Implementing a performance and development framework

Submission to AITSL

Ben Jensen and Julian Reichl
This paper was written by Ben Jensen and Julian Reichl.

The opinions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Grattan Institute’s founding members, affiliates, individual board members or reference group members. Any remaining errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

Grattan Institute is an independent think-tank focused on Australian public policy. Our work is independent, practical and rigorous. We aim to improve policy outcomes by engaging with both decision-makers and the community.

For further information on the Institute’s programs, or to join our mailing list, please go to: http://www.grattan.edu.au/

This report may be cited as: Jensen, B. and J. Reichl, 2012, Australia’s teacher performance and appraisal framework, Grattan Institute, Melbourne.
Overview

In 2011 the Commonwealth Government announced plans for a nationally consistent teacher performance and development framework. AITSL, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, has been tasked with developing this framework, due for delivery in 2013.

This paper is intended to inform the development of the teacher performance and development framework. It draws heavily on information gathered for two previous Grattan Institute reports: Better teacher appraisal and feedback: Improving performance, and Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia.

The teacher performance and development framework should have one focus: to improve student learning. Too often, discussions of teacher effectiveness and performance management have focused on the teacher, leading to discussions of firing teachers and how to measure effectiveness. To go down this path will ensure that the framework is disconnected from what really matters: improving learning and teaching in every classroom across Australia.

A focus on learning creates a meaningful development framework. The evidence shows that several methods of teacher appraisal have a positive impact on student learning. Chief amongst these is constructive feedback to teachers based on a meaningful observation of their work. An effective Performance and Development Framework must have, at its core, a belief that for a teacher or a student to improve, we need to watch what they do and tell them how to improve.

This takes the Framework into the classroom. A centralised body cannot provide the necessary observation and feedback for improved learning and teaching. Teachers need to be engaged and eventually become the leaders of reform in this area. A focus on the classroom means that the Framework needs to focus on implementation. The most elegant Framework will have no impact if it doesn’t penetrate the classroom.

Effective implementation is about behavioural and cultural change. The culture within most schools, and school systems, is a long way from one of openness and sharing, continuous learning and high performance – changing this culture will not be easy.

We can learn from successful performance and development systems in schools in Australia and in high-performing systems in East Asia. Two key lessons emerge. First, these systems have focused on the one thing that really matters: student learning. Second, they used multiple implementation tools to develop and effectively operate performance and development systems in schools.

This report highlights how the Framework can utilise these two lessons and implement meaningful reform in the Australian context.
Table of Contents

Overview .................................................................................................................. 1

1. Introduction: the Australian teacher performance and development framework ................................................................. 3

2. The importance of effective teachers .............................................................................. 5

3. Why teacher appraisal? ....................................................................................... 6

4. How should teachers be appraised? ......................................................................... 7

5. Implementation of reform ................................................................................... 10

References ................................................................................................................. 14
1. Introduction: the Australian teacher performance and development framework

The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is developing a nationally consistent teacher performance management system. This working paper is intended to inform the development of their Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework.

Research on evaluating teacher performance can be divided into two categories. The first, driven by work in the USA, focuses on how to best measure teacher effectiveness. This body of work first concentrated on the accuracy of matching student test scores to teacher performance, particularly through value-added measures. Now, particularly through the Gates Foundation work, the focus is on which appraisal mechanisms best match various value-added scores of teacher effectiveness.

The second focuses on the broader performance management literature and combines it with the evidence on how to best improve student learning. This takes a much broader perspective to performance and development and emphasises the use of multiple methods of teacher appraisal and feedback. The best systems, of which Singapore is an example, take a broad development approach that continually works to improve student learning.

We strongly advocate that the Framework follow the second approach to performance and development. Multiple methods of appraisal and feedback that are focused on student learning need to operate in Australian schools to improve learning and teaching.

We draw heavily on evidence gathered for two recent Grattan Institute publications: Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia,¹ which describes the success of four school systems, and Better teacher appraisal and feedback: improving performance,² which provides a framework for implementing effective teacher appraisal and feedback. Catching up: learning from the best describes how Singapore, South Korea, Shanghai and Hong Kong transformed their schools systems to be among the best in the world. Central to each of these reforms was a focus on effective learning and teaching.

This paper proceeds as follows:

Firstly, we describe the importance of effective teachers to a students’ outcome. Next, we describe how this effectiveness can be improved – via teacher appraisal and feedback that focuses on improved teaching and student learning. We then discuss the crucial issue of implementation – at the school level and at the system level. We articulate this discussion with examples from high-performing East Asian school systems, those that have reformed to be amongst the best in the world. We focus on how to achieve real, lasting change, and in particular how to connect a policy focus on student learning to what actually happens in the classroom.

We do not seek to prescribe a definition of effective teaching and learning: this is for every education system, each school, to develop.

determine. AITSL has already completed substantial work on effective teaching. But it should be considered that high performing systems in East Asia undertook a deep analysis of learning and teaching at the start of their reforms. Hong Kong, for example, began with a 20-month investigation of the state of learning and where it needed to be.\(^3\) The findings of that study determined all subsequent reform efforts.

\(^3\) Barber and Mourshed (2007)
2. The importance of effective teachers

All studies show that more effective teachers lead to better student outcomes. Conservative estimates suggest that students with a highly effective teacher (at the 90th percentile) learn in half a year what takes those with a less effective teacher (at the 10th percentile) a full year. A student with a teacher at the 75th percentile of effectiveness will achieve in three-quarters of a year what a student with a teacher at the 25th percentile will achieve in a full year. These effects are cumulative: the achievement of students with effective teachers three years in a row will be 49 percentile points higher than that of students with less effective teachers.4

Differences in teacher effectiveness account for a large proportion of the differences in student outcomes – far larger than the differences between schools. Outside of family background teacher effectiveness is the largest single factor influencing student outcomes.5

Aside from improving students’ lives, better appraisal and feedback can improve teacher effectiveness by 20-30%.6 This would increase Australia’s long-run GDP growth by about 0.4% per year, adding $240 billion to GDP by 2050.7

2.1 Mechanisms to improve teacher effectiveness and student learning

There are five mechanisms for improving the overall effectiveness of the teaching profession:

1. Improve the quality of applicants to the profession
2. Improve the quality of teachers’ initial education
3. Appraise and provide ongoing feedback to improve teachers once they enter the profession and are working in our schools
4. Recognise and reward effective teachers
5. Move on ineffective teachers who are unable to increase their effectiveness through improvement programs

Teacher appraisal and feedback directly affects the latter three of these. It significantly improves teachers’ understanding of their teaching methods, teaching practices and student learning.

---

4 Hanushek (1992); Hanushek, et al. (1998); Nye, et al. (2004); Hanushek, et al. (2005); Aaronson, et al. (2007); Leigh (2010); Leigh and Ryan (2011)
5 Hanushek (1997); Krueger (1999); Krueger (2002); Hanushek (2003); Krueger (2003)
6 Fuchs and Fuchs (1985); Fuchs and Fuchs (1986); Hattie (2009)
7 This makes the conservative assumption that a one standard deviation increase in test scores will increase GDP growth by 1%. See Jensen (2010) for details.
3. Why teacher appraisal?

A common objection to performance appraisal for teachers is that a teacher’s performance is difficult to observe. The truly observable component – student test scores – is itself imperfect, and is only partially reflective of an individual teacher’s performance.

These arguments ignore the fact that the vast majority of jobs are difficult to observe, and that there are only partially-objective outputs available with which to measure performance. Indeed, it is difficult to think of more than a handful of examples of employment that are truly objectively assessable: fund managers, sales-people and producers of commodities, perhaps, but few others.

Regardless of these difficulties, most jobs are undertaken in a performance-managed environment; the literature has no doubt that performance management is a good thing, that if properly conducted it increases overall performance, and that employees value it.

When teacher performance appraisal, feedback and development has taken place, it is usually viewed positively by teachers (after initial resistance) and results in increased performance. These systems of teacher appraisal and feedback work best if they are directly linked to improved classroom teaching and student learning.

3.1 TALIS – teachers aren’t getting effective appraisal

Despite the importance of teacher appraisal and feedback, the majority of teachers are not getting it. An OECD survey of lower-secondary teachers showed that, in Australia, current systems of teacher evaluation are largely seen as bureaucratic exercises, not linked to teacher development or improved classroom teaching.\footnote{TALIS is the OECD’s Teaching and Learning International Survey. See OECD (2009); Jensen (2010).}

- 63% of Australian teachers report that appraisal of their work is largely done simply to fulfil administrative requirements; and
- 61% report that appraisal of their work has little impact on the way they teach in the classroom.

The current systems of teacher appraisal and feedback do not identify nor recognise effective or innovative teaching in schools:

- 91% of teachers report that in their school, the most effective teachers do not receive the greatest recognition;
- 92% report that if they improved the quality of their teaching they would not receive any recognition in their school; and
- 91% report that if they were more innovative in their teaching they would not receive any recognition in their school.
4. How should teachers be appraised?

Below we briefly describe eight methods of teacher appraisal and feedback. Each method draws a direct line to effective teaching and learning, incorporating continuous feedback for teachers into the appraisal of their work. None of these methods are perfect. They all provide incomplete observation of the teacher; all contain slightly different pieces of information about a teacher’s role and performance. They must therefore be used in some combination. We recommend that schools use at least four of these methods to assess each teacher. Each school should decide for itself which methods to use, but all should include student performance and assessment.

Before schools implement teacher appraisal and feedback they should define what constitutes effective teaching and learning in their school. Teachers and principals, and perhaps parents, should have this discussion; they should also decide the objectives and benchmarks against which performance will be assessed.

4.1 Student performance and assessments

Student performance and assessments of their work provide indicators of teachers’ overall performance, and of specific aspects of their teaching. Used well, they are the most direct link between student learning and teachers’ performance; ensuring they’re used well is an important aspect of effective school leadership.

Unfortunately, test scores have often been used poorly. This means that discussions about teacher appraisal, feedback and development are often side-tracked by disagreement about whether test scores genuinely reflect teacher effectiveness, or how to measure the contribution an individual teacher makes to student test scores. Teacher value-added scores are an improvement on raw student test scores, but also still suffer from methodological problems. Student performance and assessment data are useful, but must be used carefully, and in combination with other appraisal methods.

4.2 Peer observation and collaboration

Peer observation involves teachers observing and learning from other teachers. The observations are often conducted in teams, and, while initially confronting, are very well regarded once established. Teachers, particularly those new to the profession, are reassured by the feedback they receive. They are able to test innovations, reveal hidden behaviours, address known problems and test unease. Peer observations are an important and effective way of changing the culture of a school from one of siloed operation to a collaborative, sharing environment.

---

9 For more on these, please see the 2011 Grattan Institute report Better teacher appraisal and feedback: improving performance Available from www.grattan.edu.au

10 OECD (2008)
11 McCaffrey, et al. (2005)
12 Kumrow and Dahlen (2002)
13 Blackwell and McClean (1996); Munson (1998)
4.3 Direct observation of classroom teaching and learning

Similar to peer observation, direct observation is carried out by a school principal or other school leader, such as a highly effective teacher. Both observation methods should contain pre- and post-observation meetings, and should focus on self-reflection followed by constructive feedback.

School leaders’ subjective assessments of teachers have found to be good predictors of student achievement.\(^\text{14}\) Jacob and Lefgren found that

\[
\text{“…principal assessments of teachers predict future student achievement significantly better than teacher experience, education or actual compensation, though not as well as value-added teacher quality measures.”} \text{\(^\text{15}\)}
\]

4.4 Student surveys and feedback

Students are a vital source of feedback for teachers. They provide information on individual student needs, how students are responding to distinct aspects of teaching, their progress and attitudes to class.\(^\text{16}\)

Students report on teachers with a high degree of reliability, however the validity of the survey results depends on the instrument used.\(^\text{17}\) School principals and teachers should be involved in developing student surveys, emphasising aspects of teaching that are valuable to the school. The more frequent the surveys, the more useful the information. The age of students affects how the surveys should be designed. In particular, it is important to note that primary students tend to rate teachers more generously than older students.

4.5 Teacher self-assessment

Teacher self-assessments are a common tool for appraisal. Their usefulness comes from requiring teachers to reflect on their own methods, and their success. Self-assessment often takes the form of a portfolio of work, compiled to highlight knowledge and skills, as well as effectiveness. Self-assessments are often a requirement of accreditation processes, but can also be useful for both formative and summative appraisals.\(^\text{18}\)

It should be noted that there is limited evidence supporting the effectiveness of teacher self-assessments; there is, however, some evidence that teachers do not consider that they improve teaching or promote good teaching practices.

4.6 Parent surveys and feedback

Parental feedback broadens the view of teacher performance, providing the perspective of an important party in education. It can strengthen the collaboration between parents and teachers, and utilise parents’ unique knowledge about their child’s education.\(^\text{19}\)

Some criticise parent surveys as being simply a distilled student opinion, and for that reason it is important that surveys only ask

\[^{14}\text{Manatt and Daniels (1990)}\]
\[^{15}\text{Jacob and Lefgren (2008)}\]
\[^{16}\text{Craig (2011)}\]
\[^{17}\text{Goe (2007)}\]
\[^{18}\text{Tucker, et al. (2003)}\]
\[^{19}\text{Dwyer (1995); Stronge and Ostrander (1997); Peterson, et al. (2003)}\]
questions about aspects of a student’s learning that parents can directly observe.

4.7 **External observation**

External observations provide assessments of teaching and learning that remove any school-specific bias.\(^{20}\) They enable establishment of benchmarks across schools, providing valuable information about strengths and weaknesses. They also encourage sharing of innovations and best-practice.

External appraisal can foster effective networks of teachers, schools and regions, however due to the obvious logistic difficulty relative to other appraisal methods it is likely that it would complement other measures rather than form a core part of a teacher’s appraisal.

4.8 **360-degree feedback**

A comprehensive appraisal requires feedback from a range of sources: the school principal; senior teachers; peers; less effective teachers and those being mentored; students and parents. This 360-degree feedback provides opportunities to reflect on work inside and outside the classroom, and in this sense can be an umbrella for the mix of methods discussed above.

As well as opening up candid conversations about performance, 360-degree feedback process is particularly important for assessing how well teachers and school principals appraise and provide feedback to other teachers. This should be emphasised in schools trying to establish greater collegiality and professional collaboration.

\(^{20}\) Isoré (2009)
5. Implementation of reform

For the Framework to have any impact it must change behaviour in each classroom across the country. Change must be sustained. This puts the focus on implementation. It must be a central focus of the design of the Framework.

Four of the world’s five top-performing education systems are in East Asia. But only 11 years ago Hong Kong was ranked 17th of 18, and Singapore 15th, in the PIRLS international assessment of reading literacy.\(^{21}\) In 2006 they were ranked 2nd and 4th.\(^{22}\) Their success is due to thorough and careful implementation of education reform.

It is important that implementation of the performance and development Framework is not narrowly focused. The Framework will attempt to change behaviour in every classroom across the country. If the reform is to succeed, it must be sustained, not a one-off change.

The sustained nature of reform was demonstrated in Hong Kong. There, implementation in was not narrowly focused. They realised the magnitude of the task and that multiple implementation tools were required for success.

Following this approach, the following implementation steps and tools should be considered.

5.1 Up-front implementation planning

Too often, implementation follows design or is merely an afterthought. Successful implementation needs to be planned alongside the design of the Framework. Neither the design nor implementation of the Framework will be successful if they are not aligned. It is worth noting that Hong Kong’s education strategy document reads like an implementation plan. It is still being used over a decade later precisely because of its careful planning and focus on implementation.

5.2 Rationale for reform

A clear rationale must be established for reform. This has to be communicated clearly and consistently to all stakeholders. The rationale must be convincing and embraced by education leaders if it is to be adopted by teachers and school principals.

Ingoing prejudices must be overcome; misinformation and interests vested in the status quo must be countered. Stakeholders in the reform – the most important, in this case, are teachers – must be convinced that the reform is a good thing, that they will benefit, and that student learning will improve as a result.

5.2.1 Enlist champions for the reform

Communication of the benefits of reform cannot all come from a central agency. Trusted champions of the cause should be identified and utilised. These should come from within the education sector (e.g. school principals, individual teachers, and...
regional and system leaders) and from outside education. Members of the private sector have important insights and experience on which to draw, also have a strong interest in the success of the reform.

5.2.2 Identify and celebrate successes

Reforms of this nature, requiring a significant change in culture, are by their nature disruptive and long-term. It is therefore of crucial importance to both identify and publicly celebrate successes along the way. This could begin with those schools that have already successfully changed their culture.

Celebrating and communicating these successes help all stakeholders see progress, and understand how the reform can help them.

5.2.3 Capacity building

Appraising others’ performance, being appraised, providing feedback – none of these things are easy. They come naturally to some, but to the majority are learned skills. To most in the teaching profession they are foreign and intimidating prospects.

Effective teacher appraisal and feedback requires school leaders to set clear objectives, develop explicit expectations of teachers and students, and identify and promote effective teaching. Principals must ensure that teachers are well trained in appraisal procedures and understand how their individual goals are aligned with the school’s goals. The outcomes of the performance appraisal process, including development goals, must be clearly communicated.\textsuperscript{23}

For this reason, significant attention must be paid to increasing the capacity of those involved – principals and teachers – to participate in the performance and development system. It is particularly important that school principals are trained in how to appraise and provide feedback. They should observe and learn from each other, and themselves should put considerable efforts into building the capacity of their staff.

This is an important step – without it, introduction of a performance and development system will simply lead to reluctance to participate, to resentment, and, ultimately, to failure of the reform.

5.2.4 Curriculum reform

Curriculum reform is disruptive. There is little doubt of the extensive change that the national curriculum will continue to bring to Australian schools. This provides an opportunity to change behaviour in schools. Curriculum reform and the performance and development framework should act together to change behaviour to improve student learning. We encourage AITSL to work with ACARA to identify linkages between curriculum and performance and development reform. For example, both reforms could encourage effective classroom observations and teaching and learning resources could also facilitate observation and professional collaboration.

\textsuperscript{23} O’Donnell and Shields (2002); Heinrich and Marschke (2010)
5.2.5 Reform to student assessments

NAPLAN will be altered with the introduction of the new curriculum. It is important to consider how the Framework can work with both a new curriculum and new national student assessments. While we do not believe NAPLAN is an accurate measure of a teacher’s performance, it is an indicator of overall school performance. It could therefore play a role in the checks and balances of within-school teacher appraisal and development.

5.2.6 Initial teacher education

The Framework needs to be incorporated into initial teacher education. All new teachers should be aware of how it operates and how to maximise their potential in the performance and development Framework. Given the importance of observation and feedback to effective performance and development, these factors need to be included in initial teacher education. Teachers need to learn these skills and then enter schools expecting extensive classroom observation, feedback to improve learning and teaching, and high quality professional learning.

5.2.7 Academic research

Academics can play two roles in implementing the Framework. First, as champions of reform. The evidence is clear that constructive feedback based on meaningful observation and appraisal has a great effect on learning and teaching. This work – for example, that of John Hattie – needs to be promoted. All educators need to be aware of the value of this reform. Engaging these researchers at an early stage of the design of the Framework and then seeking their help to engage educators would be beneficial.

Second, academic research can be an effective implementation tool at the school level. Funds can be made available for academics to work with schools to implement the framework to have the maximum impact on learning and teaching. This work can then be publicised to inform other schools, particularly in the local network.

5.2.8 Implementation leaders in schools

Specific roles (individuals) in schools could play a substantial role in implementation that improves learning and teaching. These people would require training and/or support to implement effective performance and development cultures and appraisal mechanisms in schools. This could be combined with the new teacher standards if considered appropriate.

A key aspect of this would be to promote and improve meaningful professional collaboration amongst teachers. This is important for building a performance and development culture.

5.2.9 Teachers’ teaching and working time

A greater emphasis on performance and development takes time. There is no point pretending it doesn’t. This has to be allocated within schools so educators have the time to meaningfully engage in performance and development.
5.2.10 Accountability framework

The Framework must be aligned to existing accountability arrangements for teachers and schools. In addition, existing accountability arrangements should monitor and ensure that the Framework is implemented effectively. Schools must ensure that each teacher is operating in an effective performance and development culture.

5.2.11 External support groups

Performance and development facilitators would support schools implementing the framework and facilitate cultural change (if required). Developmental teams could spend 2-3 days with a school, to establish mechanisms to improve performance and development. These groups should be linked to accountability arrangements to target resources where they are most needed.

5.3 Evaluation and re-allocation of resources

Implementation tools should be continually evaluated. They must be established to provide a continual flow of information (feedback) across school education. This will provide meaningful information on the progress made in implementing the Framework and which implementation tools are more effective than others. Resources should continually be re-allocated based on this information.

Evaluation should also identify the impact of both the Framework and each implementation tool on classroom learning and teaching. Prior to implementation, the design of the Framework and the choice of implementation tools should be mapped to understand the push and pull of the reforms on classroom learning and teaching.

Reforms that affect learning and teaching can be divided into those that push and those that pull:

- **Push reforms propel**: they generate momentum for change by providing teachers and students with new content and support to improve current practice; and

- **Pull reforms compel**: they create imperatives for change by setting new standards teachers and students must reach to fulfill organisational requirements.

The impact of the mix of reforms on the push and pull of learning and teaching in classrooms needs to be clearly laid out and monitored during implementation. This ensures the impact of the Framework and all implementation tools are heading in the right direction, and ineffective implementation of reform.
References


Jensen, B. (2010) The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and teacher education for Diversity, Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenges, OECD.


