



Victorian Aspiring Principal Assessment

Application guide for candidates

The application is the entry point into the VAPA. It will determine your readiness to proceed to the assessment stage is comprised of two tasks:

- > an **optional** self-assessment – an online questionnaire used to determine your perceived current level of performance against the VAPA framework. The outcome of the self-assessment does not contribute to your VAPA. It is included here for your reference.
- > a sample of practice (SoP) - a short biography that includes your career map and narratives against five selected performance indicators of the VAPA framework.

The sample of practice

The sample of practice (SoP) provides a meaningful professional development experience for anyone aspiring to school principal leadership, regardless of their career stage. The SoP is used to evidence your readiness to proceed to the VAPA, to provide an opportunity for you to receive feedback and to identify if you require further learning and development before commencing the VAPA.

The SoP has two elements:

- > a biography
- > five written narratives against five selected performance indicators from the VAPA framework.

1. Biography

Your biography is a brief description of your current role, the leadership positions you have held, and your career pathway. It must be no more than 300 words.

Your biography helps situate your leadership experience and provides context for your application. It should include your current school context, key roles and positions held (with dates), and any significant professional development or qualifications. For those with an extensive career in education, focus on your most recent leadership experience (a summary of the past five to ten years is recommended).

There is no single path to principalship. Leadership experience may include roles in small or remote schools, work undertaken during leave, community obligations, or experience from other careers or jurisdictions, all of which may be relevant.

Biography example

I am currently the Assistant Principal of a medium-sized suburban secondary school. I have been in this role for two years after gaining experience in the same role at a small inner suburban secondary school. My main role is to oversee curriculum and pedagogy and to work with team leaders to measure the impact of instruction.

I have recently undertaken a role in the University of Melbourne Network of Schools program to devise methods for tracking measurement growth for every student in a school. Additionally, I liaise with student teams to review the school's teaching and learning programs using methods that include student voice in the school improvement process.

Career history

2023 University of Melbourne [School and Network Partnerships](#)—implemented a network-focused approach to schoolwide improvement

- 2018** Assistant Principal (ongoing)—medium-sized suburban school with two assistant principals
- 2017** Completed Master of Instructional Leadership, University of Melbourne
- 2015–2017** Assistant Principal—small inner suburban school with 250 students
- 2012–2014** Leading Teacher—supervised 15 faculty members with a focus on implementing a schoolwide collaborative team approach to school improvement initiatives (structural change to system)
- 2004–2012** Multiple roles in Education including classroom teacher, year level coordinator and Head of Department

Words: 247 (max. 300 words)

Note: Your biography can be prepared in Word and copied into the application. If you are offered a place in the VAPA, you may use /update this biography for your portfolio submission.

2. Narratives

Your narratives should be concise, self-reflective examples that follow the Situation-Action-Result (SAR) method and show evidence of your current competence and impact. Your narratives will be assessed by a Principal in Residence using the VAPA Professional Practice Areas (PPA) framework performance indicators and their corresponding levels of proficiency (See [Appendix A](#)). They will use this together with considerations from your context illustrated in your Biography. It is highly recommended that you address the performance indicators when writing your SoP. Before drafting your SoP narratives, you may find it helpful to use [Appendix A](#) to brainstorm and map your narratives against each performance indicator.

The worked example below illustrates how the SAR method can be applied, with guided questions to support your writing.

SAR guided questions	Worked example
What led to the situation? Who was involved? What was the problem? What caused you to...? What were the circumstances surrounding...?	SITUATION: What was the situation that you were faced with? (max 100 words) Following a review of classroom observation data and student achievement results, I identified significant inconsistency in the quality of explicit teaching across the school. While some teachers were using clear learning intentions, worked examples and checking for understanding effectively, others were relying on activity-based tasks with limited instructional scaffolding. Teacher judgement data, moderation of student work samples and NAPLAN results indicated that students were not achieving consistent growth across year levels, particularly in reading and writing. I recognised that improving student outcomes depended on strengthening the consistency and quality of teaching practice across all classrooms. Words: 95 (max. 100 words)
What strategies did you use to achieve your goal? Why did you decide on that course of action? Were there any obstacles? How did you overcome them? How did you react? Describe how you did that. What did you say?	ACTION: What action did you take to address the situation? (max 100 words) I led the development and implementation of a whole-school instructional model aligned to the VTLM 2.0. I built my knowledge with the School Improvement Team by undertaking professional learning and visiting schools with established explicit teaching practices. I introduced the model to staff through a staged professional learning program, modelling lessons in classrooms and providing coaching and feedback focused on specific elements of effective instruction. Working with team leaders to embed the model into collaborative planning, ensuring teachers had structured opportunities to observe, practise and reflect on their instructional approach and consider how their teaching decisions directly impacted student learning. Words: 100 (max. 100 words)
What was the outcome?	RESULT: What was the result/outcome of your action? (max 100 words)

Can you quantify the result or impact? What happened in the end? What would you do differently next time? How did it work out? What feedback did you receive?	Classroom observations demonstrated greater consistency in instructional practice across the school, with teachers implementing clear learning intentions, worked examples and structured checking for understanding with increased confidence. Staff Opinion Survey data showed growth in areas related to instructional leadership and professional learning. Moderation of student work samples and teacher judgement data indicated improved student progress across multiple year levels, with a greater proportion of students achieving expected growth. These improvements reflected a direct connection between strengthened teaching practice and student learning outcomes, establishing a sustainable culture of high expectations, challenge and continuous instructional improvement across the school. Words: 97 (max. 100 words)
--	--

Table 1: Worked example of the SAR method applied to the VAPA Framework Performance Indicator 1.1

Important tips

- > Write in prose rather than dot points – a compelling narrative reveals the core issues you faced and the steps you took to resolve them.
- > Write using “I” rather than “we”. You will be assessed on your leadership specifically, “we implemented” or “we decided” does not allow for a clear determination of what you initiated, decided and drove.
- > Review your narratives for consistency and flow before submitting.

Offer of place

Within two weeks of submitting your SoP you will be notified of the outcome of your application.

Recommended

Upon receiving your offer, consider whether you have the time and capacity to commit to each component of the assessment before accepting. Within a week of accepting your offer, you will be allocated a Lead Assessor who will onboard you and outline the next stages of the VAPA.

Not recommended

If you are not recommended to proceed, a Principal in Residence will be in contact to discuss the most appropriate next steps for you at the current stage in your career.

Questions/Technical issues

If you have any questions, or experience any technical issues, please contact the VAPA Team at vapa@education.vic.gov.au.

Appendix A

Selected VAPA PPA framework performance indicators

When writing your narratives be sure to include one or more of the levels of proficiency as outlined below to demonstrate your readiness.

Performance indicator/SOP question	Levels of proficiency	Notes - examples of practice	
Leading Teaching and Learning (1.01) <i>Provide an example of a time when you created a positive learning culture of challenge and support dedicated to improving student learning outcomes.</i>	Models the importance of teaching as a key influence on student learning outcomes.	S	
	Questions previous practice to find avenues for improving student learning outcomes.	A	
	Assesses decisions considering their potential impact on student learning outcomes.	R	
Leading Teaching and Learning (1.02) <i>Provide an example of a time when you acted on evidence and/or data related to teaching and learning.</i>	Uses multiple sources of evidence and/or data to inform teaching and learning.	S	
	Selects from possible actions considering school readiness along with other factors.	A	
	Develops sustainable processes for the implementation of findings from analysis of data.	R	
Leading Improvement, Innovation and Change (3.01) <i>Provide an example of a time when you thought strategically when leading improvement.</i>	Seeks advice and/or feedback from others when leading improvement.	S	
	Maximises communication to lead improvement.	A	
	Respond to multiple perspectives and shares a range of options, ideas and viewpoints. Leverages internal and external expertise to drive improvement.	R	
Leading the Management of the School (4.04) <i>Provide an example of a time when you optimised resources (e.g., physical, financial and human).</i>	Seeks advice and/or feedback from others when leading improvement.	S	
	Maximises communication to lead improvement.	A	
	Respond to multiple perspectives and shares a range of options, ideas and viewpoints. Leverages internal and external expertise to drive improvement.	R	
Engaging and Working with the Community (5.04) <i>Provide an example of a time when you connected with your school community.</i>	Acknowledges the importance of community customs and traditions.	S	
	Builds partnerships by seeking understanding.	A	
	Uses community customs and traditions to support the achievement of the school's vision.	R	