AfGT

Assessment *for* Graduate Teaching

Assessment *for* Graduate Teaching Consortium

Response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

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Executive Summary

The Assessment for Graduate Teaching (A*f*GT) Consortium welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) Discussion Paper. The AFGT is an instrument developed in 2017 by members of the AfGT consortium, which now comprises 15 higher education providers from across four states and two territories. The longevity and breadth of experience provide us with a significant evidence base from which our responses within this document emerge. Our response concentrates on the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs) focussed questions posed in the Discussion Paper as well as advancing associated recommendations for further consideration by the TEEP. Broadly, we have posed a few foundational recommendations followed by more explicit comments and recommendations.

It is our perspective that TPAs play a significant role in the ITE sector and perhaps to some extent, their merit and worth is undervalued. It is argued that requiring greater consistency of implementation of TPAs will provide a strong evidence base for determining the quality and performance of ITE programs and provide insight into the status of our potential teacher workforce. The original purpose of TPAs as envisioned by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG, 2014) remains relevant and it is argued throughout this document that the purpose of TPAs is the assessment of the application of skill and knowledge as related to the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching (APSTs), not the assessment of the proposed core knowledge set.

Addressing the issues of inconsistency in assessment and moderation practices across ITE providers, practicum experiences, and of course, TPAs, is seen as particularly relevant and welcomed. Hence, it is suggested throughout our response that the establishment of a framework for evaluation and monitoring that promotes regular reporting to a national body and supports cross-institutional moderation and national benchmarking would be particularly beneficial. The impact of TPAs that are embedded within ITE programs also needs further consideration and support. Evidence from the A*f*GT Consortium suggests that its embedded nature affords it greater influence on pre-service teachers, teacher educators, teacher education programs and schools alike.

Throughout the Discussion Paper, a number of recommendations are raised that we would argue are interconnected and relate to the implementation and fidelity of TPAs. These key themes are expanded into recommendations throughout our response.

We also hold the view that having developed an assessment task 'from the ground up' as an embedded instrument through the participation of ITE experts across the Consortium and through more than 10,000 completed AfGTs, we are able to draw on what we have learned—both in relation to the AfGT as a Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA), as well as our functioning as an inclusive and mature consortium of 15 institutions.

Summary of Recommendations

Reform Area 1 recommendations
Recommendation 1: That TPAs be embedded within programs of study to provide a genuine authentic framework for inquiry and support program quality and sustainability and that their focus be on enabling judgements about pre-service teachers' readiness to teach.

Recommendation 2: That TPAs must not measure core knowledge specifically, as this is the task of the ITE institution, but that the assessment should relate to the **application** of this skill and knowledge.

Recommendation 3: That closer monitoring of assessment practices and requirements to scaffold evidence into programs may be beneficial.

Recommendation 4: That there be a requirement for consistent practice of annual reporting on program outcomes to a national body.

Recommendation 5: That closer collaboration between the TRAs and the TPA entities be established through an appropriate evaluation and monitoring process.

Recommendation 6: That a national body be tasked with the informed design and operationalisation of an evaluation and monitoring framework, be authorised as a repository to receive and review regular reporting information and conduct national benchmarking exercises.

Recommendation 7: That consideration be given to reducing the number of TPAs to enable consistency of expectations and to strengthen the evidence base of TPAs as appropriate evaluations of graduates' classroom readiness.

Recommendation 8: That confidence be strengthened in the consistency/comparability of TPAs by managing the originally-intended mechanisms and processes – i.e., limiting the number of TPAs, auditing consortium moderation and evaluation processes, and setting benchmarks.

Reform Area 2 recommendations
Recommendation 9: That TPAs are confirmed and established as a significant part of the ITE measurement architecture.

Recommendation 10: That consortia of institutions using TPAs be continued in order to enhance and strengthen the evidence base of what constitutes teaching readiness and that the robust structure of two or three large-scale, valid TPA models should be explored as a way to accurately assess graduating teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement.

Recommendation 11: That in addition to the initial evaluation and endorsement of TPAs, a national governance body such as AITSL be authorised to develop achievement indicators in Program Standard 1.2 to monitor TPAs' ongoing evidence of reliability and validity of the instrument.

Reform Area 3 recommendations
Recommendation 12: That the role of TPAs be reinforced as being explicitly related to the practicum experience.

Recommendation 13: That a national governing body such as AITSL be authorised to work with TRAs and jurisdictional Departments of Education to ensure that there are throughlines between what is approved in TPAs and what can be implemented in schools and other educational settings.

Recommendation 14: That a national governing body such as AITSL be authorised to work with TRAs and jurisdictional Departments of Education to enable the funded provision of professional learning for mentor teachers and professional experience co-ordinators to include strategies for the moderation of pre-service teachers' assessment of their practical experience.

Reform Area 4 recommendations

Recommendation 15: That the TPA remain as an embedded component of the ITE program, is under the remit of the ITE institution, and explicitly related to the work or practicum experience.

Glossary of abbreviations

AfGT	Assessment for Graduate Teaching
EdTPA	Education Teaching Performance Assessment (https://edtpa.org)
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
PST	Pre-Service Teacher
QITE	Quality Initial Teacher Education Review
TEEP	Teacher Education Expert Panel
TEMAG	Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group
TPA	Teaching Performance Assessment

Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper: AfGT Consortium Response

The AfGT Consortium represents one of the elements of the 'ITE ecosystem' since its formation in 2017 as part of a seed-funded project (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2016) to develop a teaching performance assessment (TPA). The original project was completed in 2018 and the AfGT Consortium operates now as a self-governed and self-funded body. The Assessment for Graduate Teaching (AfGT) is an instrument developed by consortium members, which now comprises 15 higher education providers from across four states and two territories. More than 10,000 pre-service teachers (PSTs) have completed the AfGT since 2017, which provides us with a significant evidence base upon which to base our responses within this document.

The 15 institutions that comprise the AfGT Consortium provide a snapshot of the ITE ecosystem: they vary in size (some are very large; others are extremely small); they vary in geographical locations (some are urban-based; others are located in smaller regional centres); they vary in program offerings (some offer graduate programs only; others offer both undergraduate and graduate programs) and they vary in terms of program delivery (some offer only online programs; others offer a range of online, blended and face-to-face options). Through the continual cycle of design, implementation, testing, refining, and reporting, the underlying structure of the AfGT has proved to be robust and valid in a wide range of education contexts. What is clear from our seven years of functioning as a consortium is that there is considerable diversity across the ITE sector and that appreciating the context of institutions is paramount.

We concentrate our responses in this document on the TPA-focussed questions posed in the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper and advance recommendations for the further consideration of the Panel. Having developed an assessment task 'from the ground up' as an embedded instrument through the participation of ITE experts across the Consortium, we are able to draw on what we have learned—both in relation to the AfGT as a Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA), as well as our functioning as an inclusive and mature consortium of 15 institutions.

Introduction

The Australian Government established the Teacher Education Expert Panel (the Panel) in September 2022 to provide advice on implementing two of these recommendations and key issues raised at the Teacher Workforce Shortage Roundtable. The Terms of Reference (ToR) includes providing advice on reforms to:
- strengthen ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates,
- strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE,
- improve the quality of practical experience in teaching, and
- improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants.

Reform Area 1: Strengthen ITE programs to deliver effective, classroom-ready graduates

The Discussion Paper proposed that the Accreditation Standards and Procedures be amended to ensure all ITE students learn and can use the identified practices. This referred to the four core knowledge base practices identified: The brain and learning, effective pedagogical practices, classroom management and enabling factors for learning. The paper raises specific questions that will influence the implementation of TPAs, with specific discussion questions relating to:

- Evidence-based teaching practices,
- Amending Accreditation Standards and Procedures,
- Curriculum specific content, and
- Ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices.

AfGT Consortium's response

One of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group's (2014) findings was that teacher education programs were not consistently equipping beginning teachers with evidence-based strategies and skills needed to respond to diverse student learning needs. They also found that pre-service teachers are not consistently assessed to determine whether they have achieved the Graduate level of the Professional Standards at program completion.

TPAs were designed to alleviate this concern. The recent *Next steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (Paul et al., 2022) suggested that TPAs were a successful initiative of the TEMAG reforms. The Review acknowledged, however, that issues remain relating to the fidelity of implementation, and the need for national benchmarking to understand the nature of impact, influence and quality of ITE programs.

TPAs are designed to measure the application of knowledge and skill gained within a specific ITE program. We would suggest that TPAs already measure the development and implementation of developmentally appropriate lessons that are sequenced and scaffolded to ensure differentiation and inclusion and to assess student learning. TPAs must also simultaneously assess the application of classroom behaviour techniques and PSTs' reflections on the effectiveness of their teaching (AITSL, 2017). Specifically, TPAs assess the PSTs' capability to apply their acquired knowledge and skill against the APSTs, and as such, they are already indicators of core knowledge.

From the perspective the AfGT Consortium, demonstrations of whether all PSTs have the knowledge and skills required would best be found through addressing Program Standard 1 and the APSTs. However, there is risk in being overly specific or prescriptive about the core curriculum, knowledge and skills mandated. Emphasis on evidence-based practice as a generalised principle can be strengthened without reliance on specific approaches that may still be contested in the research discourse.

As ITE internationally is being called upon to address the lack of diversity in curriculum and application, it seems inappropriate to require such a limited and specific core content. It is our view that this level of prescription and reduction in autonomy of ITE providers suggested in the Discussion Paper can only lead to greater inequities and lack of diversity across ITE sectors. Effective teaching is about the weighting of various pedagogical practices while interacting with the context and the enabling factors

for learning. The interaction between the four key factors noted in the Discussion Paper is also essential, however, these four factors do not act in isolation.

All ITE providers implement a program that is specific to their context and informed by specific philosophical and sociological perspectives, whilst demonstrating how their program meets the Accreditation Guidelines (AITSL, 2022). While it is agreed that all providers should focus on evidence-based practice, the issue appears to be the lack of consistency in delivery and reporting. Hence, we would argue that evaluation and monitoring accompanied with reporting to an appropriate body would allow for continuous quality improvement and greater confidence in the consistent quality of ITE programs across the country. The TPAs have a significant role to play in this endeavour as they provide rigorous and reliable evidence of the impact of the programs by assessing the application, knowledge and skills required of classroom-ready teachers.

TPAs provide a strong indication of success. However, it is agreed that more than likely, not all TPAs consistently measure the application of evidence-based practice. There is only anecdotal evidence for this view. The recent proliferation of TPAs and the lack of appropriate national moderation suggests ITE stakeholders may not truly understand or acknowledge the merit and worth of TPAs as an evaluative tool for ITE outcomes.

TPAs currently provide an untapped source of evidence of the impact of ITE programs and while we agree that performance monitoring for ITE programs is essential, it must be based on agreed principles. Further, consistency of reporting accompanied by evidence of impact from each institution would create a firm understanding of the need for policy enhancements in the ITE space. For example, as a consequence of the data collected from the AfGT Consortium, we are able to demonstrate a causal relationship between entry and selection criteria into programs and outcomes related to the AfGT. Similarly, greater use of TPAs, such as providing feedback to pre-service teachers and teacher educators to engage in evaluative thinking would add value. To some extent, it may be that the TPAs are being underutilised and it may be considered that some TPAs are top-down assessments. Consequently, we believe that TPAs that are not fully embedded within a program struggle to demonstrate the relationship between knowledge and skills as taught and may simply add a burden of assessment.

Research into the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) in the United States demonstrates the different perceptions that institutions and stakeholders have about the instrument: it is seen as either a framework for inquiry (that is, an instrument that is embedded within program content and delivery and counting as credit points) or as a compliance device (that is, using the summative assessment as an add-on hurdle requirement) (De Voto et al., 2021). The AfGT is an embedded program that addresses the priorities from the 2014 TEMAG Review (TEMAG, 2014), and as such, demonstrates a closer interaction to the content areas addressed in ITE programs across diverse contexts.

Our experience of the AfGT suggests that collaboration across institutions and activities, such as moderation, adds value to the program and stakeholders. In addition to cross-institutional moderation, the AfGT Consortium conducts regular evaluations of the implementation of the assessment in a continuous improvement process. Alignment of the AfGT with program requirements suggests that institutions have successfully embedded the AfGT into their program designs. The level of insight and familiarity with the requirements of the AfGT reflects a consistent application of the Accreditation Standards and Procedures (AITSL, 2022) – at least across the jurisdictions within which the AfGT is implemented.

The AfGT Consortium works in partnership with stakeholders, including Teacher Registration Authorities (TRAs), and appreciates that more could be done to enhance mentor teachers' knowledge of mentoring and the nuanced requirements of TPAs. The proliferation of TPAs, however, appears counter-productive to the aims of TEMAG (2014) and to the findings of the QITE Review (Paul et al., 2022). For example, questions have been posed by some mentor teachers during annual evaluations of the implementation of the AfGT that suggest concerns about mentor teachers working across so many different TPA activities (Keamy & Selkrig, 2019). Reducing the number of TPAs and insisting on cross-consortia moderation and benchmarking of TPAs will enable consistency of expectation around demonstrations of the achievement of the assessed APSTs.

Reporting to a national body may be a good solution however, we note the challenges of negotiations around what is to be mandated will be significant. Ensuring that any TRA must accredit programs with a robust process that includes the need to comprehensively demonstrate that all APSTs are met may also be appropriate. Furthermore, increasing engagement by TRAs nationally to ensure that the APSTs are met across ITE programs would ensure an appropriate level of consistency. Similarly, we would support greater use of information that emerges from TPAs to ensure national moderation of classroom readiness. This may require significant capacity building across the ITE and education sectors in relation to appropriate and consistent assessment and moderation practices. A national monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of ITE programs through, for example, annual reporting by each institution may be a valuable resource.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That TPAs be embedded within programs of study to provide a genuine framework for inquiry and support program quality and sustainability and that their focus be on enabling judgements about pre-service teachers' readiness to teach.

Recommendation 2: That TPAs must not measure core knowledge specifically, as this is the task of the ITE institution, but the assessment should relate to the **application** of this skill and knowledge.

Recommendation 3: That closer monitoring of assessment practices and requirements of scaffolding evidence into programs may be beneficial.

Recommendation 4: That there be a requirement for consistent practice of annual reporting on outcomes to a national body.

Recommendation 5: That closer collaboration between the TRAs and the TPA entities be established through an appropriate evaluation and monitoring process.

Recommendation 6: That a national body be tasked with operationalising an evaluation and monitoring framework receiving regular reporting information and conducting national benchmarking.

Recommendation 7: That consideration be given to reducing the number of TPAs to enable consistency of expectations and to strengthen the evidence base of TPAs as appropriate evaluations of graduates' classroom readiness.

Recommendation 8: That confidence be strengthened in the consistency/comparability of TPAs by managing the originally-intended mechanisms and processes – i.e., limiting the number of TPAs, auditing consortium moderation and evaluation processes, and setting benchmarks.

Reform Area 2: Strengthen the link between performance and funding of Initial Teacher Education

This section of the Discussion Paper falls into two parts: first, establishing performance measures for ITE. The Panel proposes that measuring performance be used to recognise high-quality ITE programs and identify areas for targeted improvement by defining, measuring, and reporting on the quality of ITE across higher education providers. Second, the Panel suggests potential options for linking performance measures to funding, including financial incentives. The Discussion Paper raises two areas for consideration: Public transparency and accountability, supported by compact agreements and Transition funding to support performance improvement. The specific questions for consideration relate to:

- ITE performance measures,
- Public reporting,
- Public transparency,
- Transition funding to support performance improvement, and
- Excellence pool for higher quality programs.

AfGT Consortium's response

Our response specifically relates to those areas that affect the implementation of TPAs. Funding questions are out of the remit of the TPA, however, it is clear that the funding of ITE programs and future pre-service teacher candidates is of great concern and requires further investigation.

Core to this section is the current place of TPAs within ITE programs. We suggest that TPAs in their current form are a valuable measure of performance and fit well within a measurement architecture of ITE. For example, greater reporting consistency to ensure an emerging evidence base relating to the influence of IT programs would be valuable. It would also assist in demonstrating the causal relationship between ITE programs, TPAs and ultimately the workforce. Using TPAs, for example, to provide more substantive feedback to pre-service teachers will promote evaluative thinking about their practice very early on in the professional learning journeys.

It is our view that establishing an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework that includes areas such as selection, the diversity of program offerings and completion results in TPAs would be an asset. Broad monitoring of inputs and outputs are also important and could be released to the public as a means of transparency and greater clarity.

As previously suggested, cross-institution moderation also provides a process for the continuous improvement of ITE programs, thereby strengthening the evidence that TPAs measure the classroom readiness of graduates (Clinton et al., 2021). There is currently no feasible means by which TPAs can be compared. Consequently, there can be no certainty about the consistency of TPAs; nor can there be certainty about the comparability of passing standards.

Having collective confidence that all approved TPAs (we suggest 2 or 3 nationally to provide for the diversity of contexts) are robust in every measure and comparable, will mean that there can be a revitalised focus on quality, thereby addressing risks of institutional conflicts of interest in where the bar is set. Having achieved that, TPAs would be seen as providing not just a pass/fail but a graduated measure of the quality of each pre-service teacher's response and could provide extremely valuable transitional information that could guide school leadership teams in supporting and further

developing their new graduates. An institution's mean TPA score would be an excellent indicator of program quality.

Recommendations

Recommendation 9: That TPAs are established as a significant part of the ITE measurement architecture.

Recommendation 10: That consortia of institutions using TPAs be continued in order to enhance and strengthen the evidence base of what constitutes teaching readiness and that the robust structure of two or three large-scale, valid TPA models should be explored as a way to accurately assess graduating teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement.

Recommendation 11: That in addition to the initial evaluation and endorsement of TPAs, a national governance body such as AITSL be authorised to develop achievement indicators in Program Standard 1.2 to monitor TPAs' ongoing evidence of reliability and validity of the instrument.

Reform Area 3: Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

This section of the Discussion Paper integrates the system of practical experience, raises a number of questions and suggests that there are a number of opportunities to support consistent, high-quality practical experience across all jurisdictions, providers and schools. The specific questions rate to:

- System-level agreements,
- Centres of excellence,
- National frameworks,
- Student support during placements,
- Integrating theory and practice, and
- Role of schools in supporting practical experience.

AfGT Consortium's response

While many of these questions are beyond the remit of TPAs we would argue that there is an explicit relationship between TPAs and practicum experience that must be further explored. Of great concern is the lack of consistency and rigor in practicum reporting. We know from the experiences of the Consortium that practicum experiences vary considerably across the nation, as do the internal arrangements within ITE institutions that support PSTs undertaking this important aspect of their program of study. The variations necessarily reflect the different contexts of the schools and other settings, yet there are instances where jurisdictional variations means that the AfGT Consortium must consider variations necessitated by different Departments of Education (for instance, in the use of video recording in the AfGT that has been approved by AITSL's Expert Panel for PSTs to reflect on their own teaching).

The AfGT as an embedded TPA ensures that mentor teachers are actively engaged in the TPE process. We would argue this promotes the notion of an integrated education system and provides an opportunity to ensure that practice, theory and learning through assessment are integrated.

For PSTs to be eligible for graduation, they must satisfactorily complete a TPA and pass their teaching placement, which is usually indicated in a report written by the PST's mentor teacher. It is essential that both pieces of assessment work in parallel with each other, yet whilst TPAs are subject to at least within-institution moderation (and in the instance of the AfGT Consortium, cross-institution moderation), the practicum reports are rarely moderated by mentor teachers or professional experience co-ordinators. We also consider that the work of mentor teachers would be enhanced with professional learning opportunities that include guidance about moderation of the assessment of pre-service teachers on practicum experience. This would reduce the variations that exist between mentor teachers' practicum reports and enable increased alignment between the assessments conducted by mentor teachers and what the PSTs are completing in their TPA.

Recommendations

Recommendation 12: That the role of TPAs be reinforced as being explicitly related to the practicum experience.

Recommendation 13: That a national governing body such as AITSL be authorised to work with TRAs and jurisdictional Departments of Education to ensure that there are throughlines between what is approved in TPAs and what can be implemented in schools and other educational settings.

Recommendation 14: That a national governing body such as AITSL be authorised to work with TRAs and jurisdictional Departments of Education to enable the funded provision of professional learning for mentor teachers and professional experience co-ordinators to include strategies for the moderation of pre-service teachers' assessment of their practical experience.

Reform Area 4: Improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

Reform Area 4 suggests that increasing the number of mid-career ITE entrants can help to address teacher shortages and improve diversity in the teaching profession. The Discussion Paper raises a number of opportunities for consideration:
- Better pathways,
- Developing and disseminating evidence and best-practice guidance,
- Improving flexibility in program delivery, and
- Cost of delivery and supply was raised as a key barrier.

The specific questions raised relate to:
- Better pathways for mid-career entrants,
- Building the evidence base, and
- Increasing flexibility.

AfGT Consortium's response

While fast-tracking maybe a sensible option we must ensure that all candidates can complete an appropriate TPA that is clearly aligned to their ITE program. If multiple pathways into the teaching profession are provided, TPAs must be seen as a critical component that demonstrates the capacity and capability to teach in any context.

Further, the AfGT Consortium believes there are some risks associated with leaving the TPA until well after PSTs finish their last formal coursework requirement. Delaying completion of the TPA could be problematic logistically, from a resourcing and knowledge-based perspective. Without support from the ITE institution, it is hard to see how pre-service teachers will be able to successfully complete the TPA at the current quality levels. In addition, if high standards of teacher preparation are to be maintained across ITE providers, more consideration needs to be given to how mid-career entrants into the teaching profession can study and maintain paid employment concurrently. The AfGT Consortium advocates for a balanced approach to study and employment options for mid-career entrants such that commitments like the TPA be completed with rigour.

Recommendations

Recommendation 15: That the TPA remain as an embedded component of the ITE program, is under the remit of the ITE institution, and explicitly related to the work or practicum experience.

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