

Decadal Plan for Education Research

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
Response Submission

February 2026



AITSL acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, sea countries and waterways from across Australia.

We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and living cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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Introduction

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited (AITSL) is pleased to respond to the *Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2026–35*.

About AITSL

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is Australia's centre of excellence for teaching and school leadership. Established as a Commonwealth company in 2010, we exist to maximise learning for all children and young people by supporting teachers and school leaders to thrive.

AITSL fulfils this role by providing national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership, including by setting the national standards for quality teaching and school leadership; championing the vital role of educators in shaping Australia's future; and providing the support, insights, and foresight needed to drive continuous improvement in teaching and leadership across Australia.

Research indicates that teaching and school leadership are the most significant in-school influences on student outcomes. Accordingly, our work spans four main areas of focus:

- **Initial teacher education:** We provide support, resources, and tools to help ensure that every pre-service teacher is classroom ready upon graduation.
- **Quality teaching:** We help teachers be the best they can be and provide tools and resources to maximise their impact on student learning.
- **Educational leadership:** We help leaders become highly effective by giving them the tools, resources, policies, and practices needed to succeed in their important role.
- **Data and evidence:** We use evidence to develop policies, tools and resources that will have maximum impact in improving the quality of teaching and leadership. AITSL has also been trusted to develop the first national, longitudinal dataset on the Australian teaching workforce.

On behalf of Education Ministers, AITSL has developed 12 national standards and frameworks that are foundational pillars for teaching and leadership in the Australian education landscape. We have also built a significant library of evidence-based tools and resources to support the implementation of these national standards and frameworks, and to promote reflective practice and continuous learning within the profession.

Context of this response

AITSL's mission is to define, elevate and support quality teaching and school leadership to maximise the learning of every child and young person. We use educational research to inform the policies and processes we design, and conduct small educational research projects. As such, we have a commitment to evidence-informed policy and practice.

Through the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative, we also bring together data from higher education providers, teacher regulatory authorities, teachers and school leaders on topics important to the national teacher workforce.

This response draws on these varied perspectives.

Response to Overarching Questions

What are the key areas or issues for future research in each field or sector?

There is a great need for Australian research that can inform educational policy making, requiring efforts from universities, the Australian Educational Research Organisation as well as independent research and consultancy groups. Below are examples of future research that would be useful to inform and complement AITSL's policy remit.

- **Independent impact evaluations** that examine the effects of major policy levers, such as teacher and principal standards, on teaching quality and student learning outcomes, including analysis of the equity of impacts for diverse student groups (for example, First Nations students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disability, students from language backgrounds other than English, and students in rural and remote contexts).
- **Longitudinal research on teachers' work, working conditions and careers** that examines connections between initial teacher education, teacher quality, and workforce outcomes, including career intentions, retention and longevity in the profession, and pathways into middle and senior leadership roles.
- **Studies investigating the interaction between school leadership and teaching practice**, and how these relationships influence student learning, teacher satisfaction, professional culture, and workforce retention.
- **Research examining influences on quality teaching and school leadership**, including the role of initial teacher education, professional learning, access to high-quality educational research, and system-level supports, with a view to identifying policy settings that strengthen professional capability over time.
- **Research studies seeking in depth understanding of** publicly available ATWD data insights such as willingness to enter and remain in the classroom.

What steps should we take to drive short-term gains and long-term advancement in these areas?

The shared vision articulated in the Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2026–35 represents an important first step in driving long-term advancement. The priority areas identified align well with AITSL's sphere of influence. Additional steps that could support both short-term gains and longer-term progress are outlined below.

In the short term, priority steps include:

- improving the accessibility of high-quality research findings for education professionals, for example by:
 - promoting open access publishing as standard practice so that education professionals can readily access research; and
 - creating opportunities for education professionals to hear directly from researchers about findings and their implications for practice and policy.

- strengthening connections between research funders and users of research findings to improve shared understanding of research priorities and evidence needs
- promoting development and adoption of a national application form for seeking research approvals for applicability across all jurisdictional systems and sectors (rather than seeking duplicative approvals as is current practice).

Over the longer term, supporting sustained advancement could include:

- investing in, and prioritising, research methodologies that examine the applicability of findings across diverse Australian education contexts, including replication of studies in different jurisdictions and settings.

What mechanisms are most effective for addressing the aims of the Decadal Plan?

From AITSL's perspective, a small number of system-level mechanisms would be particularly effective in supporting the aims of the Decadal Plan.

- **Streamlined, cross-jurisdictional research approval mechanisms** that speed up the process of gaining permissions to conduct research across Australian jurisdictions and support more nationally coordinated research efforts.
- **Coordinated data collection, infrastructure and access mechanisms**, including expanded and systematised large-scale databanks, that allow researchers secure access to high-quality data sets and facilitate natural experiments and other quasi-experimental research designs arising from policy variation across jurisdictions.
- **Knowledge-transfer mechanisms** that place research findings directly in the hands of those positioned to use them, including open access publication requirements and structured forums where researchers present findings to policy makers, system leaders, and practitioners.

Conclusion

The Decadal Plan provides opportunities to harness and direct research efforts within Australia and has the potential to improve the quantity, quality and usefulness of research findings over the decade. To ensure success, the Plan should explicitly address how it will balance:

- research that delivers system-wide benefits with research that responds to the needs and priorities of specific communities and cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities; and
- the priority areas identified at the commencement of the Plan with emerging priorities and evidence needs that arise over the decade.

Establishing clear processes to manage these tensions will strengthen the Plan's responsiveness and long-term impact.

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The logo for AITSL, featuring the lowercase letters 'aitsl' in a sans-serif font. The letters are colored with a gradient from light green to dark teal.

Australian Institute
for Teaching and
School Leadership
Limited

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of two overlapping triangles. The left triangle is dark teal and points to the right. The right triangle is light green and points to the left. They meet at a central point, creating a white diamond shape in the middle.

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