



GUIDELINE

Guideline for the Appointment of a Principal

Introduction

Mercy Partners is a pontifical Public Juridic Person (PJP) enacted by the Holy See in November 2008. Mercy Partners, the PJP, is governed by its Canonical Statute which has been approved by the Holy See. Mercy Partners Limited, the civil entity, is a company limited by guarantee and is governed by its Constitution.

Mercy Partners is the canonical sponsor and civil owner of a number of education ministries located in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The educational ministries are also companies limited by guarantee, with Mercy Partners being the sole Member of each of the companies.

Context

The Constitutions of each of the educational ministries set out the Reserved Powers of the Member and include the power of the Member to approve the appointment or dismissal of the principal of the ministry in accordance with contractual, industrial and legal due process and in consultation with the Directors of the ministry Company.

Whilst the ministry Board is the employer, the principal is the chief executive officer who complies with and ensures that the ministry's Executive Leadership Team implements the Board's strategic direction and policy. The principal is responsible for the ministry's leadership and management, the ongoing formation of the ministry as a community of faith, the good order and quality of performance of the ministry, and the educational, pastoral and spiritual welfare of the ministry's students and staff.

Appointing the right person as principal is critical for the ongoing success of Mercy Partners educational ministries. Rigorous recruitment and selection processes are essential if ministries are to attract and be led by principals of the highest personal and professional calibre. Moreover, such processes are to be ethical, procedurally fair and effective.

It is the role of Mercy Partners to establish Guidelines for the Appointment of a Principal. It is the role of the ministry Board to implement the process and protocols for the appointment of the principal in consultation with Mercy Partners and aligned to this Guideline.

This Guideline is intended to support Board Directors and all people involved in the principal appointment processes to achieve these outcomes.

Key Selection Criteria

The role requires that the principal be a baptised member of the Catholic faith and committed to Gospel values. Other essential criteria for the principal position should include:

- active membership in a Catholic Eucharistic community;
- demonstrated capacity to lead in alignment with the school's mission and vision as a Catholic faith community;
- recognised and current qualifications in Education and Theology/Spirituality, preferably at a Master's or Doctoral level;
- proven leadership experience, preferably within a Catholic education ministry;
- ability to serve as both a leader and a role model for the community's values and aspirations;
- capacity to lead in the formation of both staff and students.

The new principal should be held in high esteem by peers and have the energy and capacity to encourage and inspire all members of the ministry community.

Other criteria will be specific to the needs of the ministry at the time, and will be underscored by a well-defined position description that outlines specific duties associated with:

- faith development and religious education
- educational leadership
- pastoral care and child safety
- staff management and holistic formation
- administration and financial management
- strategic planning
- legal compliance.

Essential to and underpinning the selection criteria is the core specification that the principal is the Catholic faith leader who is responsible for the maintenance and development of the Catholic education ethos within the ministry community.

Role of Mercy Partners in Selection and Appointment Processes

When a principal's term is nearing completion or upon their resignation, the Chair of the ministry Board must immediately notify the Chair of the Mercy Partners Board.

The ministry Board must prepare a selection procedure document for Mercy Partners' review and endorsement. This should specify:

- The names of selection panel members for each stage of the recruitment process
- The entity responsible for coordinating recruitment (and the scope of their role)
- The Selection Panel Chair and members
- Indicative timelines for each stage of recruitment

This information must be provided before engaging a recruitment firm.

Mercy Partners will appoint a representative—typically the ministry's Liaison Person—to serve on the selection panel.

During recruitment, the Chair of Mercy Partners must receive the names and CVs of proposed shortlisted candidates and be invited to comment before those candidates are notified.

After interviews, once the panel identifies a preferred candidate, the Chair of the ministry Board will seek formal endorsement of the candidate from the Mercy Partners Board, via its Chair. Only after endorsement may an offer of appointment be made.

Upon acceptance, a notification protocol will be agreed between the ministry and Mercy Partners Chairs to ensure timely communication with all key stakeholders.

Role of Recruitment and Selection Panels/Personnel

The recruitment and selection panels are responsible for:

- Advertising the position.
- Preparing an application package (including ministry overview, position description, criteria, process, and timeline).
- Receiving and managing applications.
- Conducting probity and credential checks (qualifications, employment history, teacher registration, Working with Children clearance).
- Conducting reference checks, including faith and employer references.
- Scheduling and conducting interviews.
- Formulating an appointment recommendation to the ministry Board.

Before advertising, ministries are encouraged to hold consultations with members of the ministry community to identify shared hopes and expectations for the next principal. This feedback should inform the panel's discernment.

If an external recruitment officer or agency is engaged, a clear written brief must define the scope of their duties. This brief must include:

- The expected deliverables and timelines.
- A fee proposal and credentials, including relevant experience, referees, and demonstrated capacity to undertake executive recruitment within Catholic education or the not-for-profit sector.
- A statement acknowledging that the recruitment agency is not part of the decision-making process.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the ministry's Catholic identity and culture, and on the expectation that the successful candidate will actively further the mission and objectives of Catholic education while upholding the ministry's tradition, ethos, and philosophy.

Decision-making authority remains solely with the Selection Panel and not the recruiter, in consultation with the ministry Board and Mercy Partners.

Confidentiality

All persons involved in the recruitment and selection process must maintain strict confidentiality throughout every stage. Information relating to inquiries, applications, interviews, or deliberations is not to be shared beyond those authorised to participate in the process.

The names of individuals who make inquiries or submit applications must remain confidential and are not to be disclosed outside the Selection Panel, the Chair of the ministry Board, and the designated Mercy Partners representative. This preserves the privacy and professional reputation of all prospective applicants.

When the shortlist of candidates is provided to Mercy Partners for endorsement, the information is to be treated as strictly confidential. Mercy Partners will restrict access to the material to the Chair and nominated reviewers solely for the purpose of endorsement. The details of shortlisted candidates are not to be distributed further or discussed outside those directly responsible for the approval process.

All panel members, recruitment officers, and associated personnel are required to maintain confidentiality after the process concludes and to securely destroy or return all recruitment documentation once the appointment is finalised.

Principal Induction and Formation

Once appointed, the incoming principal will participate in a program of initial formation and induction into the Mercy Partners governance arrangements and the traditions of the ministry's founding charism. This will include opportunities and links with other Mercy Partners' principals in Australia. The programs should start prior to the commencement of the position being taken up formally by the incoming principal.

Handover and induction at the school level is a responsibility of the ministry Board and will need to be cognisant of the incoming principal's experience, skills and transition needs.

The principal will have ongoing personal and professional formation pertaining to Mercy Partners and the ministry's founding charism.

Appendix

Included in the Appendix is a summary and checklist of the key principal selection and appointment actions and the personnel responsible for the completion of each of the actions.

Appendix 1

Summary and checklist of key steps in the principal selection and appointment process and the personnel responsible for the completion of each of the actions.

It should be noted that the Chair of Mercy Partners Board may delegate one or more of their assigned responsibilities to an authorised representative appointed by the Chair of the Mercy Partners Board.

Action	Responsible Person	Status (tick once action is completed)
Current Principal resigns or retires, the Chair of the ministry Board to notify the Chair of Mercy Partners Board immediately.	Chair of the ministry Board	☐
Selection procedure, including proposed selection panel Chair and members, is to be prepared by the ministry Board and provided to Chair of Mercy Partners Board.	Chair of the ministry Board	☐
Chair of Mercy Partners Board to notify the Chair of the ministry Board of the Mercy Partners representative/s for the selection and appointment process.	Chair of Mercy Partners Board	☐
Chair of Mercy Partners Board to be provided with information about short listed candidates by the Selection Panel Chair. Short listed candidates to be advised only AFTER Mercy Partners endorsement confirmed.	Selection Panel Chair	
The Chair of the Selection Panel to make a recommendation to the ministry Board of the preferred candidate.	Selection Panel Chair	☐
Chair of ministry Board to seek endorsement by Mercy Partners Board of the preferred candidate through the Chair of Mercy Partners. No offer is to be made to the preferred candidate until Mercy Partners endorsement is received.	Chair of ministry Board	☐
Chair of Mercy Partners Board to advise the Chair of the ministry Board of the endorsement or otherwise of the preferred candidate.	Chair of Mercy Partners Board	☐
At the completion of the appointment process, the ministry Board Chair and the Mercy Partners Board Chair to agree on a Notification Protocol to key stakeholders.	Chair of ministry Board and Chair of Mercy Partners Board	☐
The incoming principal to participate in a Mercy Partners formation and induction program.	Principal and Mercy Partners Formation Directorate	☐

Version Control					
Version #	Overview of updates	Author	Approved By	Date Approved	Next Review Due
1	Creation of Guideline	Education Collaboration Committee	MP Board	13 November 2024	13 November 2027
2	Updates to the Selection and Appointment Process and Role of Recruitment and Selection Panel/Personnel, along with the inclusion of a confidentiality section.	Education Collaboration Committee	MP Board	12 November 2025	12 November 2028