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## **Quick start evaluation guide – advice for users**

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# 1. Understand the evaluation framework



# 1. Understand the evaluation framework

This document is a supplement to the Quick start evaluation guide and provides advice for users as they evaluate principal preparation programs.

The Quick start evaluation guide introduces an evaluation framework for professional learning providers and education systems and sectors in Australia. It can be used to assess principal preparation programs against what is known about high-quality principal preparation.

## **We know that effective principal preparation programs:**

- have clearly defined aims in the form of specific, achievable goals
- identify and select talented aspiring principals at an appropriate stage of development to benefit from the program
- are designed and delivered so that participants learn and develop new knowledge, understanding and skills that enhance their leadership ability
- lead to changes in participant leadership behaviour, consistent with the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (the Principal Standard), that in turn shift teaching and learning in the school, and lead to improved student outcomes.

# 1. Understand the evaluation framework

The evaluation framework consists of four components that are supported by key questions and evaluative tools designed to assist with measuring the effectiveness of principal preparation.

## Framework components

COMPONENT 1

### **Review of program objectives and goals**

COMPONENT 2

### **Evaluation of selection processes**

COMPONENT 3

### **Evaluation of program content, design and delivery**

COMPONENT 4

### **Evaluation of participant performance and outcomes**

## Key questions help clarify the focus of the evaluation

Each component has focus questions supported by more detailed key evaluative questions. These help decide what the evaluation will concentrate on. Data can then be collected to help answer the key evaluative questions in each focus area in order to measure the effectiveness of the program.

## Select tools relevant to the program goals

The Quick start evaluation guide includes commonly used tools that help in collecting data about programs. The framework itself does not specify which tools should be used for each key evaluative question because each program is unique. Tools must be chosen that are most appropriate and relevant to the program's objectives and intended outcomes, and adapted to the context.



## 2. Plan and conduct an evaluation of principal preparation



## 2. Plan and conduct an evaluation of principal preparation

Planning is the first step to conducting any evaluation. There are important factors to consider when planning an evaluation to prevent operational matters and practical issues negatively impacting the effectiveness of the process.

### Develop an evaluation timeline

The evaluation framework is designed to be used throughout the principal preparation process but it is recommended a timeline for evaluating the components of the framework is created. A suggested timeline for evaluation is:

Timing	Components	Why evaluate at this time?
Before program	<b>1. Review of program objectives and goals</b>	Review program objectives, goals, intended outcomes and strategies to ensure the selection processes and content are aligned with the program's mission. Articulate the objectives and goals to ensure programs measure what they are trying to achieve.
Before and after program	<b>2. Evaluation of selection processes</b>	Have a theory of who will benefit from the program before the program commences. On conclusion, review whether this was the case, and revise content or selection procedures accordingly.
Before, during and after program	<b>3. Evaluation of program content, design and delivery</b>	Evaluate the content, design and delivery of a program before (to ensure alignment with program goals), during (to review whether delivery is effective and to adjust the program) and after (to analyse how appropriate and effective these aspects were).
During and after program, and ongoing	<b>4. Evaluation of participant performance and outcomes</b>	Analyse the impact of program graduates during the program (to make improvements), after (to analyse the overall impact) and ongoing (to track the performance of graduates and their development as leaders over time).

## 2. Plan and conduct an evaluation of principal preparation

### Allow for different program goals

Programs may have a different impact on outcomes, depending on the program's main goal. A program designed to give principals stronger skills in financial and human resource management may have a less direct impact on student outcomes than a program targeting instructional leadership, though all these skills are crucial to the effectiveness of principals in their broad roles. If comparing different programs and assessing their impact, it is important to compare programs with similar goals and to be specific about their expected impact.

### Consider process, output and outcomes for thorough evaluation

Evaluation can involve an examination of processes, outputs and/or outcomes. Many frequently used measures of program success, such as whether participants enjoyed the program, are forms of feedback that do not give adequate information about impact when used alone.

While enjoyment of a program may indicate that individuals felt they were learning, it does not provide information on changes to their behaviour, impact on teachers in their school, or on the ultimate objective of improved student learning outcomes.

Measuring outcomes is difficult but it is essential for robust evaluation. Outcome measures, such as the impact the program had on participants' behaviour and the impact graduates have had on student learning outcomes, constitute the evidence of whether a program is achieving individual, program and system goals.

### Set up a consistent process for collecting and organising data

Evaluations can become burdensome with over-collection of data, leaving evaluators 'data-rich' but 'information-poor', and with less time and resources for valuable analysis. It is important to be clear about what will be valuable to collect and confine data collection to these parameters.

Once data decisions are made, the strengths and weaknesses of available data collection tools can then be considered. Deciding at this stage on the best data methods will ensure that only necessary data are collected. Take precautions for the possibility of unavailable or incomplete data.

Draw on information from multiple sources and use a range of methods to provide a complete picture of changes taking place as a result of the program. It is worth piloting proposed methods of data collection to ensure they work as intended. Maximising the response rate will add reliability and validity to the data, allowing more significant conclusions to be drawn. Depending on the method of collection, collect data at the same or a similar time each year and keep procedures for collection as similar as possible.

Set expectations of participants in writing at the start of the program and obtain their consent to collect information with a signed statement. Program participants should know what information is being collected about them, and how the data will be used, stored and disposed of. Program graduates are the main source of useful information, so put strategies in place to maintain contact with them.



## 2. Plan and conduct an evaluation of principal preparation

### Analyse the data to identify patterns

After data is collected, analysis should include comparing differences over time and identifying key themes and any recurrent issues. Resist generalisations about data across situations and claiming definitive causal effects. Other factors may have been responsible and should also be considered, such as changes in school demographics, staffing, or education policy factors. Consider investing in data systems that allow for tracking over time and linkages between responses.

### Allow adequate time for evaluating impact

Take a baseline measurement of participants' skills and knowledge to assess what impact the program has in the short term. Pre-assessments and surveys administered as part of selection processes or early in the program can then be useful in making sure the curriculum is meeting the needs of participants.

Post-program evaluations can assess the impact of program graduates in their future roles. To get a full picture of how principal preparation affects participants and schools, evaluations need to be longitudinal and include follow-up evaluations at least 12 months after program completion.

Given leadership development is a continuous process and the impact on student outcomes may take time to materialise, evaluations would ideally continue for a minimum of two to three years.

### Apply the results to guide improvement

Evaluations are a squandered resource if they are not used to guide improvement. When questions have been carefully identified as part of a thorough planning process, then the data collected is likely to be useful in generating high-quality, desirable information at the final stage.

Evaluations can be useful to document changes and improve programs over time. If new elements are introduced to a program or new goals established, then use the results of evaluation to assess whether these changes were effective. Try to determine which parts of the existing program are more or less effective.

It is difficult to guarantee an effective feedback loop but good evaluation design can reduce the chances that evaluations are conducted and forgotten. Some common challenges that can be mitigated are:

Challenges	Potential/partial remedies
<b>Long causal chain</b>	Focus on intermediate outputs (e.g., principal behaviours)
<b>Defining what to measure</b>	Create a clear and agreed-upon evaluation framework
<b>Hard-to-measure outputs</b>	Use mixed methods and multiple sources
<b>Impact takes time</b>	Longitudinal evaluation
<b>Evaluations are underused</b>	Use checklist to help create feedback loop

### 3. Select and use evaluation tools



# 3. Select and use evaluation tools

When using the evaluation framework, first identify the focus areas and key evaluative questions most relevant to the program being evaluated. Then select tools, indicators or measures that will generate answers to them. There are a few useful 'rules of thumb' when selecting, developing and using tools:

## Test the validity and reliability of tools in the context they will be used

Validity refers to the tool's accuracy in measuring what it should measure. For example, student enrolment data may be an invalid measure of principal performance. Greater enrolments at a school could be due to factors that do not relate to the quality of the school leadership.

Reliability refers to how consistently a measure predicts certain outcomes. For example, infrequent teacher observations performed under varied conditions can produce fluctuating results.

The design of many of the tools in the Quick start evaluation guide reflects the contexts they were created in. Altering tools may change their reliability and validity. So, it is best to test the tool (preferably in conjunction with another method) before relying on it to generate data on a large scale.

## Use mixed methods and multiple sources

Most types of evaluation tools generate either quantitative or qualitative data. Quantitative data can be particularly useful in monitoring changes over time to outcome variables. Quantitative approaches include data analysis of changes in student outcomes, employment data or retention rates in a program.

Qualitative data often reveal information about perceptions, experiences and behaviour. Qualitative research tools include open-ended interviews, observations, and self-assessment tools that include opportunities for written responses.

Use of multi-method evaluations, collecting data from different points in time, and gaining perspectives from different groups can all enhance the usefulness, reliability and validity of a program evaluation. Different tools will generate data across different timeframes so this should also be considered. For example, a self-report tool is fairly immediate, but other tools such as observations of leadership practice may require more time to organise and may need to be spaced over time to generate longitudinal data.

## Take precautions to reduce bias

Embarrassment or fear of penalisation may impact the honesty of people's responses about their own or other's performance. A teacher may not wish to give a negative performance review to a principal if they worry it may have an adverse effect on their career. People may over-rate their own performance or knowledge when they are not aware of what they don't know.

While response bias will almost always exist, it is sensible to take the precautions to reduce it. For example, offering anonymity on surveys and combining self-assessments with feedback from others.

## Minimise complexity to maximise response rates

Long surveys and complicated tests often have a high attrition or low response rate. Tools should collect the data they need but not be too burdensome. To engage respondents best, instructions should be clear, question structure should be simple, and response options logical. Design questions, scoring options or rubrics to maximise the variability of responses, allowing greatest differentiation between participants. Rubrics should use consistent and clear language that links the evidence demonstrated by the participant with particular rubric scores. Train raters and provide norming sessions and scoring guides for observational tools to ensure consistency. These actions can help to ensure reliability and validity of responses and that the data generated by tools is most meaningful.



# 3. Select and use evaluation tools

## Evaluation can provide immediate benefits to participants

A well-designed evaluation can benefit participants at the same time as it gathers information. For example, self-assessment tools and course feedback can work to improve the program, while also being integrated into ongoing support for program participants once they have graduated.

Formative and summative assessments throughout the course offer information for both the program provider and the participants on how well the course is working. By evaluating participant performance throughout, participants receive feedback on whether they are improving and where they need help. At the same time, the information being collected will indicate which parts of the program are working well and which are not.

## Take account of ethical and privacy issues

Consider the ethical and legal implications of collecting data. For example, some tools might collect information that could identify or compromise respondents. In such cases, collect data with caution. The context and use of data collection should always be clearly explained. So, make respondents aware of how the information will be used and give them a choice to consent or not.

## Evaluation tools need to be fit for purpose

The key evaluative questions posed in the framework can be answered in many ways. Because each program is unique, evaluation tools must be developed to suit the context and purpose of use.

We do not suggest specific tools for each key evaluative question in the framework for several reasons:

- 1. The choice of evaluation tools should follow from program aims** to ensure the tool will capture data required. Program providers will need to carefully consider the best type of tool, and tailor specific content within it, to generate the data they require.
- 2. There are only a handful of evaluation tools that have been developed and tested in an Australian context.** Tools provided by AITSL (such as the 360° Reflection Tool and the School Leader Self-Assessment Tool) have been created in line with the Principal Standard, and validated in the context of the professional practice of Australian school principals. While the differences between tools created in Australia and overseas may appear superficial, the task of determining their validity would often require testing and further analysis.
- 3. There is limited literature on which specific tools are the best to use** when evaluating certain aspects of principal preparation programs. In some cases, certain types of tools appear likely to generate the required data but in many cases there is no empirical reason why one is more desirable than another.
- 4. Prescribing a specific tool may be too simplistic for most evaluations.** Every methodological approach has strengths and weaknesses and so a mixed method approach to evaluation is recommended. Triangulation – the process of using multiple measures, methods or sources of data to assess an outcome – is particularly relevant in evaluating leadership development programs because of the different levels of impact the program may have.



# 3. Select and use evaluation tools

## Recognise the diverse range of available evaluation tools

The Quick start evaluation guide introduces various types of tools that are commonly used in evaluation. The evaluation framework provides guidance on how these tools can be applied to each component of the process.

<b>Document reviews</b>	Review of school policies, procedures and information can provide useful information as to whether program participants have acted on new knowledge gained throughout the programs. They can also be used to evaluate selection and program delivery phases.
<b>Performance appraisals/ observations</b>	Participants' performance appraisals are a source of data about both performance and change in behaviours and practices over time. Performance appraisals of individuals before they start the program can act as a baseline, with subsequent annual appraisals providing data points in a longitudinal evaluation.
<b>Review of best practices</b>	As part of the evaluation process, you may wish to analyse the evidence base on a particular aspect of the program. For example, reviewing how highly-regarded programs recruit and select participants. This could take the form of a literature review.
<b>Rubrics</b>	Rubrics can be used to assess the quality of processes and outcomes across a range of issues. Rubrics are usually informed by evidence and reviews of best practice, thus making it easier to engage with the evidence base.
<b>Secondary data analysis</b>	Analysis of secondary data sources such as workforce data, or program graduate retention and promotion rates, can be used to identify trends or make predictions about future outcomes.
<b>Self-reports</b>	Self-reports are often used in evaluating learning needs and principal performance outcomes. They are generally cheap, easy to administer, and provide one way of determining differences between program participants.
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	Semi-structured interviews are a valuable source of qualitative data. Typically these interviews are used to gain participants' points of view.
<b>Strategic review</b>	Strategic review tools encompass a range of tools that can be used in assessing and clarifying program goals; results can also be used for future planning. The Principal Standard and Leadership Profiles, which describe the leadership actions of principals as they progress to higher levels of proficiency, may provide a starting point for a strategic review of program aims.
<b>Student outcomes analysis</b>	Student data can be used to help develop an understanding of the impact a leader's participation in a program had on student outcomes such as wellbeing, learning, growth and achievement (the final item as measured by test scores).
<b>Survey instruments</b>	Surveys can be used to collect a range of quantitative data through scaled responses or qualitative data using open-ended questions. They can also be used to triangulate other evaluative data from interviews or observations. They can serve as formative self-assessment opportunities for participants.

## 4. The elements of effective principal preparation



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### There are three key skill areas that aspiring leaders need to develop

The role of school principal is challenging, broad and complex. The *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles* sets out an evidence-based description of effective school leadership. Aligning with the Principal Standard and Leadership Profiles is a body of evidence that illustrates the skills, knowledge and capabilities that principals need. These key skills are:

1. Instructional leadership, including the skills to:
  - define, frame and communicate a school's mission
  - manage the instructional program of the school including supervising instruction, coordinating curriculum and monitoring student progress
  - promote a positive learning climate including protecting instructional time, professional development and promoting high expectations for teachers and students.
2. New management and leadership skills to effectively run a school, including finance and budgeting, human resources and strategy.
3. Higher-order leadership capabilities including strategic thinking, the ability to lead change, and personal and interpersonal skills such as emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-management and relationship management.

## 4. The elements of effective principal preparation

### There is no single, defined and common pathway to becoming a principal

Throughout their careers, teachers and school leaders need to develop their leadership skills, knowledge and capabilities. They develop in part through individual, on-the-job development activities such as mentoring and coaching, taking on more responsibilities or shadowing and observing a principal in a school. Most leaders also develop through formal principal preparation programs.

### High quality principal preparation programs have common characteristics

Research has identified the characteristics of effective principal preparation programs. These can also provide the basis for more effective evaluation.

- 1** Programs need to select participants who have the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to benefit from the training offered.
- 2** Program objectives are linked to the education system's strategic priorities of improving teaching and learning. Programs also need to be explicit about their intended purpose and outcomes.
- 3** Content of the program focuses on developing participants' deeper subject matter expertise, new management and leadership skills, and higher-order leadership capabilities.
- 4** Program delivery includes a range of different learning experiences that encourage collaboration, feedback and the opportunity for individuals to practise new skills in a real world context.
- 5** Rigorous program evaluations are conducted to assess the value and worth to participants, schools and systems, and to guide ongoing program improvement. Evaluation of outcomes should take into account both intermediate outcomes, such as a change in participant behaviour, as well as longer-term outcomes such as improved student performance.



## 4. The elements of effective principal preparation

### Well prepared school leaders can improve student outcomes

The ultimate objective of developing the leadership capacity of aspiring principals is to improve student outcomes, but the relationship between these is indirect. Changes in leadership practices affect teaching, and changes in teaching in turn affect student outcomes. There are many intermediate and external factors that influence this chain of events, such as time lag between participation in a program and taking up a principal role. These factors can interrupt the causal chain and affect the longer-term benefits.

The simplified causal chain leading from principal preparation programs to improved student outcomes includes the following steps:

- Specific, achievable program goals are articulated.
- Talented aspiring principals are selected into the program.
- The program improves participants' leadership ability.
- Program graduates improve their leadership, teacher quality and overall school climate.
- As a result of these improvements, student outcomes improve.

It is essential to state program objectives and intended outcomes explicitly, as well as the underlying assumptions that might explain the how, when and why of the process of change. This will help to isolate parts of the program that contribute to achieving the intended outcomes and link potential individual participant outcomes to system level outcomes. Assumptions that underlie the program and assess its outcomes can then be tested.

## 5. Key evaluation considerations



# 5. Key evaluation considerations

Education systems and sectors in Australia have invested significant resources in developing and delivering principal preparation programs. These investments and the effectiveness of the programs themselves cannot be assessed without a commitment to evaluating them. In short, we need to know what is and what is not working.

## Evaluation approaches must be tailored to context

No uniform approach to evaluating principal preparation programs exists. There are a wide array of programs with diverse goals and they serve participants from different backgrounds and educational contexts. The evaluation framework provides a guiding process to help tailor an approach to evaluation specific to unique program goals.

The framework concerns principal preparation programs or specific leadership courses delivered by a provider to aspiring principals, in line with the Principal Standard. Such programs may be broad or quite targeted in focus. The framework might be helpful in the evaluation of other programs but it is not designed for this purpose.

## Evaluation should consider broad program impacts

Effective evaluative approaches include multi-source, longitudinal measures of program quality and impact. Providers should be able to demonstrate that their programs are readying aspiring principals for their first principal job, that they have a positive impact in this role, and that their program is contributing to the number of well-prepared aspirants available to take up future vacancies. The framework described in this guide allows evaluation of performance in each of these areas.

### Using the framework to conduct high-quality evaluation will help:

- assess program effectiveness by evaluating improvements to participants' skills, knowledge and capabilities
- improve program content, delivery and operation by providing feedback to providers
- encourage alignment between programs and the needs of schools and education systems
- provide accountability as to whether funds are being invested wisely
- inform decisions about potential participants and funders.

# 5. Key evaluation considerations

## Quality evaluation can contribute to improved national approaches to principal preparation

The evaluation framework aligns with the recommendations arising from a review of the Australian principal preparation landscape. These are detailed in the AITSL report *Preparing Future Leaders: Effective preparation for aspiring school principals*.

### Take a systematic, standards-based and coherent approach

C1

This recommendation aligns with the **first component** of the framework, defining program goals in the context of the needs of the education system and the Principal Standard. It is also an important element of the third component.

### Identify and nurture talent

C2

In the strongest approaches to leadership preparation, people are identified early and supported to develop over their careers. The identification, recruitment and selection of potential leaders is addressed in the **second component**.

### Match learning to an individual's capabilities, career stage and context

C2

C3

Program design and learning matched to individual needs and evidence-based course content are critical elements of the **second** and **third components** of the framework.

### Use evidence-based adult learning techniques

C3

Highly effective programs reflect an understanding of adult learning principles including opportunities to apply new skills and knowledge, learning from experts and practitioners, collaborating, receiving feedback and ongoing support. This is addressed in the **third component**.

### Evaluate programs for impact

C4

The **fourth component** of this framework outlines a range of tools for evaluation of program impact at the participant, school, student and system level.



## 5. Key evaluation considerations

### The features of this evaluation framework are distinct from other models

The evaluation framework draws on key concepts and design features from several models, but does not follow any one directly. It is a unique design that features a cyclical review process to determine goals based on system needs, context and the Principal Standard. It provides a range of example tools that can be adapted to collect data for specific needs from multiple sources. Consider these distinctions in developing a unique approach and selecting tools to collect data.

	Similarities	Differences
<b>Wallace Foundation and Education Development Center's rubric</b>	Based on extensive research about effective principal preparation programs	Does not support program providers to review their own goals and is based on a rating system
<b>Rainwater Leadership Alliance framework</b>	Creates a logical evaluation process and the opportunity to define program goals	Does not include outcome measures as part of the process
<b>Center for the Evaluation of Educational Leadership Preparation and Practice guide (also adapted by New Leaders)</b>	Contains a similar framework	Does not have the same emphasis on defining program objectives and articulating the strategies to achieve them
<b>Guskey five-step evaluation model</b>	Focuses on participants' reactions, learning, organisation support and change, use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes	Does not have key elements such as system and participants' needs, or selection of participants