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Developing a five-year strategic plan 2020-25



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Contents

Executive summary	3
The project	5
Introduction and background	5
Methodology	6
Observations and findings	7
<i>Progress in achieving 2015-2020 Strategic Plan recommendations</i>	7
<i>Challenges facing principals</i>	12
<i>Ensuring the relevance of VACPSP</i>	15
<i>Recommendations: Strategic priorities</i>	18
Alignment of strategic actions with vision, mission and goals	20
Timeline for implementing priorities	21
Conclusion	22

Developing a five-year strategic plan 2020-25

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals Inc (VACPSP) continues to meet the professional needs and interests of principals across the state and continues to advocate on their behalf in times of rapid change within the Catholic education sector. The membership has grown significantly in the past five years. Since 2015 membership has increased from 241 to 315. This represents 77.6% of principals in Catholic primary schools across Victoria compared to 61.6% in 2015. VACPSP has built a strong platform on which to adopt new strategic directions that will further enhance its key purposes of collegiate support for principals, promoting the mission of the church in schools and advocating for principals as leaders within the Catholic sector.

VACPSP employs a part-time Project Manager – Strategy and Conference, full-time Business Operations Manager and part-time Accounts Officer to support its operations. The Executive Committee comprising representatives from the three country dioceses and the archdiocese of Melbourne, oversees the policy and operational directions of VACPSP. The COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 has impacted to some degree on revenue from business partners and sponsors. Despite this VACPSP remains financially viable.

VACPSP has worked assiduously with strong leadership provided by the President, to ensure that it is recognized as the peak professional body representing Catholic primary school principals and that its profile, status and central purpose are acknowledged within the Catholic sector at both state and national levels, the broader educational community and by state and federal governments.

Significant steps forward have been taken. Good relationships have been established with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM). Further work is required to establish and maintain relationships with country Catholic Education Offices. Formalised relationships with all Catholic education authorities should now be a key objective. Development of further position papers on key issues facing principals should assist in achieving such relationships. They should be developed collaboratively drawing on research, appropriate expertise and the knowledge and experience of principals. There is a strongly held view that cooperation/partnerships with Catholic education authorities on mutually agreed initiatives would enhance leadership development, achievement of the vision and mission of Catholic education and the importance of Catholic education for families associated with local parishes. Increasingly media outlets seek opinion from, and the informed views of VACPSP on matters affecting Catholic primary schools. Importantly, VACPSP now has a seat at both the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA) and Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association (ACPPA) tables.

It is unanimously agreed by principals that a full-time role for the president would give significant energy and stronger purpose to the Association in fulfilling its vision, mission and goals.

Through face-to-face Zoom consultations, the consultant has found that principals in general, are now more aware of the benefits and services of the Association. The engagement of Brennan Law Partners to provide legal advice to the Association and individual members has resonated positively with members. The biennial conference, which is now open to school leadership teams, is highly valued. Communication with members has improved with regular bulletins and

news alerts being provided to members. The Annual Report is a welcome addition to the official documentation of the Association and is made available to all members and Catholic education authorities. It is recognised though, that there are still members who are not conversant with the range of services and support from the Association. The dioceses of Sandhurst and Ballarat and the northern region of CEM have the lowest VACPSP membership in the state and require further targeted effort to increase membership.

Active membership of the Executive Committee contributes significantly to the achievement of VACPSP goals. Consistent zone/deanery representation provides an important vehicle for the communication of VACPSP services and support and for gaining input from principals at the local level on matters affecting them and their schools. Members appreciate the contribution of the local VACPSP representatives to network meetings through regular reports and the seeking of input. The annual induction programs for Executive Committee members are positively received and have paved the way for members to undertake their representative roles with higher levels of knowledge and confidence. The effective use of communication technologies in 2020 has been welcomed across the state and is seen to be an effective and efficient way to access information and to contribute to future directions.

Flowing from the consultations the following recommendations in the form of strategic priorities have been formulated as the basis for the 2020-2025 Strategic plan:

- 1. Enhancement of the credibility, visibility and influence of VACPSP through creation of a full-time president's role***
- 2. Ensuring strong advocacy and influence as new Governance arrangements are put in place***
- 3. Input and influence regarding the professional role of principalship with a specific focus on professional supervision support for principals***
- 4. Tapping into and supporting the professional learning and wellbeing needs of principals***
- 5. Development of strong, sustained and formalised relationships with Diocesan offices, and where appropriate, Catholic School Parents Victoria and the Australian Catholic University***
- 6. Establishment of a clearly articulated communication strategy enabling maximum engagement of principals in advancing the mission and goals of VACPSP and gaining regular input to VACPSP policies and directions.***

Developing a five-year strategic plan 2020-25

1. The Project

The Victorian Association Catholic Primary School Principals Inc. (VACPSP) is committed to the development of a five-year Strategic Plan for the years 2020-2025. Ross Kimber, Director of *rfk consulting* has been engaged to conduct Victoria-wide consultations with principals, leaders within the Association and others as nominated by VACPSP to assist in identifying key issues and drivers that can contribute to development of the plan. This follows his services to the VACPSP in 2014/15 in assisting the development of a 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. The Association is nearing the end of this strategic plan and has engaged the consultant to conduct a project to update the strategic plan of VACPSP for the next five years. This would include a review of the recommendations of the 2015-2020 plan, highlighting of issues arising from that plan and recommendations for moving forward strategically into the next five years.

Through this project VACPSP seeks to:

- Gauge how in the current educational, economic and political environment, VACPSP Inc. can remain a high-end support service for principals in the new governance model
- Find out what more could be offered to non-members that would make them feel that the Association was more relevant for them
- Understand what extra benefits, as well as legal support, could be provided for members
- Discover any further items of interest for consideration of the Association.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. VACPSP has successfully positioned itself as the professional peak body for Catholic primary school principals in Victoria. Further, VACPSP now represents Catholic primary school principals at the national level and on the peak body committees of the Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association (ACPPA) and the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA). Implementation of the recommendations of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan has progressively occurred. Membership has continued to grow and stabilise.
- 2.2. VACPSP continues to focus on the principal as a professional leader in a 21st-century educational environment and the organisational and functional issues that pertain to the everyday management of Catholic primary schools. VACPSP represents the views of Catholic primary school principals at Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), Catholic Education Office (CEO), Diocesan and government levels in Victoria and ACPPA and APPA at the national level. It is the only professional Association for principals that is solely:
 - Victorian;
 - Catholic; and for
 - Primary school principals.
- 2.3. Over 30 years ago Catholic primary school principals devolved the right of representation to the Victorian Independent Education Union (VIEU). Until recently the VIEU represented principals professionally on both APPA and ACPPA. Now it is VACPSP that performs that role.
- 2.4. VACPSP is served by a part-time President. Part-time Project Manager – Strategy and

Conference (hereafter Project Manager), a full-time Business Operations Manager and a part-time Accounts Officer

2.5. Membership fees are collected annually. Fees range from \$310 - \$825 depending on student enrolment numbers

2.6. The vision for VACPSP is: *Catholic principals leading with a strong, courageous and active voice, promoting educational excellence in Catholic schools*

2.7. The current Mission Statement states that the VACPSP is: *“To advocate and be an influence for principals in enacting their role”* and lists the goals as:

- *To be visionary in the representation of principals.*
- *To be strategic in the advocacy for principals.*
- *Through collaboration, unite and empower principals.*
- *To increase the professional skills of principals.*
- *To improve the wellbeing and working conditions of the principal class*

2.8. The following table shows the comparative numbers (2015, 2020) of Catholic primary schools in each diocese in Victoria together with the numbers of VACPSP members:

Diocese	2015			2020		
	Number of schools	VACPSP members	% of Schools with VACPSP members	Number of schools	VACPSP members	% of Schools with VACPSP members
Ballarat	53	16	30.2	56	34	60.7
Sale	35	26	74.3	37	29	84.3
Sandhurst	41	10	24.4	45	25	55.6
Melbourne Northern	74	44	59.5	81	56	69.1
Melbourne Southern	66	52	78.8	60	59	98.3
Melbourne Eastern	71	50	70.4	74	60	81.1
Melbourne Western	51	43	84.3	53	52	98.1
Melbourne total	262	189	72.1	268	227	82.8
Totals	391	241	61.6	406	315	77.6

3. Methodology

The following methodology has been used in gathering information and compiling this report:

- 3.1. Initial and subsequent meetings with the Project Manager and President to clarify the task, discuss the proposed methodology, identify stakeholder groups and individuals for consultation purposes and seek their views on key issues and challenges facing the organisation, hopes for the organisation and possible futures
- 3.2. Review of relevant documentation, including duty statements of VACPSP employees, VACPSP website and Facebook page
- 3.3. Zoom meeting with Executive Committee to outline the approach and to initiate the consultation process
- 3.4. Preparation of guidelines and questions for focus groups and individuals
- 3.5. One-on-one meetings with VACPSP President, Project Manager, Business Operations Manager, Victorian Principals Association (VPA), President, Catholic School Parents

Victoria (CSPV) Executive Officer, VACPSP representative on CSPV Council, Catholic Education Melbourne ((CEM) Learning Services Director. All were provided with questions prior to interviews

- 3.6. Focus groups of principals in each of the country dioceses and focus groups in each of the regions in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (ten focus groups totaling 42 principals). Participants were provided with discussion guidelines and questions prior to meetings
- 3.7. Focus group meeting with CEM Executive Director and Directors
- 3.8. Analysis of data from consultation meetings and preparation of progress reports
- 3.9. Workshop with Executive Committee
- 3.10. Preparation of draft report for road testing with Executive Committee
- 3.11. Finalisation of report and presentation to VACPSP executive.

4. Observations and Findings

The findings and observations detailed in this section have been drawn from the strategic conversations with the President, Project Manager, Executive Committee members, principals who participated in the ten focus group meetings, VPA President, CSPV Executive Officer and CEM Executive Director and Directors, documentation provided to the consultant and the VACPSP website.

4.1. Progress in achieving 2015 -2020 Strategic Plan recommendations

Recommendation 1

That a key priority over the next five years be given to raising the profile and status of VACPSP for current and prospective members through the following actions.

Identification and promotion of:

- *the key benefits for principals as members of VACPSP*
- *the services provided to principals by VACPSP in the areas of professional support, advocacy and professional learning.*

This priority has been progressively addressed over the past five years. Interviews and focus group conversations point to the following achievements of which the VACPSP can be proud:

- Membership has grown. Since 2015 there has been growth from 61.6% of schools to 77.6%. All dioceses show increased membership. Sandhurst and Ballarat have achieved growth with more than 50% increase in each. Many principals made the point that “the Association has come a long way” whilst recognising that “more can be done”. It is increasingly apparent that the Association has a clearer role and that it is meeting the needs of many principals who feel that the IEU is not effectively representing them
- Principals recognise that there is a strong and active outstanding leadership from the President, Project Manager and Business Operations Manager. Attendance at network meetings by the president, Project Manager and Tyson Brennan of Brennan Law Partners has helped lift the profile of the Association as has participation in trade/market days held by Principals’ networks. Regular contact is maintained with zone/deanery representatives who receive the records of all meetings. It was reported that one zone representative sends reports of meetings immediately to all principals in the zone. Round table conversations at Executive meetings are held to pick up on key issues raised at one meetings of principals

- It is recognised that the VACPSP is an important forum for principals with advice, support and advocacy being seen to be important identifying features especially in increasingly changing and challenging times
- Legal support from Brennan Law Partners has been a significant step forward for the Association. Tyson Brennan is highly visible and has attended and presented at zone meetings and the biennial conference. Most principals are aware of this service and value it highly: “We know this support is available when we need it”. There is no cost for principals for the first consultation. Independent legal advice is highly valued with many principals indicating that sometimes the kind of advice sought from diocesan offices is either “slow in coming” or not available. It is recognised that the distinction between system legal requirements and the specific legal needs and supports of principals is important with an acknowledgement that there are times when it is appropriate for principals to access expert legal advice and support from an independent legal source
- VACPSP has sought and achieved representation on national bodies, ACPPA and APPA. This has required lengthy and persistent lobbying with strong leadership shown by the president. There is a strong belief that the voice of Victorian Catholic primary school principals is now increasingly being heard
- The Association has been consulted by the CECV on industrial relations matters affecting the working conditions and employment of principals. Representation on CEM reference groups, for example, Occupational Health and Safety, Long Service Leave, School Improvement, Catholic Identity and Governance is recognised as evidence of the increased standing of Catholic primary school principals in the eyes of the CECV and diocesan offices. Principals in the Melbourne Archdiocese recognise that the relationship with Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) has become stronger with increased opportunities for meetings with Directors and participation in working parties/reference groups. There is a feeling that the Association is a more trusted and credible organisation. VACPSP has been given the opportunity to present to principals at the annual meetings of principals
- There is a view expressed by many that by being a non-unionised body there is increased credibility with senior officials in Diocesan offices and that there is a greater capacity for partnership arrangements to contribute to, and assist delivery of key policies affecting Catholic education in primary schools
- It is recognised increasingly by schools that membership of VACPSP is in the interests of the school
- Providing a voice through various media is recognised. When approached by the media the president is quick to respond
- Links with sponsors and business partners have been strengthened with significant support provided to the biennial Conference. These business partnerships have also yielded income for VACPSP although during the current Pandemic this has become more problematic
- Monthly informative and well-designed newsletters are distributed and uploaded to the website: These contain links to resources and sponsors. In general, these are well received.

Revision of the Vision and Mission statements to include support for and advocacy on behalf of principals

- Vision and mission statements have been revised with principals, in the main, agreeing that they remain relevant. The emphases on advocacy and the wellbeing of principals are strongly supported.

Updating the VACPSP website to include statements of benefits of VACPSP membership, the professional services offered and position papers as they are developed

- Most principals indicated that they either rarely or never looked at the VACPSP website. The view was expressed by one principal that the logos for sponsors overwhelmed the home page and “dwarfed” the VACPSP logo. It was commonly held that the website required a new look that encourages increased accessibility. Many indicated that they could no longer remember their passwords
- The VACPSP *Policies and Procedures Manual* was published via the website in 2018. Brennan Law Partners were engaged by VACPSP to assist in the preparation of this manual. It is a comprehensive document that includes the descriptions of the roles, responsibilities and expectation of VACPSP officers, Committee Executive members and zone/deanery representatives on the Committee
- Establishment of the Alumni group with clear statement of purposes has occurred. A Committee member has been designated as the contact person. The Business Operations Manager looks after communications with them. The Pandemic in 2020 has put a brake on face-to-face gatherings. However, the groundwork has been laid for growth to occur in 2021 and beyond
- A video promoting Catholic education in primary schools has been produced, widely distributed and included on the VACPSP website. It is a visually attractive, engaging and warm video that captures the essential values and intentions of Catholic education in primary schools. It is a strong addition to the offerings that help enhance the reputation of Catholic schools. Principals have been encouraged to use the video in local parish school communities. It has also been made available to Diocesan offices.

Development of position papers that can be used for advocacy and promotional purposes by VACPSP within the Catholic sector, the broader educational community at both state and national levels and at state and federal government levels. Development of such papers should be conducted collaboratively drawing on appropriate expertise and the professional needs, interests and views of principals. Appropriate resources should be provided enabling this work to be conducted effectively, efficiently and in a timely way. The issues listed in section 4.3 of this report provide a starting point for development of position papers recognising that this list is far from exhaustive and that more will be identified

- The following position papers have been developed and published via the VACPSP’s website
 - CECV Funding Anomalies
 - Parliamentary Enquiry into Gifted & Talented Children
 - Speed Limit Survey Response
 - Victorian State Government Inquiry into Homework –
 - Senate Select Committee on School Funding Submission –
 - Principal Professional Learning
 - Principal Wellbeing
 - Swimming Programs.

Initiation of regular meetings between VACPSP Executive Members and the Directors of Education in country dioceses and the maintenance and use of records of these meetings for communication purposes by zone/deanery representatives

- It is generally recognised that there is more to be done in relation to the country dioceses. Zones/deaneries across rural Victoria are now represented on the VACPSP Executive Committee

allowing higher VACPSP visibility in the country dioceses opening up possibilities for increased liaison with education leaders in Catholic Education Offices.

The targeting of the Sandhurst and Ballarat dioceses and the northern region of the Melbourne Archdiocese as priorities for promoting the benefits and services of VACPSP membership thereby increasing membership numbers

- Increase in membership in both dioceses and the northern region of Melbourne has occurred signifying targeted information and more visible promotion by the VACPSP and the work of Zone representatives in these dioceses. It is also recognised that further promotional activity is required to bring membership levels to those in other areas.

A process leading to the identification of the professional learning needs and interests of VACPSP members and development of professional learning opportunities tailored to those needs and interests. This process should include an evaluation of current professional learning activities including the biennial conference

- A position paper on Principal professional Learning has been developed and published via the website
- The biennial Conference has been hugely successful with increased numbers and the opportunity for deputy principals to attend. Those who attended pointed to the fact that it was exclusively and rightly for leaders in Catholic primary schools. All acknowledged the excellent organisation, the calibre of presenters, diversity of content and the opportunity for personal reflection and growth. Attendance at the 2019 conference by the President and Executive Officer of ACPPA was appreciated as was the attendance of the CSPV Executive Officer
- The *Impact the Future 2019* conference video has been produced and included on the VACPSP website. It is a highly professional and engaging production. Zone representatives have been encouraged to show it at zone/deanery meetings
- At this stage an audit of professional learning needs of principals on the basis of interests and need has yet to be conducted.

Preparation of a VACPSP annual report for information and promotional purposes

- Annual reports have been published for the past two years and included on the VACPSP website and distributed to Catholic education authorities. And all members

Other achievements

- An active link with CSPV has been established with VACPSP representation on its Council:
 - The relationship between the two organisations is a developing one and is stronger than it has been in the past. VACPSP has brought a school leadership perspective to the Council. This has opened up possible areas for partnership
 - The two organisations share common values and a shared understanding of the importance of establishing effective school/family relationships
 - The Executive Officer attended the 2019 conference and would value the opportunity to present at a future conference.
- A stronger link with the Australian Catholic University has been established paving the way for more active partnership on mutually agreed initiatives.

Recommendation 2

That a key priority over the next five years be given to strengthening the structural and operational arrangements of VACPSP through the following actions.

This priority has been addressed progressively over the past five years.

Changing the title of Chairperson to President of VACPSP

- The change of title to “president” has occurred. The leadership provided by the president is recognised as a key factor in the enhancement of VACPSP as a significant professional Association for Catholic primary school principals. This change is widely accepted.

Consideration of campus principals and assistant principals as eligible for VACPSP membership

- Campus principals and deputy principals can now attend VACPSP conferences
- The Constitution has been amended to enable campus principals to become members
- At this stage deputy principals cannot become members of VACPSP. It is expected that principals will keep their deputies abreast of key VACPSP matters
- School leadership team members are able to attend the biennial conference. Some principals stated that the conference should only be for principals as it provides a “rare” opportunity for principals to meet and network together.

Consideration of the position of Chairperson/President as full-time with release from her/his current principal’s role to take a more active strategic leadership and advocacy role for the Association

- The president’s position is currently school based with funding provided to the school to enable release for presidential duties two days a week
- Principals fully support the move towards a full-time president believing that the credibility and visibility of VACPSP as the key professional body acting for and representing primary principals will be significantly enhanced
- The Association has been working for some years to create a full-time president’s position. A case for this has been submitted to the CECV and at the time of writing this report, is under consideration although it is recognised by the Executive that this matter may be one for the attention of each diocese following the implementation of new governance arrangements
- An important issue for VACPSP is the funding source for the position. It is unlikely to be resolved until new governance arrangements in all dioceses have been set in place. It should be noted that many principals feel that VACPSP could consider funding a full-time position from its own resources, necessitating a review of membership fees.

Expansion of the time allocation for Executive Officer (perhaps to full-time) to enable a stronger focus on overseeing processes for the development, implementation and coordination of key initiatives including development of position papers and support for Executive Committee members in their roles at the local level

- Staffing arrangements of the VACPSP office have been streamlined with the Business Operations Manager now employed on a full-time basis and the addition of a part-time Accounts Officer who is engaged on a needs-based hourly basis
- The Business Operations Manager and Accounts Officer are highly regarded and recognised for their strong commitment and focused support for the Executive
- The Project Manager is also highly regarded for her high-quality services and leadership within the Association and continues to work on a part-time basis. At this stage the current arrangements work well for the Association

- Monthly informative and well-designed newsletters are distributed and uploaded to the website: These contain links to resources and sponsors
- Induction meetings for Executive members are held at the start of each year.

Establishment of appropriately resourced sub-committees/working parties with terms of reference stating purpose, anticipated outcomes and timeframe for the identified task. It should be recognised that a range of working groups may be in place over the next five years and that some will have a short-term life while others depending on the scope of the work may continue for much longer

- The Executive Committee has overseen the appointment of VACPSP representatives on CECV and CEM working parties as appropriate when requests have been received
- Working parties have been established to address particular issues as they arise. These working parties have been charged with taking action on decisions of the Executive Committee and/or providing advice on matters affecting principals and their schools. Examples of working parties include marketing/building the VACPSP profile, principal wellbeing, overseeing the operational protocols and performance of VACPSP employees.

Allocation of funds to Executive Committee members' schools to facilitate participation in Executive Committee/working party activities

- Funding support has been provided to the president's school to enable him to devote two days to the responsibilities associated with the role
- Most zone/deanery principals' networks have allocated funds to Executive members' schools to enable them to attend VACPSP meetings.

Further consideration of the need for field officers to assist implementation of strategies for enhancing the profile and status of the Association. Clarity of role and purpose in the context of VACPSP strategic directions is required prior to any decision about field officers being made

- It has been decided not to appoint field officers. The strength of the Executive Committee and in particular the zone/deanery representatives has led to more effective communication and the facility to gather the views of principals regarding key matters impacting on their roles and school operations.

Further consideration of whether or not a static office for the Association should be established. A business case for this should be developed in the context of new strategic directions and any major changes to the structural and operational arrangements as listed in the above recommendations

- The location of the VACPSP leadership team across the state is regarded as an important aspect of distributed leadership. This has minimised the feeling that the Association is Melbourne-centric. Consequently, it has been decided that there is no need for a static office. Current arrangements are efficient and overhead costs are kept to a minimum.

4.2. Challenges facing principals in the current educational, economic and political environment

- The move to more centralised governance arrangements in all dioceses (this has already occurred in the Sale diocese) was identified in all consultation conversations as an important issue for principals. In general, principals believe that the VACPSP needs to be vigilant as proposed arrangements are made known. Participation in the CEM's Governance working party is seen to be an important vehicle for the Association's voice on key issues to be addressed and where influence can be clearly applied in the interests of all principals and schools. Any VACPSP impact on country dioceses has yet to be felt.

Principals believe that the following issues are ones where the Association can exert concerted influence:

- Relationship of principals with Parish Priests in the new governance environment
- Recruitment and induction of new principals
- Professional supervision as a key aspect of principals' employment contracts
- Contract renewal of principals
- Accountability and compliance requirements of principals and schools
- Perceived loss of autonomy at the local level
- Principals' workload and wellbeing
- the spiritual dimensions of principalship and the role of the principal in relation to Catholic identity
- Support for students with disabilities and those with serious behavioural disorders/practices.

It is important to note in the context of these challenges, that recent research findings point to the importance of school systems developing and aligning policies, implementation strategies and practices in a coherent way to achieve improvement objectives and outcomes. Increasingly, systems are working towards integrated approaches to strengthening school leadership, school improvement and accountability, building the quality of teaching, and ensuring rigorous and supportive principal and teacher performance and development processes and procedures. It is recognised that system leaders, comprising senior leaders in central and district offices, school principals and including school governing authorities, working collaboratively create the conditions for improving school leadership, teaching, learning and professional development practices in all schools within a system.

There is now a wealth of knowledge about school, leader, and teacher effectiveness and the ways in which improvement processes can be successfully and effectively embedded routinely into a school's culture, identity and practices. Importantly there is also a growing catalogue of literature that demonstrates the importance of strong relationships and partnerships between education authorities, local/district offices and schools to maximize the impact of school practices on learning outcomes for students.

Hence VACSPS should be devoting energy and effort in developing and sustaining effective relationships and where appropriate partnerships designed to enhance the key role of educational leaders in their local school communities, their leadership

skills and the supportive networks of principals. This is a pressing priority given the imminence of new governance arrangements in dioceses.

- In general principals see that there is a need to ensure that the reputation of Catholic education and Catholic schools is enhanced across the state. Many principals feel that issues arising from Royal Commission findings have “damaged” the Catholic church with an adverse effect, in some instances, on school enrolments. The dissemination of the VACPSP video on the values of Catholic education and the benefits of a Catholic school education is highly regarded. Its content and intent are still relevant, and the video is worthy of a rerun in the current climate. In addition, it is felt that the Association has an important part to play in promoting the centrality of the catholicity of primary schools and the spiritual dimensions of principals. Additionally, it is felt that VACPSP could build links with appropriate bodies in the early childhood sector
- There is also a view held by some that the current pandemic is having a marked impact on the economic wellbeing of families with consideration being given by some to the movement of children into government schools by family necessity rather than preferred choice
- Some principals expressed the view that the enrolment policies of some Catholic secondary schools effectively denied the enrolment of some Catholic primary school students in these schools. This is seen to be a matter for further investigation by the Association. When further information is obtained, liaison with the Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools (APCSS) should occur
- Principal wellbeing is a key concern for most principals. Many expressed the view that often there is a feeling of “loneliness” in the job, of “abandonment” and “vulnerability”. The increasing demands of parents, increase in the numbers of students requiring special assistance, the potential for litigation, increased compliance and accountability requirements, changes to school governance and increased awareness of, and actions designed to ensure the safety and protection of students contribute to this feeling. Connections with colleagues is regarded as a significant mitigating factor; collegiality and networking being seen to be an essential professional requirement.

The VACPSP’s *Position Paper on Principal Wellbeing*, accessible through the VACPSP website, highlights the importance of establishing the right conditions in dioceses for supporting principals and identifying their continuing professional learning and wellbeing needs. It is a document that clearly provides a solid basis for focused advocacy and formalised relationships with governing authorities in the new Catholic education governance era. This point is made as follows: “Catholic Education aims to support the growth of all members within the community. It is the responsibility of the system to provide the environment where all people can flourish and grow to fullness of life... As members of a faith-filled community, the VACPSP will work in partnership with Archdiocesan and Diocesan agencies to fulfil this important task.”

The VACPSP’s *Position Paper on Principal Professional Learning*, also accessible

through the VACPSP website and a companion piece to the wellbeing position paper, provides a platform for action on two fronts; firstly, “supporting the learning and growth of all leaders in Catholic schools, especially current Principals and those who are aspiring to Principalship”, and secondly, working in “partnership with Archdiocesan and Diocesan working parties as strategies are developed at a System level”.

Many believe that VACPSP has a key role in encouraging, supporting and promoting professional connections through the use of technology as an important vehicle for this purpose. The current pandemic has highlighted the importance of virtual meetings in bringing principals together. VACPSP should continue to explore ways in which technology can be used to gain input from principals and as a means of communication about what the Association is doing on their behalf. Zone/deanery representatives, operating as they do at the local level, can play an important role here. The profile of VACPSP would be enhanced as principals see the practical benefits of VACPSP membership.

- For principals in rural Victoria, of continuing concern, is the bussing of students with Catholic primary schools seen to be at a disadvantage. It seems that priority is given to government schools thus making it difficult for bus routes and times to be changed. This is seen to be a matter which VACPSP could take up with diocesan Catholic Education Offices.

5. Ensuring the relevance of VACPSP for members and non-members

- Some principals indicated that the biggest risks facing VACPSP are 1) principals not seeing the relevance for them, 2) a perception that the needs of members are not sufficiently recognised, 3) the services and support provided by VACPSP may not be widely known and, 4) insufficient recognition of the Association as a key body representing the interests and wellbeing of principals. It seems that for some principals there is a lack of awareness of the gains of the Association over the past few years. This points to the continuing need for high visibility in local zone/deanery networks. Links between experienced VACPSP members and new members to promote the aims activities and achievements of the Association should be encouraged. Zone/deanery representatives on the Executive can help facilitate this. Seeking audience on a regular basis and maintaining communication channels with diocesan Catholic Education Offices is of paramount importance
- It is acknowledged that VACPSP has made positive and strong gains over the past five years. Increased membership is testimony to this with the work of the president and executive lauded for its sustained efforts on behalf of principals
- It is still the case, despite increased membership, that some principals do not know much about the Association and what it does or could do for them. There is a continuing need to raise awareness of the Association’s achievements and be clear about its benefits and services to members. Zone/deanery representatives supported by the Executive play key roles here. A full-time president with the capacity to attend zone meetings is also recognised as an urgent priority for the Association. In addition, bringing members together through the use of communication technologies is seen to be a positive and necessary way to engage principals in key matters and

challenges facing them and to assist in exploring and contributing to practical actions that VACPSP could take to support them

- Whilst membership numbers have grown over the past few years, there is some concern that membership in the dioceses of Sandhurst and Ballarat and the northern region of the Melbourne Archdiocese remains comparatively low. It is recognised that with further targeted promotional activity the membership in these areas will continue to increase
- The profile and standing of the VACPSP has been enhanced by stronger representation from all zones/deaneries. Continuing support from the Executive is a necessary condition for enabling representatives to promote actively and promulgate the key actions and influence of VACPSP at local, state and national levels and to attract new members
- The engagement of Brennan Law Partners demonstrates in a highly visible and practical way, the commitment of VACPSP to the professional wellbeing of principals. It is felt by many that this important service to members could be given greater prominence in communications
- The promotional video, regular newsletters, publication of position papers, stronger links with the CECV and representation on national principals' bodies have enabled a higher profile within the Catholic education sector. These gains provide the platform on which to build new strategic directions. They should be celebrated and publicised. It is also recognised that greater use of social media for communication and feedback purposes should be used to enhance VACPSP visibility and members' engagement
- The distinction between the industrial and professional interests of principals is now much clearer. It is recognised that the driving intent of the Association is to be recognised first and foremost as a vibrant, proactive organisation representing the professional interests of principals. The vision and mission statements of VACPSP reflect this. What is now required is the alignment of strategic directions and actions with the stated goals
- The VACPSP web site is not visited on a regular basis. Many indicated that they could not remember their passwords. Many feel that the website is ineffective as an essential communication medium for principals. Whilst the website contains important operational information about VACPSP, it lacks the key "engagement factor". The front page is overwhelmed by the logos of the sponsors and business partners (some indicated the VACPSP logo is "lost" and therefore lacks visual impact). In general, it is felt that the website needs a "makeover". The Association's Facebook page is scarcely accessed, and it was pointed out that there is no recent content. The value of social media as important vehicles for communication should be investigated perhaps through the establishment of a small working party of members with a passion for the use of social media in the professional context
- It is unanimously agreed that VACPSP should have a highly visible and strong identity demonstrated by active promotion of the key role principals play as Catholic education leaders. All recognise the potential of VACPSP to support and represent principals. It should be the "voice" of Catholic primary school principals on issues that

resonate with principals across the state. It should have recognised status within the Catholic sector in Victoria and Australia. Recognition by both APPA and ACPPA of VACPSP as the unique body representing the professional needs and interests of Victorian Catholic primary school principals is an important contributing factor to the raised status of the VACPSP. The benefits of representation on ACPPA and APPA are not necessarily known and understood by principals and should be communicated to members in a timely way

- The Executive Committee is increasingly buoyed by the fact that VACPSP is increasingly being called on to provide input/feedback on CECV initiatives. It is generally believed though that VACPSP should be taking a proactive stance on issues that directly relate to the professional needs and interests of principals. When systemic decisions are made without effective consultation with principals, distrust, confusion and dilemmas can ensue. It is believed that productive, constructive, trusting relationships between the CECV/Catholic Education Offices should be fostered. Whilst there are meetings held with the Executive Director and Directors of Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) there are no meetings at present between Directors of Education in country dioceses and VACPSP representatives. This tends to reinforce the view of some country members that VACPSP is “Melbourne-centric”
- Generally, principals believe that VACPSP needs to be courageous with strong, informed and influential leadership. Two important questions need to be addressed: “Are principals brave enough to take a stand on key issues impacting on their leadership within the Catholic sector?” and, “Is VACPSP brave enough to take a stand on key professional issues on behalf of its members?”
- The VACPSP vision and mission statements are seen to be strong and relevant. However, it is also generally recognised that the vision and mission statements gain higher visibility and increased traction when initiatives and actions are clearly attached to them. This view was commonly raised by individuals and focus groups. As some expressed, “there is a need for more action to give life to the vision and goals”, a need to “ensure that actions are referenced to the vision” and should be seen “as drivers for the services and activities”
- The biennial conference, supported by business partners, is valued and recognised as a well-designed and important professional learning experience for principals and other school leaders. The focus on Catholic school leaders is seen to be a major strength providing a key opportunity to focus on catholicity and its importance for Catholic schools and their leaders. Interestingly, for many principals, this is seen to be one of the few tangible benefits of VACPSP membership.

It is the view, however, of many principals that the professional development program of the VACPSP beyond the conference is problematic. There is an urgent need to tap into principals’ professional learning needs and to consider the development of partnering relationships with Catholic Education Offices and the Australian Catholic University on key professional learning opportunities tailored to principals’ needs. The induction of new principals, mentoring and participation in system-led conferences and related activities are immediate possibilities for concerted VACPSP action. Already a positive relationship with the Leadership Development section of CEM has been established with the view to identifying ways

in which CEM and VACPSP can work together to support the professional learning of principals. Establishing similar relationships with Catholic Education Offices in country dioceses should be pursued in the short term.

6. Recommendations: Strategic priorities for the next five years

It is recommended that six strategic priorities and associated areas for action be adopted for implementation by VACPSP over the next 5 years. The recommendation is intended to build on the strengths of past and current practices and to point to areas where further development and improvements could be made.

The strategic priorities have been drawn from an analysis of the information gained from the consultations with principals, one-on-one conversations with the VACPSP President, Project Manager and Business Operations Manager, VPA President, CSPV Executive Officer, VACPSP representative on CSPV Council, CEM Learning Services Director and meetings with the VACPSP Executive and the CEM Executive Director and Directors. Relevant membership data and an examination of the VACPSP website and policy documents have also helped inform the priorities.

They are framed in the knowledge that VACPSP has worked assiduously to implement the recommendations of the previous 2015-2020 strategic planning report. Much has been achieved. VACPSP now enjoys increased membership and a higher profile within the Catholic sector and a stronger voice for Catholic primary school principals. At the same time there is widespread acknowledgement that more can be confidently achieved. The will and commitment to improve is clearly evident.

6.1. *Enhancement of the credibility, visibility and influence of VACPSP through creation of a full-time president's role*

Areas for action include:

- Identification of funding sources as a matter of urgency
- Clarification of the role in the context of VACPSP goals and changing governance arrangements for Catholic education in Victoria.

6.2. *Ensuring strong advocacy and influence as new Governance arrangements are put in place*

Areas for action focused on influence and possible partnerships with governing authorities include:

- principals' workload and wellbeing
- recruitment and induction of new principals,
- contract renewal of principals,
- accountability and compliance requirements,
- perceived loss of "autonomy" at the local level,
- relationship with the parish priest/canonical administrator and School Advisory Boards,
- the spiritual dimensions of principalship and the role of the principal in relation to Catholic identity
- Support for students with disabilities and those with serious behavioral disorders/practices, and;
- Making space in the biennial conference for gaining input on key issues facing principals and for which advocacy is required.

A step forward would be the development of further VACPSP position papers that can be used as levers for influence and advocacy with Catholic education authorities. Aligned with this is the need to ensure these position papers are known and understood by the authorities and VACPSP members.

6.3. *Input and influence regarding the professional role of principals with a specific focus on professional supervision support for principals*

Areas for action include:

- Gaining input from principals across the state to determine their professional requirements relating to professional supervision
- Development of a position paper for presentation to Catholic education authorities.

6.4. *Tapping into and supporting the professional learning and wellbeing needs of principals*

Areas for action include:

- Increased opportunities for networking, and the sharing of leadership practices at the local level and through newsletters
- Mentoring of, and support for, newly appointed principals,
- Monitoring of principals' wellbeing at the local level
- Processes for the identification of principals' specific professional learning, workload and wellbeing needs
- Continuing engagement of Brennan Law Partners as a provider of legal support for principals
- Promotion of the biennial conference as an important vehicle for professional learning, collegiality, networking and raising the profile of VACPSP
- Use of VACPSP alumni as mentors for newly appointed principals and those who seek support.

6.5. *Development of strong, sustained and formalised relationships with Diocesan offices, and where appropriate, Catholic School Parents Victoria and the Australian Catholic University*

Areas for action include:

- Establishment of, and maintaining effective working relationships with CECV, CEM, CEM regional offices, country Catholic Education Offices, and Principal Consultants in zones/deaneries
- Identification of key priorities for continuing discussions and communication with Catholic education authorities
- Developing and sustaining effective partnerships on mutually agreed initiatives that enhance Catholic education and the role of school leaders in creating the right conditions for improving student learning and school/families relations.

6.6. *Establishment of a clearly articulated communication strategy enabling maximum engagement of principals in advancing the mission and goals of VACPSP and gaining regular input to VACPSP policies and directions*

Areas for action include:

- Focused support and resources for Executive members to perform their roles

- effectively at the local level through sharing of practices and workshops
- Effective use of social media for communicating VACPSP policies, news alerts, current activities, intended actions, and outcomes of meetings with governing authorities to members
- Continuing promotion of the achievements and benefits of VACPSP to increase membership particularly in the dioceses of Sandhurst and Ballarat and the northern region of CEM
- Improving the VACPSP website and Facebook page
- Effective use of communication technologies for bringing principals together
- Promotion of Catholic education and Catholic primary schools as the preferred choice for families connected to the Catholic church.

7. Alignment of strategic actions with VACPSP vision, mission and goals

Emerging from conversations with principals across the state was the need to refer continually to the VACPSP vision, mission and goals as the drivers for action to strengthen the influence and impact of the Association in its advocacy and services for principals. It is recognised that the vision, mission and goal statements gain higher visibility and increased traction when initiatives and actions are clearly attached to them. The following table illustrates the way in which areas for actions relate to VACPSP goals.

From this, it is suggested that whenever VACPSP develops position papers, initiatives, programs and events, reference should be made to relevant VACPSP goals.

Vision: <i>Catholic principals leading with a strong, courageous and active voice, promoting educational excellence in Catholic schools</i>	
Mission: <i>To advocate and be an influence for principals in enacting their role</i>	
Goals	Areas for action
<i>To be visionary in the representation of principals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation of full-time president's position with a clear role description in the context of VACPSP goals and changing Catholic education governance arrangements ▪ Review of the roles of VACPSP employees as new directions are implemented ▪ Promotion of VACPSP as the key professional body representing principals at local, diocesan, state and national levels
<i>To be strategic in the advocacy for principals.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full-time president with access to Catholic education leaders in all dioceses, principals' networks and national primary principals' Associations ▪ Focused support and resources for Executive members to perform their roles effectively at the local level ▪ Position papers on key issues affecting principals' wellbeing and workload ▪ Effective communication strategy with CECV, diocesan education offices and CEM regional offices ▪ Making space in the biennial conference for gaining input on key issues facing principals and for which advocacy is required
<i>Through collaboration, unite and empower principals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective communication strategy with principals through zone/deanery representatives, social media

	<p>and communication technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued promotion of the achievements and benefits of VACPSP to increase membership particularly in the dioceses of Sandhurst and Ballarat and the northern region of CEM ▪ Formalised relationships with diocesan offices ▪ Stronger relationships with Principal Consultants in zones/deaneries ▪ Partnerships with diocesan education offices on mutually agreed initiatives and where appropriate, Catholic School Parents Victoria and Australian Catholic University
<i>To increase the professional skills of principals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify professional needs of principals ▪ Programs and activities tailored to principals' needs ▪ Establishment of partnerships with Catholic education authorities to design and deliver leadership development programs and activities ▪ Mentoring and support for newly appointed principals ▪ Increased opportunities for networking ▪ Promotion of biennial conference benefits for the personal and professional growth of principals
<i>To improve the wellbeing and working conditions of the principal class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify wellbeing needs of principals ▪ Seek input from principals on key matters affecting working conditions ▪ Development of position paper on professional supervision component of employment contracts ▪ Use of VACPSP alumni as mentors for newly appointed principals and those who seek support ▪ Advocacy and influence through effective liaison and communication with Catholic education authorities ▪ Maintain and promote the services of Brennan Law Partners

8. Timeline for implementing priorities

Priority	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1. Enhancement of the credibility, visibility and influence of VACPSP through creation of a full-time president's role					
• Funding sources	☐				
• Role clarification; President, VACPSP employees	☐				
2. Ensuring strong advocacy and influence as new Governance arrangements are put in place					
• Governance issues impacting on principals	✓				
• Position papers for advocacy with Catholic education authorities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Input and influence regarding the professional role of principals with a specific focus on professional supervision support for principals					
• Input from principals on professional supervision	☐				

• Position paper on professional supervision	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. <i>Tapping into and supporting the professional learning and wellbeing needs of principals</i>					
• Increased opportunities for networking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Mentoring newly appointed principals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Monitoring principals' wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Identification of principals' professional learning, workload and wellbeing needs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Continue with Brennan Law Partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Promotion of biennial conference	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Use of alumni for mentoring		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. <i>Development of strong, sustained and formalised relationships with Diocesan offices, and where appropriate, Catholic School Parents Victoria and the Australian Catholic University</i>					
• Priorities for discussion with Catholic education authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Effective relationships with CECV, CEM, and country Catholic education offices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Establishment of working relationships with CEM regional offices	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Liaison with Principal Consultants in zones/deaneries	<input type="checkbox"/>				
• Development of partnerships with Catholic education authorities to achieve mutually agreed objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
6. <i>Establishment of a clearly articulated communication strategy enabling maximum engagement of principals in advancing the mission and goals of VACPSP and gaining regular input to VACPSP policies and directions</i>					
• Support and resources for Executive members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Effective use of social media and communication technologies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Continuous promotion of VACPSP achievements and benefits of VACPSP membership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Targeting of Sandhurst and Ballarat dioceses and Northern CEM region for increased membership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
• Continuing promotion of Catholic education and Catholic primary schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Conclusion

The VACPSP is well poised to build on past gains and to move confidently into the future. With a full-time president and clearly articulated priorities and actions aligned with the Association's vision, mission and goals, the profile and standing of VACPSP within the Catholic sector will be enhanced. The services and benefits for principals will be better known and appreciated. Relationships with Catholic education authorities will be strengthened based on cooperative effort, collaboration and partnerships on mutually agreed initiatives.

The Consultant thanks VACPSP and all those with whom he has consulted for their encouragement and generous gifts of time, views and ideas.