suggested that they hold an acceptable level of knowledge about the range of principal performance in their network and area. They use this knowledge to respond to principals' support needs and inform regional directors. However, DET does not require its areas or regions to formally report on principal performance or the support needed to divisions with responsibility for PD management (People Division) or professional practice (Professional Practice and Leadership Division).

DET has an extensive understanding of student outcomes and school performance through its data collection. It does not have a similarly detailed understanding of principals' range of performance, despite available data, and this restricts its ability to identify and develop targeted support.

3.2 DET's understanding of principals' learning and development needs

DET has access to information about the professional learning and development needs of school staff through the PLDP within a school's AIP. However, DET does not systematically analyse or report on this information to inform its understanding of principals' specific professional learning needs.

Additionally, neither DET's guidance to principals nor the 2019 PDP template explicitly asks principals to describe their professional learning activities as part of the PD process. However, principals may choose to discuss this as part of their strategies to achieve their PDP goals. Our analysis of 40 PDPs indicated that 44 per cent of principals described PLDP activities or professional reading in their 2019 PDPs.

DET does not formally consult with principals about their learning and development needs or systematically gather and analyse information about these needs from SEILs.

It is important for DET to understand the range of principals' learning and development needs so it can develop resources to support performance and career development in all aspects of the role.

Identifying learning and development needs

Our interviews with SEILs and principals discovered that principals' learning and development needs are identified through:

- discussions between SEILs and principals during the PDP process
- some principal network meetings, such as area forums or network meetings, which identify topics for professional learning
- SEILs aligning their area and region's common professional learning needs with priorities identified by school improvement data and DET's priorities.

There is some evidence that informal processes at an area level allow SEILs and area EDs to develop professional learning opportunities that respond to needs identified through the PDP process. This may occur at principal network meetings or in the

area-led sessions at area principal forums. We did not find evidence that DET uses this information to inform region or statewide professional learning and development opportunities.

Most interviewed principals suggested that DET’s focus on school improvement means that their professional capacity in other aspects of their role may not be developed. Eleven of the 16 interviewed principals said that the scope of identified learning and development needs is constrained by individual SEILs’ focus on school improvement.

Interviewed principals also advised us that they have very little input into the professional learning activities that DET provides. Eighty per cent of survey respondents agreed that the current approach does not help DET understand their needs. It is also unclear if SEILs consistently identify principals’ learning and development needs related to organisational leadership.

Our review of a sample of 40 PDPs found that when principals describe the professional learning activities they undertook, they focus on professional learning associated with school improvement. We did not find examples of principals describing professional learning associated with strategic resource management, staff management or system leadership.

Figure 3D outlines surveyed principals’ responses about their experience of identifying their learning and development needs through the PD process.

FIGURE 3D: **How principals identify their learning and development needs**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The review process enables me to identify my areas for further development as an instructional leader	37%	34%	20%	9%
My reviewer understands my professional learning and development needs	42%	34%	18.5%	5.5%
My reviewer helps me identify relevant professional learning and development opportunities	38%	36%	18%	8%

Source: VAGO.

These responses show that most principals experience a PD process that helps them identify their learning and development needs. However, 24 per cent of respondents reported that their SEIL does not understand their learning and development needs or does not help them identify relevant opportunities. This indicates that some SEILs may need support to improve their practice.

“ I believe that more of a focus on the actual goals, growth and learning is required.”

—Survey respondent

“ There needs to be a greater discussion about the principal’s individual development as a leader; that’s been lacking in my development.”

—Interviewed principal

Interviewed area EDs and SEILs consistently placed principals' professional development and learning within the context of school improvement. Three SEILs mentioned that they would suggest professional learning geared towards achieving region-wide performance targets. While some EDs and SEILs recognised that professional development for some principals may lie outside school improvement aims, this was not a common view among interviewed SEILs.

Interviewed mid-career principals were more likely to state that the current process does not support their whole-of-role development or help them take the next step in their career to network or system-level leadership.

DET's strong focus on aligning principal PDPs to school improvement aims likely does not assist all principals to identify relevant professional learning opportunities.

APPENDIX A

Submissions and comments

We have consulted with DET and we considered its views when reaching our audit conclusions. As required by the *Audit Act 1994*, we gave a draft copy of this report, or relevant extracts, to DET and asked for its submissions and comments.

Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

Responses were received as follows:

DET	47
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Department of Education and Training

Office of the Secretary

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Victoria 3002
Telephone: 03 9637 2000
DX210083

BRI2059991

Mr Andrew Greaves
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 31, 35 Collins Street
MELBOURNE 3000

Dear Mr Greaves

Proposed report: Systems and support for principal performance

I refer to your letter of 18 November 2020 seeking comment on the proposed report for this audit.

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) is committed to supporting high-quality teaching and leadership in every school in order to support students' achievement, wellbeing and engagement. We have strong systems and guidance in place to support principals' performance and development. However, we recognise we can improve our implementation to ensure that all principals have a more consistent experience. The Department will clarify the performance and development process and improve the guidance and systems that support its implementation.

In addition to the performance and development process, principals are supported through a range of initiatives including region-based induction and mentoring programs and a suite of professional learning programs tailored to principals from the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership.

The Department accepts the findings, and believes they will make a valuable contribution to improving the performance and development support we provide to principals.

The Department's action plan that addresses the recommendations is attached and reflects acceptance of all the seven recommendations.

Should your office wish to discuss the Department's response, please contact Bella Stagoll, Acting Executive Director, Integrity, Assurance and Executive Services on (03) 7022 0120 or Bella.Stagoll@education.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Tony Bates
Associate Secretary
1/12/2020

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address



DET action plan: Systems and support for principal performance

#	Recommendations that DET:	Response	#	The Department will:	End date
1	In its performance and development process guidance for principals and DET staff, clarifies and communicates expectations for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development of goals, and assessment against them, for both instructional and organisational leadership the extent to which a principal's performance and development should align with their school's annual implementation plan how to use performance development plan goals to support individual professional growth in all aspects of the principal role. 	Accept	1.1	Update and communicate guidance for principals, reviewers and approvers on the principal performance and development plan (PDP) process, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly articulate the purpose of the performance and development process for principals and the system, including a focus on both instructional and organisational leadership clarify the relationship between the principal PDP and a school's strategic plan (SSP) and annual implementation plan (AIP) highlight how PDP goals can be used to support individual professional growth in all aspects of the principal role. 	Dec 2021
2	Develops clear guidance and routine practices for its regions on the implementation of the principal performance and development model, with particular reference to assessment criteria and decisions, to ensure it is consistent and equitable.	Accept	2.1	Investigate the causes of inconsistencies in assessments within the principal performance and development process and accordingly update and communicate guidance for reviewers and approvers to improve the consistency of implementation across regions to support achievement of equitable outcomes.	Dec 2021
3	In relation to the inclusion of Schedule B accountabilities within the principal PD model, reviews each Schedule B accountability and determines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> if the accountability should be assessed through the principal performance and development model or an alternate process criteria to use when assessing performance against the accountability. 	Accept	3.1	Review the Schedule B accountabilities to determine which, if any, should continue to be managed through the PDP model. Upon review, if any of the Schedule B accountabilities are to be managed through the PDP model, the Department will determine the criteria to use when assessing performance against the accountability.	Sep 2021
4	Ensures major changes to the professional development plan module in eduPay are subject to user testing by principals, and regularly monitors system improvements and user feedback.	Accept	4.1	Continue to ensure that principals are invited to participate in user testing when material changes are made to the PDP module in eduPay.	Jun 2021
			4.2	Facilitate current stakeholder forums as a mechanism to engage principals and to obtain feedback on changes to the PDP module in eduPay.	Jun 2021
5	Uses reporting functionality in eduPay's professional development plan module at an area and regional level to regularly monitor and ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the timely completion of key steps in the principal performance development cycle 	Accept	5.1	Investigate the capabilities of the eduPay system and options with regions and implement processes to improve the tracking of key principal PDP information, including timeliness of completion of each stage of the PDP cycle.	Dec 2021

DET action plan: Systems and support for principal performance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the compliance of performance development plans and assessments with DET guidance. 		5.2	Investigate options with regions and implement appropriate changes that can improve the consistency of principal performance and development plans with guidance.	Dec 2021
6	Advises the Minister on options to recognise high performing principals, including consideration of modifying the current assessment scale to capture the full range of principal performance.	Accept	6.1	Investigate and advise the Minister of options to recognise high performing principals through the performance and development process, including consideration of modifying the current assessment scale and through alternative recognition processes.	Dec 2021
7	Ensures that principals' learning and development needs for both instructional and organisational leadership are regularly captured, including from eduPay's professional development plan module and performance and development process, to inform the design and delivery of principal professional learning activities.	Accept	7.1	Bastow, with support from People Division and Performance Division, will review current sources of information on the professional learning needs of principals and design a systematic consultation process with principals, SEILs and other reviewers to understand professional learning needs and inform the design and delivery of professional learning activities.	Sep 2021

APPENDIX B

Acronyms and abbreviations

Acronyms

AEU	Australian Education Union
AIP	annual implementation plan
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APF	Australian Principals Federation
DET	Department of Education and Training
ED	executive director
FISO	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes
PASS	Principals' Association of Specialist Schools
PD	performance and development
PDP	professional development plan
PLDP	professional learning and development plan
SEIL	senior education improvement leader
SMART	specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely
SSP	school strategic plan
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office
VASSP	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
VPA	Victorian Principals Association
VPS	Victorian public service
VPSC	Victorian Public Sector Commission

Abbreviations

FISO model	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes model
PD model	principal performance and development model

Abbreviations

the Standard	<i>Australian Professional Standard for Principals</i>
VGSA 2017	<i>Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 Additional Commitments</i>
VPSC Framework	<i>Executive Performance Management Framework</i>

APPENDIX C

Scope of this audit

Who we audited	What we assessed	What the audit cost
DET	<p>We assessed if DET supports and manages principals' PD to optimise student outcomes.</p> <p>Specifically, we assessed if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• principal PD processes are consistent with DET's guidelines and requirements• DET understands principals' performance and their learning and development needs.	The cost of this audit was \$480 000.

Our methods

As part of this audit we:

- interviewed DET's staff, including regional directors, area EDs, SEILs and principals
- conducted a survey of school principals
- analysed the anonymised 2019 eduPay dataset of school principal PDPs.

We conducted our audit in accordance with the *Audit Act 1994* and ASAE 3500 Performance Engagements. We complied with the independence and other relevant ethical requirements related to assurance engagements. We also provided a copy of the report to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

APPENDIX D

Survey analysis

In February and March 2020, we surveyed Victorian Government school principals to support this audit. We did this to understand principals' experiences with the PD process, what works well and what could work better.

We sent the survey to 1 332 principals across primary, secondary and special schools. We received 479 responses (a response rate of 36 per cent). Because the survey was optional, there was a risk that respondents did not represent the whole principal population due to self-selection.

We considered this risk and examined the profiles of survey respondents compared to the profile of Victorian school principals in 2019. Both groups were similar in school type and distribution across DET's regions. We received responses from principals at each career stage. We are therefore confident that the risk of self-selection does not have a significant impact on our survey results.

Figures D1 to D12 summarise our survey results. These figures do not include results for questions that included open-text responses. All percentage results in the following tables have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. This margin of error does not affect the qualitative findings in this report. We used the Wald test with finite population correction to calculate the margin of error. Figures may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Preparing for the PD cycle

FIGURE D1: **When preparing your own PDP, how helpful do you find the following resources?**

	Principal PD guidelines	Principal goal-setting guide	Principal evidence guide	Mid and end-cycle guides	Online learning modules (via eduPay)	Technical guidance on using eduPay
Not at all helpful	19.67%	19.67%	22.59%	27.20%	56.07%	53.35%
Somewhat helpful	59.21%	59.21%	55.44%	56.07%	39.33%	42.26%
Very helpful	21.13%	21.13%	21.97%	16.74%	4.60%	4.39%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D2: **I use resources from education sector organisations to help me prepare for my PD cycle (for example, AEU, APF, PASS, VPA, VASSP)**

No	Yes, occasionally	Yes, regularly
54.39%	37.45%	8.16%

Note: Australian Education Union (AEU), Australian Principals Federation (APF), Principals' Association of Specialist Schools (PASS), Victorian Principals Association (VPA), Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP).
Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D3: **How much time does it take you to gather the evidence to support your review meetings?**

Less than 1 hour	1–2 hours	3–4 hours	5–6 hours	More than 6 hours
5.23%	25.31%	34.73%	15.27%	19.46%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D4: **Please indicate how much you agree, or disagree, with the following statements.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My principal network is a source of support and knowledge in preparing for my PD cycle	27.82%	33.89%	22.59%	15.69%
My PDP is clearly aligned with my school's SSP and AIP	85.36%	11.51%	1.46%	1.67%
I have a clear understanding of the standards expected of principal performance	70.29%	22.80%	4.81%	2.09%
I have a clear understanding of the criteria that will be used in evaluating my performance	51.67%	32.01%	12.55%	3.77%
My PDP process enables me to identify areas for further development as an instructional leader	38.08%	34.73%	16.53%	10.67%

Source: VAGO.

Experience of the PD cycle

FIGURE D5: **How many hours overall do you spend preparing for and participating in your own PD review cycle?**

1 hour	1–2 hours	3–4 hours	5–6 hours	More than 6 hours
1.46%	13.39%	25.73%	21.97%	37.45%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D6: **Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My reviewer understands my school context	61.22%	28.93%	6.50%	3.35%
My reviewer has a good understanding of my work as a principal	65.83%	23.48%	7.97%	2.73%
I feel comfortable talking to my reviewer about my performance and asking for support during review meetings	68.76%	19.50%	6.92%	4.82%
I feel comfortable talking to my reviewer about my performance and asking for support outside of the PDP process	70.02%	16.56%	8.60%	4.82%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D7: **My mid-cycle review meeting is:**

Less than 1 hour	1–2 hours	More than 2 hours
33.33%	58.49%	8.18%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D8: **Please indicate how much you agree, or disagree, with the following statements.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My reviewer is well-prepared for my performance review meetings and provides constructive feedback	60.59%	26.42%	8.18%	4.82%
My reviewer makes the best use of the data and evidence available when discussing my performance	59.33%	26.42%	10.48%	3.77%
The performance review process enables me to highlight my areas of growth as an instructional leader	49.90%	27.88%	14.05%	8.18%

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My performance evaluation is a fair and accurate assessment of my performance as a principal	56.60%	24.74%	12.16%	6.50%
The review process enables me to identify my areas for further development as an instructional leader	36.97%	34.24%	20.17%	8.61%
My reviewer understands my professional learning and development needs	42.23%	33.82%	18.49%	5.46%
My reviewer helps me identify relevant professional learning and development opportunities	38.24%	36.13%	17.65%	7.98%

Source: VAGO.

Professional learning and development needs

FIGURE D9: **When identifying my professional learning and development needs, I prefer to use resources from:**

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not at all
DET	9.87%	40.76%	38.24%	11.13%
My principal network	10.08%	34.03%	43.07%	12.82%
Education sector organisation (for example, AEU, APF, PASS, VPA, VSSPA)	3.99%	16.18%	50.00%	29.83%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D10: **How many hours overall did you spend on professional learning or development activities in 2019?**

Less than 20 hours	20–30 hours s	30–40 hours	40–50 hours	50–60 hours	More than 60 hours
2.53%	10.53%	15.79%	16.21%	14.53%	40.42%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D11: **I prefer to do my professional learning and development through:**

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not at all
In-school embedded learning	13.03%	49.16%	34.03%	3.78%
Workshops or seminars provided by DET	2.10%	27.73%	62.61%	7.56%
Bastow Institute courses	3.36%	21.64%	62.39%	12.61%

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not at all
Principal network	8.82%	35.92%	50.63%	4.62%
Education sector organisation (for example, AEU, APF, PASS, VPA, VSSPA)	2.31%	11.55%	57.77%	28.36%

Source: VAGO.

FIGURE D12: **How confident are you that the current performance review process, including the PD cycle:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Minimises the administrative burden of preparing my PDP	2.75%	13.95%	34.67%	48.63%
Helps principals understand DET's performance expectations	7.19%	26.64%	39.11%	27.06%
Sets out clear criteria for assessing principal performance	5.92%	31.50%	37.42%	25.16%
Assesses principals' performance fairly and consistently	6.34%	28.54%	34.04%	31.08%
Provides an environment where principals feel safe asking for help performing their role	9.73%	30.66%	30.44%	29.18%
Helps DET understand the learning and development needs of principals	3.17%	16.07%	34.67%	46.09%

Source: VAGO.

APPENDIX E

Better practice PD

Performance reviews enable organisations to understand their employees' performance, professional development and contribution to the organisation's performance.

Performance reviews have two purposes, to:

- identify areas for growth and learning to form an employee's PDP
- inform administrative decisions on aspects of employment, such as salary progression or promotion.

Goal setting and performance appraisals are therefore essential elements of the performance review process.

Goal setting involves determining the goals that an employee or organisation wants to achieve and their timeframes for achieving them. Effective goals help to improve performance because they:

- direct an employee's attention and effort to relevant work activities
- increase an employee's effort and persistence to achieve challenging goals
- identify the skills and knowledge that an employee needs to achieve their goals.

Performance appraisal is a formal process where a reviewer evaluates how well an employee is performing their role. The purpose of this process is to help employees develop their professional learning and performance and provide evidence for employment decisions.

Performance appraisals have three main components:

- setting performance ratings or assessment criteria
- evaluating an employee against the criteria
- feeding the results of the evaluation back to the employee.

The last component usually occurs at the end of an annual cycle.

Performance appraisals are most effective when employees perceive them as fair and receive constructive feedback. A fair PD process has:

- a focus on external ratings, such as supervisor feedback or work-relevant performance data
- two-way review conversations
- more, rather than fewer, rating categories
- a strengths-based approach.

The VPSC Executive Performance Management Framework

The VPSC Framework is a good-practice guide to performance appraisals in Victorian public service (VPS) departments and entities. Principals are part of the Victorian teaching service and part of the Victorian public sector. DET does not consider their role as equivalent to VPS executive-class employees. Despite this, the VPSC Framework provides a good-practice benchmark for performance appraisals.

The VPSC Framework is based on six elements:

- clear performance expectations that strategically align with outcomes through SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) goals
- a focus on outcomes to achieve organisational and government priorities
- a focus on effective leadership behaviours
- promotion and application of public sector values that demonstrates commitment
- evidence-based decision-making, where reward, recognition and reappointment are driven by data
- equity through consistency, where performance goals are informed by work-level standards and measured by a common rating scale.

The VPSC Framework suggests that executives' PDPs should include certain core features, including goals that are based on key result areas, expectations of behaviours and actions that will achieve the desired outcomes, and a four-point rating scale.

The purpose of performance management in the VPSC Framework is to drive high performance, support career development and a positive workplace culture. The VPSC Framework is not designed to hold executives accountable for the duties of their role.

The VPSC Framework recommends that employers use a four-point rating scale to identify employees' level of accomplishment. This scale has the following assessment points:

- does not meet expectations
- meets most expectations
- meets all expectations
- exceeds expectations.

Auditor-General's reports tabled during 2018–19

Report title

Rehabilitating Mines (2020–21: 1)	August 2020
Management of the Student Resource Package (2020–21: 2)	August 2020
Victoria's Homelessness Response (2020–21: 3)	September 2020
Reducing Bushfire Risks (2020–21: 4)	October 2020
Follow up of Managing the Level Crossing Removal Project (2020–21: 5)	October 2020
Early Years Management in Victorian Sessional Kindergartens (2020–21: 6)	October 2020
Accessibility of Tram Services (2020–21: 7)	October 2020
Accessing Emergency Funding to Meet Urgent Claims (2020–21: 8)	November 2020
Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2019–20 (2020–21: 9)	November 2020
Sexual Harassment in Local Government (2020–21: 10)	December 2020
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