

MEDIA RELEASE



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Leadership award for Deakin academic

Professor Karen Starr - a strong advocate for reduction of the 'administrivia' that plagues school principals - was inaugurated as a fellow of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders at ACEL's national conference in Melbourne.

The inaugural chair of Deakin University's Centre for Educational Leadership and Renewal, Professor Starr has held principal positions in South Australia and Victoria and was chief writer for the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Project (SACSA) that set the framework for current curriculum in all South Australian state, independent and Catholic pre-schools, primary and secondary schools.

She received the Telstra Business Women's Hudson Community and Government Award in 2004 for her work in school improvement.

Since taking up her role at Deakin in 2006, she has worked with education leaders and researched the professional challenges facing school principals and the declining numbers of applicants for principal positions.

"Leadership in schools has become incredibly regulated in our risk averse society and mandated procedures take up an inordinate amount of time and don't allow as much time for creativity," Professor Starr said.

"Interacting with students, teaching and learning is the exciting part of being an education professional; it's the 'administrivia' - the administrative and compliance load - that is deterring people from applying for principal level jobs.

"Principals are becoming bogged down in things that are peripheral to the core game of teaching, learning and managing change in schools. The job has shifted away from kids, classrooms and curriculum and needs to return to these essential functions."

Professor Starr believes politicians and education bureaucrats need to be more aware of the downside of ever increasing compliance and reporting requirements.

"I think principals should be trusted more," she said.

"Education professionals know if a student can read and write without giving them a standardised test and ranking them against all other students in the state.

"People know which schools need assistance. Principals are also telling me that they are concerned that equity issues are being lost - we used to have clear social justice policies but these seem to be rarely mentioned now."