

# InSights

## **Classroom Ready: Demonstrating the impact on student learning of initial teacher education programs**

Summary of responses to  
the call for submissions

October 2015

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership with funding provided by the Australian Government.

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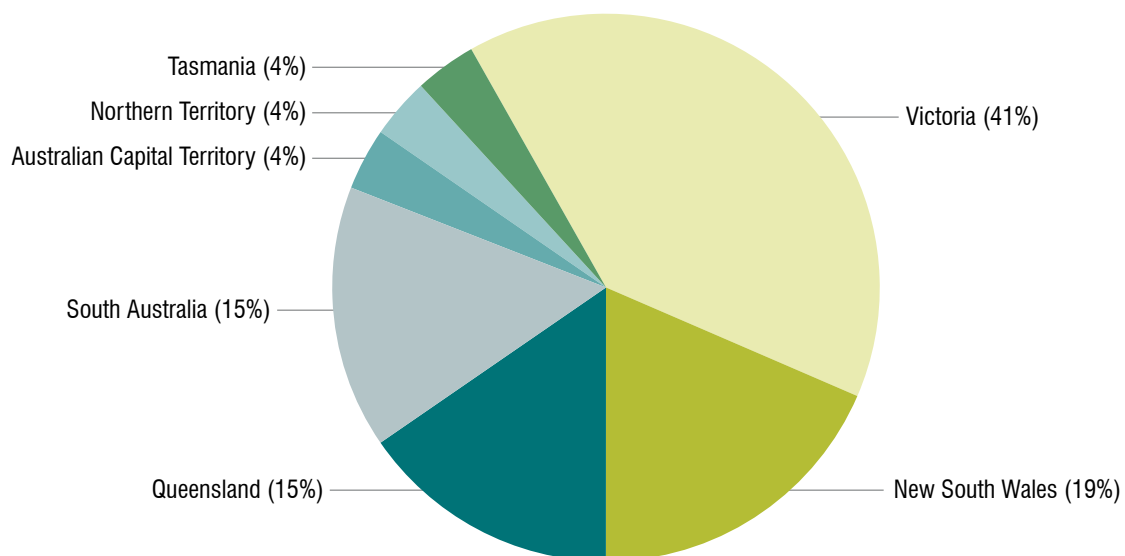
# Introduction

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) called for submissions in response to its position paper, *Classroom Ready: Demonstrating the impact on students learning of initial teacher education programs*. The paper outlined an approach to evidence-based assessment of initial teacher education (ITE) programs and their impact on school student learning.

Three questions were posed to the public and relevant stakeholders for consultation over a period of three weeks. There were 27 responses in total, and during that three week period there were over 860 downloads of the position paper. The majority of respondents were from Victoria (41 percent), followed by New South Wales (18.5 percent), Queensland (18.5 percent) and South Australia (14.2 percent). The roles of the majority of respondents fell under the category of 'other' (33 percent), followed by teacher educators (30 percent), school leaders (19 percent), teachers (11 percent) and government employees (7 percent).

The responses raised some common themes about the validity and reliability of data related to demonstrating impact, and the resourcing, context and ethical implications of data collection. These themes are outlined in the summary below, followed by an outline of the broader challenges identified by some respondents.

Figure 1: Respondents to the call for submissions, by state or territory



Note: Figures exceed 100 per cent as a result of rounding

Figure 2: Respondents to the call for submissions, by role

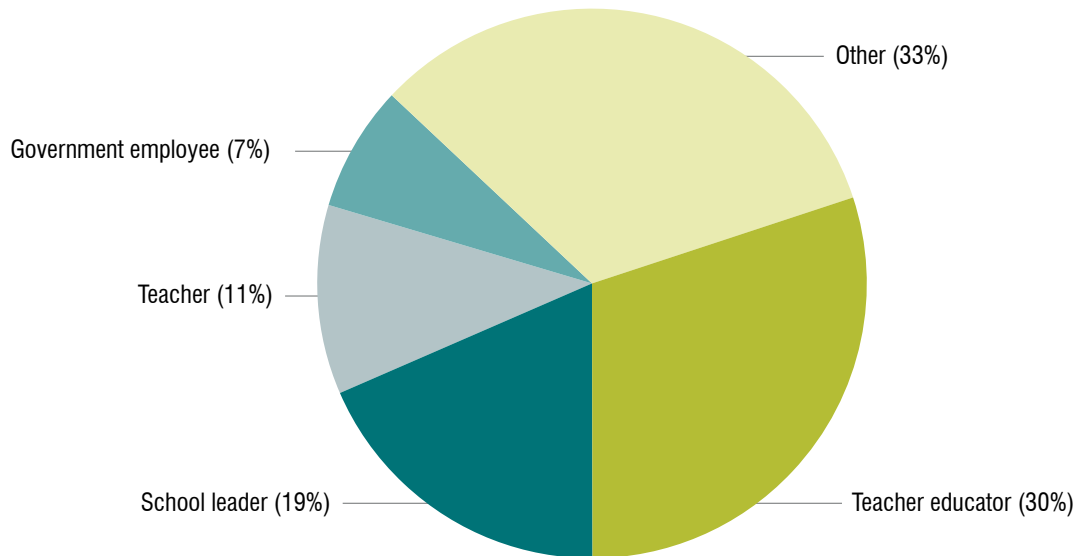


Table 1: Proposal by AITSL on evidence to be collected by providers

Evidence of graduate performance	Evidence of graduate outcomes
1.1 Assessment of graduate standards	2.1 Registration and employment
1.2 Assessment of classroom performance	2.2 Satisfaction of graduates and their employers
1.3 Evidence of impact on schoolstudent learning	2.3 Priorities for program improvement
	2.4 Quality indicators of learning and teaching (QILT) surveys

# Responses

## Which of the proposed components of evidence of impact would convince you about the quality of initial teacher education programs?

The majority of respondents identified categories (1.1) *Assessment of graduate standards*, (1.2) *Assessment of classroom performance* and (1.3) *Evidence of impact on school student learning* as the most compelling evidence of the quality of ITE programs. Feedback indicated that the impact of a quality ITE program should be measured by the assessment of pre-service teachers against the Graduate Career Stage of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)* (1.1), and complemented by evidence of classroom performance (1.2). Several respondents argued that the *Assessment of graduate standards* should serve as an umbrella under which the other six components of the evidence of graduate performance and evidence of graduate outcomes rest.

Evidence of graduate performance was deemed more relevant for establishing the quality of ITE programs than graduate outcomes, due to the fact that it would likely increase the reliability and validity of the data. Almost all respondents noted that the key to evidence is that it is transparent and clearly relates to the outcomes identified and represents authentic learning. For this reason, a significant proportion of respondents cited the use of case studies or portfolios as the most effective form of evidence of impact. Case studies were seen as a more compelling form of evidence which could demonstrate more effectively and successfully the extent to which pre-service teachers have demonstrated the Graduate Career Stage of the APST.

Classroom performance was additionally cited as a crucial measure of impact. However, it was noted that classroom performance assessments could count as part of the broader assessment against the graduate Standards as this would reduce the need to further assess pre-service teachers against the Graduate Career Stage of the APST separately, or to gather additional evidence regarding impact on school student learning. Classroom performance assessments were seen as providing assurance of the quality of an ITE program, and instilling confidence in the pre-service teacher of their readiness for registration and classroom teaching. Some suggestions were made regarding the introduction of either a panel of experts or an individual ITE evaluator to further assess pre-service teachers. Some respondents believe this would increase the validity and reliability of data as it would not solely rely on a school teacher's assessment of performance.

The most commonly cited proposed components under the evidence of graduate outcomes were (2.1) *Registration and employment*, (2.2) *Satisfaction of graduates and their employers*, and (2.4) *Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching (QILT) surveys*. Survey data was believed to be a sound source of evidence of impact because of the variety of participants, and because it could be gathered over time and reported on at regular intervals.

However, while a few of the respondents encouraged the use of surveys, the majority of respondents cited challenges regarding the reliability and validity of survey data, and so cautioned against using surveys with poor response rates. Several respondents recognised the importance of the QILT survey, as it is mandatory for all Australian universities, and encouraged the use of this data as evidence of impact, together with data from surveys conducted with other stakeholders, such as principals, teachers, pre-service teachers and the school students themselves. However, whilst data on the satisfaction of graduates and their employers could be feasibly obtained, some challenges were cited in regards to access to graduates post-graduation, the timing and context of the survey, the potential for 'survey fatigue' in regions with few employers, and the non-compulsory nature of the survey for student participants. A few respondents noted that as a consequence of these key challenges, the data may be influenced by a smaller pool of survey participants and lack the transparency, reliability and validity needed.

## What components of evidence of impact should be mandatory, and which should be optional?

Respondents reported that evidence generated by students which indicates that they have met the Graduate Career Stage of the APST should be mandatory. Many respondents felt that the evidence should expose the development of the professional knowledge, practice and engagement described in the Graduate Career Stage of the APST, and pre-service teachers must be held accountable to these standards.

Some respondents advocated for mandatory national standards to measure all aspects of the evidence. This would ideally result in program-by-program analyses which would be uniform and avoid individual variation amongst those measures. Others however warned against such an approach, stating that it was both difficult and inappropriate to make particular forms of evidence of impact mandatory for all programs, as it would result in a 'one size fits all' approach. Instead, elements should be chosen from within a range of options tailored for the needs and circumstances of particular programs and students, and measured against and achieved through the Graduate Career Stage of the APST. This approach was echoed by several other respondents who raised concerns over the regulatory approach of addressing each of the standards, as it was time consuming and not reflective of the daily teaching and learning that occurs in a program. Instead, a small number of shared instruments or measures of impact could be made mandatory, such as surveys or observation protocols.



Some respondents felt that surveys of supervising teachers and school students and QILT surveys could be optional components to complement the mandatory components (1.1) and (1.2). In particular, respondents noted the importance of gauging the efficacy of pre-service teachers, supervising teachers and principals and using a specific scale to measure efficacy, such as the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES). The QILT survey was regarded as an important optional, yet complementary, component, as common assessment creates a powerful opportunity to strengthen alignment and raise quality and consistency. It was furthermore suggested that whilst the QILT survey provides excellent data for evidence of impact, there should be a common set of questions included in all QILT surveys shared across programs by providers as part of the assessment of graduate outcomes, and that this would be a strong addition to the evidence base.

*Registration and Employment* was also seen as a useful optional component by almost all respondents. This was largely understood as an opportunity to increase transparency, communication and collaboration between providers, regulatory bodies and school employers. It is regarded as potentially falling under component (2.3), *Priorities for program improvement*, with identified targets and implementation plans related to graduate registration and employment.



## What evidence of impact could initial teacher education providers feasibly collect?

Almost all respondents indicated that the most feasible evidence of impact ITE providers could collect would be components (1.1) and (1.2). Most ITE providers already collect evidence of their impact on graduate performance, which includes teaching performance assessment results, classroom observation results, lesson plans, indicators of learning and teaching in conjunction with the schools, video footage of classes, and pre-service teachers' assessment of school students.

A number of respondents encouraged the use of electronic portfolios to collect evidence of impact. It would be possible to ask pre-service teachers to keep a portfolio of evidence against the APST for Graduate Teachers, over the course of their professional experience, which also includes reflections on their teaching and learning.

Several respondents questioned the relevance of components (2.2) and (2.4) to collecting evidence of impact. Although several respondents noted challenges with the reliability and validity of graduate satisfaction data, many agreed that it is easily obtainable by ITE providers, as are data from program QILT surveys. Suggestions were made for AITSL to provide surveys of graduates after they had found employment and their current employers and surveys to graduates and employers following the in-school teacher assessment procedures. Such surveys however must be consistent in their approach and questions so as to accurately measure satisfaction.

## Other matters raised in submissions

Several key themes emerged surrounding the challenges posed by the components of the evidence of graduate performance and evidence of graduate outcomes. Particular concerns regarding a 'one size fits all' approach were raised by many respondents. As teacher education in Australia constitutes a very complex and diverse set of practices in a wide range of contexts, many respondents argued that particular forms of evidence cannot be expected to be appropriate or fitting across providers. Standards, expectations and outcomes vary depending on the school, the classroom, the region, the program and the pre-service teachers themselves. For example, forms of evidence appropriate in urban contexts may not be suitable in regional contexts, or those appropriate for secondary teachers may not be appropriate for primary teachers. As such, mandatory evidence for all programs would assume the commonality of all programs, and overlook the needs and circumstances particular to different programs and students. Instead, several respondents recommended that elements be chosen from within a range of options which are appropriate to those needs and circumstances, and standards established which can be used as a baseline to evaluate the relevance and authenticity of programs and courses offered.

A number of respondents raised concerns about including component (1.3) *evidence of impact on school learning*. Respondents stated that this component is problematic as it is difficult to measure pre-service teacher impact on student learning due to a number of variables and ethical issues. Under the Graduate career stage of the APST, pre-service teachers are assessed on their capacity to support student participation and their knowledge of teaching strategies. Contrary to the outcomes outlined in component (1.3), they are not expected to demonstrate an ability to 'establish and implement' until they have attained full registration. Furthermore, pre-service teachers spend a brief time period engaged in the classroom, and so measuring the impact of their teaching on student learning can be challenging. The context of the classroom can also make measuring impact problematic. For example, pre-service teachers who are placed within a challenging classroom environment and produce lower results cannot be compared with a pre-service teacher who has high performing students who are engaged with their learning and are well resourced.

Significant ethical issues were also raised relating to data collection which would be used to measure impact. A few respondents noted that legally, ITE providers do not have the right to access school student performance data. Should this become standardised, it is recommended by respondents that the Australian Government establish strict ethical guidelines to administer the collection of student grades. Some respondents suggested the use of portfolios to provide evidence of impact on student learning, however as these portfolios would most likely be electronic and contain personal information there are additional ethical considerations. For example, as the learning management system used by some universities cannot be accessed outside of the university context, there are challenges to how pre-service teachers can share and use their portfolio. Also, there are problems with some alternative e-portfolio software which requires that information be kept on servers outside of Australia, which is not permitted under privacy laws.

Several respondents questioned the use of registration and employment data. Whilst such data was identified as important and necessary by some respondents, others considered it as neither reliable nor valid. This is largely because registration and employment data may not reflect the extraneous factors which influence employment after graduation, such as geography, personal circumstances, employment preferences, the changing demographic of graduate teachers, role availability, systemic priorities (such as schools with faith-based programs), and quality induction and mentoring opportunities. Furthermore, once pre-service teachers have graduated, data about registration rests within the regulatory authority, and data about employment (including performance) rests with the employer. Questions were raised therefore about access to such data, and ultimately, how much of this information can an ITE provider be responsible for collecting and managing.

Lastly, a significant number of respondents emphasised the need for greater university involvement in placements and the monitoring of pre-service teachers. In particular, respondents stressed the need for standardised criteria of assessment for pre-service teachers, remuneration for supervising teachers and additional training, classroom observation by the university, and greater collaboration between placement schools and universities to evaluate what the skills and capacities of pre-service teachers.

## Conclusion

In principle, there was consensus among respondents across the board for the implementation of an evidence-based assessment of initial teacher education programs. The majority of respondents found components 1.1 and 1.2 to be the most compelling forms of evidence of impact. While acknowledging the challenges of validity and reliability of survey data, many respondents cited surveys and data collected from 2.1 as supporting sources of evidence to complement evidence of graduate performance. Several challenges however were highlighted to the proposed components of both evidence of graduate performance and evidence of graduate outcomes. In particular, respondents were concerned about maintaining the validity and reliability of data and the problematic aspects of measuring evidence of impact on school student learning. Respondents further emphasised the need for consistency and standardisation, and consideration of the ethical implications around data collection, and also the need to strengthen the relationship and increase collaboration between schools and universities. Ultimately, respondents were all committed to continuous improvement of the teaching profession and to graduates being equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to teach the school students of Australia.

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