

2021 Stakeholder Survey

Stakeholder views on the impact of COVID-19

June 2021

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This project was conducted in accordance with the international quality standard ISO 20252, the international information security standard ISO 27001, as well as the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*. ORIMA Research also adheres to the Privacy (Market and Social Research) Code 2021 administered by the Association of Market and Social Research Organisations (AMSRO).

Background and analysis

Background

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides national leadership for the Australian, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence so that teachers and school leaders can have the maximum impact on student learning in all Australian schools.

Every two to three years, AITSL conducts a stakeholder survey to measure the impact of its policies, standards, tools, resources and initiatives, as well as its organisational impact through its reach among, and engagement with stakeholders. The 2021 AITSL Stakeholder Survey was conducted between 22 February and 9 April, with a total of n=2,592 responses received across the following stakeholder groups:

- AITSL expert / steering / focus groups
- Early childhood settings
- Education sector organisations (e.g. Departments of Education, Independent Schools Association, Catholic Education)
- Education unions
- Higher education institutes / providers
- Peak / representative bodies
- Professional associations
- Professional learning providers
- Schools (principals, deputy / assistant principals, staff in other leadership roles and teachers)
- Pre-service teachers
- Teacher regulatory authorities

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, AITSL added an additional question to the survey to measure the impact of the pandemic on educators and students. Stakeholders were asked the following open-ended question:



We know that the last 12 months have been difficult on educators and students. How has COVID-19 impacted you as an educator or your students?

A total of n=1,014 stakeholders provided a response to this question. AITSL commissioned ORIMA Research to conduct a thematic analysis of the qualitative responses. This report presents the findings of this analysis.

Analysis strategy

Initial coding of approximately 10% of comments was undertaken before code frames were reviewed and refined in collaboration with the AITSL project team. The balance of comments was then coded using the revised code frames. The following report presents the frequency of theme endorsement.

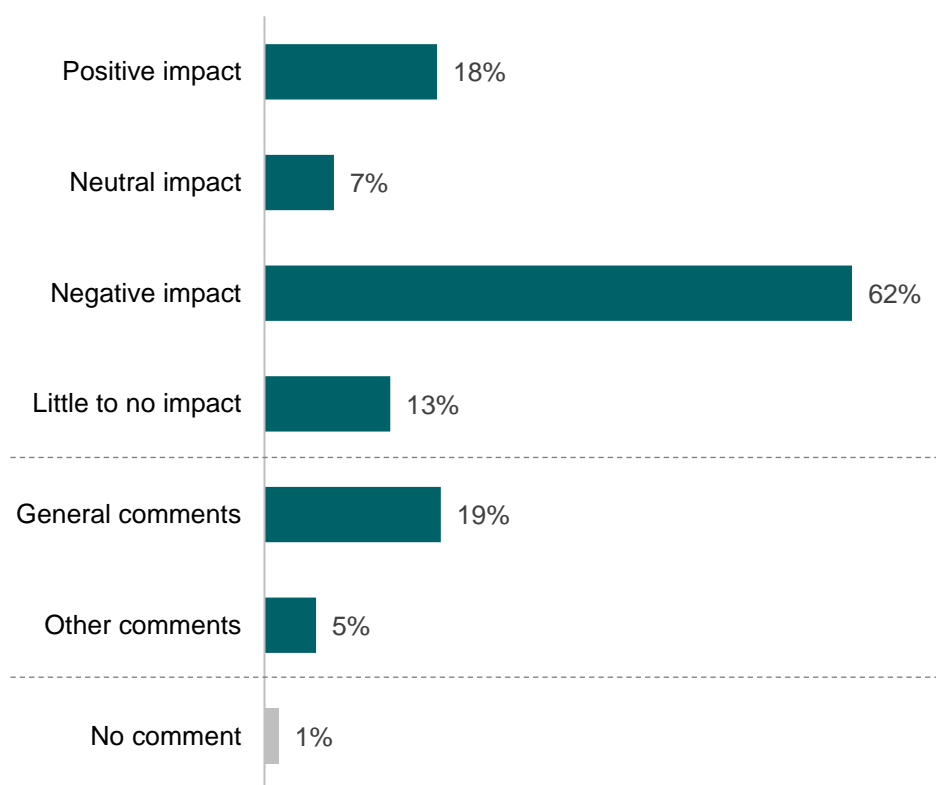
All differences between demographic groups presented in this report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (chi-squared test).

Research findings

Types of feedback provided by stakeholders

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the majority of stakeholders provided a comment in relation to how the COVID-19 pandemic had **negatively** impacted themselves as educators or their students (62%), while less than one-in-five felt that the pandemic had a **positive** impact (18%), and 13% indicated that the pandemic had **little to no** impact.

Figure 1: Types of feedback provided – Overall
Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)



Differences by demographic characteristics



Gender – female respondents were more likely than males to report that the COVID-19 pandemic had a *general* negative impact (64% versus 52%), while male respondents were more likely than females to indicate that the pandemic generally had little to no impact (18% versus 12%).



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status – respondents who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent were more likely than those who did not identify as such to report that the pandemic had a *general* positive impact (43% versus 18%).

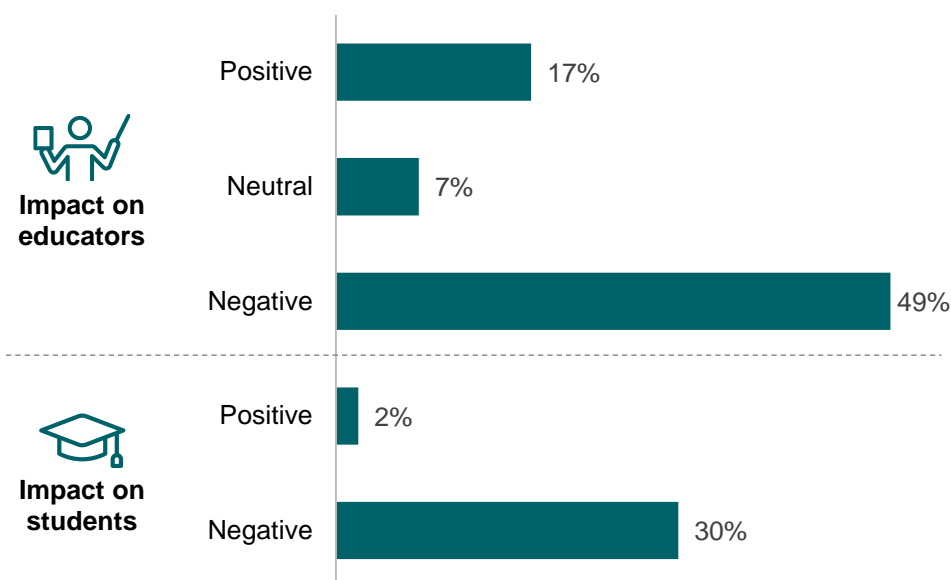


Certification status – those certified as a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher were more likely than those who were not certified to report that the pandemic had a *general* positive impact (33% versus 21%).

When looking at the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic more closely, around half of stakeholders provided feedback on how the pandemic negatively impacted themselves as educators (49%), while 17% remarked on the positive impact on educators (see Figure 2 below). In comparison, fewer comments were centred around the impact of the pandemic on students, both negative (30%) and positive (2%).

Figure 2: Types of feedback provided – Impact on educators and students

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)



Differences by demographic characteristics



Gender – female respondents were more likely than males to indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted themselves as *educators* (50% versus 42%), as well as their *students* (32% versus 22%).



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status – respondents who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent were more likely than those who did not identify as such to report that they were positively impacted as *educators* (43% versus 17%).



Certification status – respondents certified as a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher were more likely than those who were not certified to report being impacted positively as *educators* (32% versus 19%).

Impact on educators – overview

As shown in Table 1 overleaf, the most commonly reported positive impact of COVID-19 on educators was improved knowledge or use of technology or information technology (IT) skills (10%). A smaller proportion of stakeholders reported having more time to reflect on and change their teaching practice (3%), having a better understanding and connection between teachers, parents, and the community (3%), and learning / improving their skills in general (3%).

The most commonly reported negative impacts of COVID-19 on educators – reported by over one-in-five stakeholders – were an increase in workload or time requirements (23%) and a decrease in wellbeing, including increased fatigue or stress (22%). Furthermore, just under one-in-ten comments

suggested a lack of support, appreciation or recognition from schools / leadership / the Department (8%).

A smaller proportion of stakeholders also provided comments where neither a positive nor negative impact was explicitly mentioned: having to change their curriculum or teaching methods (4%), generally having to conduct teaching online (2%), and needing to remain flexible and agile in the changing environment (2%).

Table 1. Impact of COVID-19 on educators

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)

Impact on educators	
Positive impact	17%
Improved knowledge or use of technology and IT skills	10%
Allowed me to reflect on / change my practice	3%
Better understanding / connection between teachers, parents and the community	3%
Learned or improved skills in general	3%
More time to do planning, non-teaching tasks, and administrative tasks	1%
Neutral impact	7%
Changed curriculum or teaching methods	4%
General comment about conducting online teaching	2%
Needed to remain flexible and agile to react to the changing environment	2%
Negative impact	49%
Increased workload / time requirements	23%
Increased fatigue or stress / decrease in wellbeing	22%
Lack of support, appreciation or recognition from schools / leadership / the Department	8%
Reduced hours or loss of work / leaving profession	4%
Difficulties learning and using new technology	3%
Difficult to communicate or maintain relationships with students / families	3%
Lack of support, appreciation or recognition from parents / community	3%
Lack of resources (e.g. staff, funding, pay)	2%
Impact on professional development / learning availability / access	2%
Difficult to provide feedback (e.g. timeliness)	1%

Impact on students – overview

As displayed in Table 2, there were few comments that indicated that COVID-19 had a positive impact on students, with 2% reporting that students became more independent, responsible and adaptive. The most commonly reported negative impacts of COVID-19 on students included a decrease in wellbeing, including increased anxiety or stress (10%), falling behind and decreased academic achievement (9%), and lowered engagement in learning (7%). A small proportion of stakeholders also mentioned increased behavioural or social issues (4%), impacts on vulnerable and at-risk students (4%), and student difficulty accessing online learning (4%).

Table 2. Impact of COVID-19 on students

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)

Impact on students	
Positive impact	2%
Became more independent / responsible / adaptive	2%
Negative impact	30%
Increased anxiety or stress / decreased wellbeing	10%
Decreased academic achievement / falling behind	9%
Decreased engagement in learning (e.g. learning not enforced at home, students not independent learners)	7%
Increase in behavioural / social issues	4%
Impacts on / increase of vulnerable and at-risk students / communities	4%
Difficulty accessing online learning (e.g. technology issues, disadvantaged students)	4%
Decreased attendance / attendance issues	2%

General / other comments

In addition to comments focused on specific impacts of the pandemic on educators and students, around one-in-five stakeholders also provided general comments (19%) – as shown in Table 3, these included broad feedback around how the pandemic has led to increased challenges (7%), as well as comments around how educators / students are coping with, or adapting to, the pandemic (7%).

Table 3. General / other comments

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)

General / other comments	
General comments	18%
General positive comment about coping / adapting well	7%
Negative impact or increased difficulty in general	7%
Yes, impacted in some way in general (no other details provided)	3%
Missed face-to-face contact / connections	3%
Little to no impact	13%
Other comments	5%
No comment	1%

Some stakeholders were positively impacted by COVID-19, and reported that they were coping and adapting well.

"I'm a better teacher for having learnt to adapt and re-adapt even though I didn't enjoy it at the time. I feel like an unstoppable educator now." – Secondary school leader, VIC

"It forced me to go outside of my comfort zone and teach in a manner I had never tried before. There were failures and success, but overall it was the greatest PD I've ever had." – Primary experienced teacher, WA

Some stakeholders were also negatively impacted, or reported increased difficulty in general.

"The interruption has created a long lasting effect on students' value of education. This will take years to undo and will have negative consequences for their future learning and job prospects, especially in this regional area." – Special education middle career teacher, NSW

"[There] has been a slowing in educational progress and social aspects have suffered." – School leader, WA

"COVID-19 highlighted the uncertainties of this modern age in which we live and the ongoing challenges facing learners and educators." – Primary experienced teacher, NSW

A small proportion of stakeholders suggested they were impacted in some way, though were not explicit in how they were affected.

"Everybody is impacted by COVID-19 whether it's a social, mental, emotional or physical [impact]." – Early childhood teacher, SA

"In every aspect of teaching and learning, as it is a wholistic process." – Secondary middle career teacher, NSW

A few stakeholders indicated they missed face-to-face contact and connections.

“Lac[k] of face-to-face opportunities.” – Secondary experienced teacher, TAS

“It makes me more aware of the importance of face-to-face teaching, especially to our marginalised students.” – Secondary middle career teacher, WA

“Reliance on technology has been detrimental to social connections.” – Secondary middle career teacher, QLD

Over one-in-ten stakeholders reported that they experienced little to no impact.

“I feel relatively unscathed compared to other countries.” – Secondary middle career teacher, QLD

“Long-term impacts will be minimal.” – Secondary experienced teacher, WA

“Minimal disruption as most students continued to come to school or engage online.” – Primary school leader, VIC

Feedback about AITSL

A small number of stakeholders provided a response specifically related to AITSL (n=13). These comments suggested that:

Stakeholders require more support from AITSL.

“With online teaching I feel I am falling behind in my skills to keep up with technology and could use AITSL support in upgrading these skills.” – Primary experienced teacher, WA

“AITSL [and the] government only emailed Principals saying thank you for the leadership - five emails in one day saying the same thing - no one giving any ideas, thoughts or processes in supporting Principals to deal with the many changes to teaching, learning and staff support. As a Principal I [have] given up with AITSL, state and federal governments who pander to the funding programs only and never speak up when the media rants about the teaching profession. QLD put \$8 million towards Principal wellbeing - rhetoric only - What does AITSL do to support Principals - the change to the 360-degree reflection tool was changed without warning - I had to find out how to do this before showing aspirants... no support from any governing body. AITSL, you mean well but for me it is more paperwork and does it really matter when we are too busy in schools to deal with what is on the website. Thank you asking though. I am on Easter break - the first time I have been able to read through emails and FB and just saw the survey!” – Secondary school leader, QLD

“The demands on teachers were enormous and unrealistic. We pray it may never happen again but if it should AITSL, NESAs and the Unions should have better plans and procedures in place. They should be planning for any future catastrophes that may impact teachers.” – Primary experienced teacher, NSW

AITSL should raise the public perception and awareness of educators.

“I think teachers need AITSL to publicly point out the amazing pivot to online learning and the unacknowledged sacrifices teachers made to ensure students were taught. This includes the 'babysitter' mindset that allowed teachers to endanger their own health and that of their loved ones in the name of 'reopening' schools that, in fact, never closed. Our society needs to be re-educated about the nature and role of education in the 21st century.” – Secondary experienced teacher, ACT

“We're regularly working 55+ hour weeks - we're exhausted, depressed, stressed out of our minds and still dumped on by politicians and society for 'going home at 3pm every day and having long holidays'. Can AITSL do something about a public education campaign to get people's heads out of the 1950's please?” – Secondary experienced teacher, ACT

Impact on educators



The following chapter presents a detailed discussion of themes which suggested a positive, neutral, or negative impact on educators explicitly.

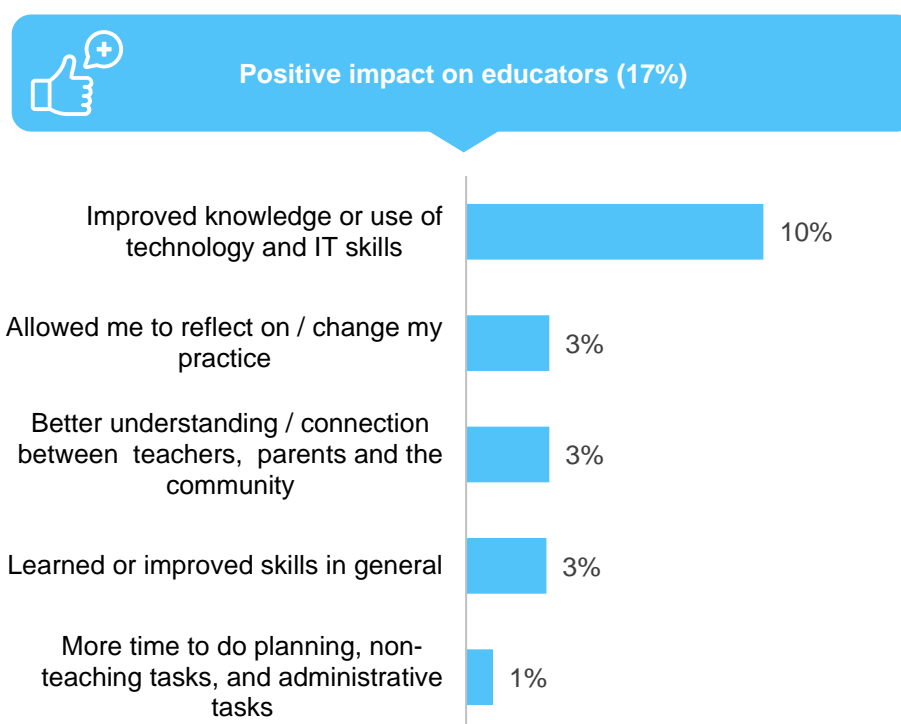
Positive impact on educators

Just under one-in-five educators indicated the COVID-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on them as educators (17% – see Figure 3 below). Improved knowledge or use of technology (10%) was the most commonly reported positive impact, followed by the ability to reflect on and change their practice (3%), better understanding from parents or the community of what teachers do (3%), learning new or improving existing skills (3%), and more time to do planning, non-teaching and administrative tasks (1%).

There were no significant differences found in these comments across different demographic cohorts.

Figure 3: Positive impact on educators

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)



Improved knowledge or use of technology and IT skills was reported as a positive impact of COVID-19 for many stakeholders.

“COVID-19 pushed me out of my comfort zone with my teaching. I had to learn new skills (which was fantastic) to deliver curriculum online... I found there were plenty of resources available to help me deliver online learning.” – Primary experienced teacher, QLD

“[I am] more technologically aware and able to integrate these into everyday teaching.” – Primary experienced teacher, QLD

“Having to switch or prepare to switch online has had a positive impact - I think most staff feel more comfortable with electronic interactions than before.” – Early childhood school leader, WA

Online platforms that were mentioned by stakeholders include:

- Microsoft Teams; Zoom
- Microsoft OneNote
- Google Classroom
- Connect Education
- Canvas

This period also allowed educators to reflect on or change their practice.

“It has had a positive impact as it gave me time to stop and reflect on my own practices and evaluate what was working and what was not.” – Secondary middle career teacher, VIC

“COVID has been a great opportunity to reflect on practice and to offer opportunities to break age-old traditions and norms.” – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

“Covid has allowed me to reflect on what is important in my classroom and what is essential to teach. It has allowed planning and teaching to sort of go back to basics. Covid has had a positive impact on my teaching overall.” – Primary middle career teacher, WA

“It’s actually allowed me to have a much closer look at just how students learn/ don’t learn.” – Primary experienced teacher, VIC

“COVID gave us the opportunity to really reflect upon what is important in the curriculum. It also made us realise the utmost importance of student and staff well-being. Post COVID we have gone straight back to doing things the way we always have done. The curriculum is way too crowded and data driven.” – Primary experienced teacher, QLD

Stakeholders also reported a better understanding and connection between teachers, parents and the community.

“Forged stronger working relationships and community links.” – Secondary experienced teacher, WA

“Parents have a better understanding of what educators do.” – Primary school leader, WA

“Switch to remote learning was challenging for a lot of students and their families. However, built a more solid connection between home and school.” – Special education early career teacher, Victoria

Educators reported having learnt or improved their skills in general.

“I have learnt more skills over the past 12 months in terms of teaching and wellbeing.” – Primary school leader, NSW

“2020 was a huge learning curve for me as I discovered a lot of resources, strategies, collaborations, etc.” – Primary early career teacher, VIC

It also provided educators with more time to plan, complete non-teaching and administrative tasks.

“I had time to spend on...organising teaching resources, getting my work done without interruptions, preparing programs and how I was going to differentiate for all my students.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

“COVID-19 allowed me to complete my administrative work (during lockdown) within a reasonable timeframe.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

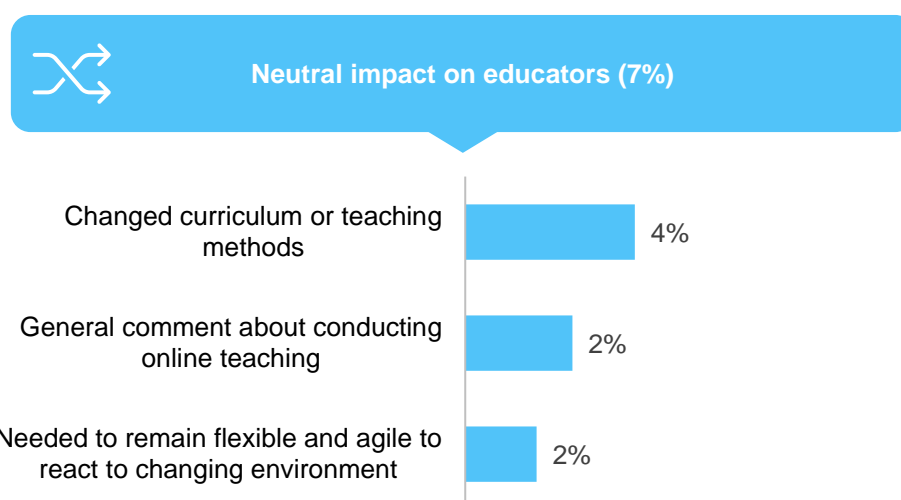
Neutral impact on educators

A small proportion of stakeholders indicated the COVID-19 pandemic impacted them as educators, however in neither a positive nor negative manner (7% – see Figure 4 below). They reported having to change their curriculum or teaching methods (4%), or provided a general comment about conducting online teaching (2%) or having to remain flexible and agile to react to the changing environment (2%).

There were no significant differences found in these comments across different demographic cohorts.

Figure 4: Neutral impact on educators

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)



Some educators reported that they changed their curriculum or teaching methods because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are exploring different ways of delivering the curriculum as a direct result of the lock down.” – Secondary school leader, NSW

“Having to condense lessons and making sure they have grasped and understood the concepts taught in a shorter space of time.” – Primary experienced teacher, NSW

“Redesigning & redefining curriculum so it can be delivered, applied in a digital space. Incorporating elements of formative & summative assessment/s in the digital space while developing & identifying student's academic skills acquisition has proved consistently challenging.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

“Needed to present my teaching in different modes, consider how the learning was presented and how to give feedback effectively.” – Primary experienced teacher, VIC

Others provided general comments about conducting online learning.

“We prepared for the move to online learning and had times of blended learning.” – Secondary school leader, SA

“There has been a shift to more digital work, with some innovative pedagogies still being trialled.” – Secondary school leader, NSW

A small proportion of stakeholders also indicated that they needed to remain flexible and agile to react to the changing environment.

“COVID has demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability of the teaching profession. The use [of] online/remote platforms when teaching is exciting.” – Primary experienced teacher, NSW

“Lots of problem solving and responding to daily changes, and less focus on growth and strategising.” – Secondary school leader, QLD

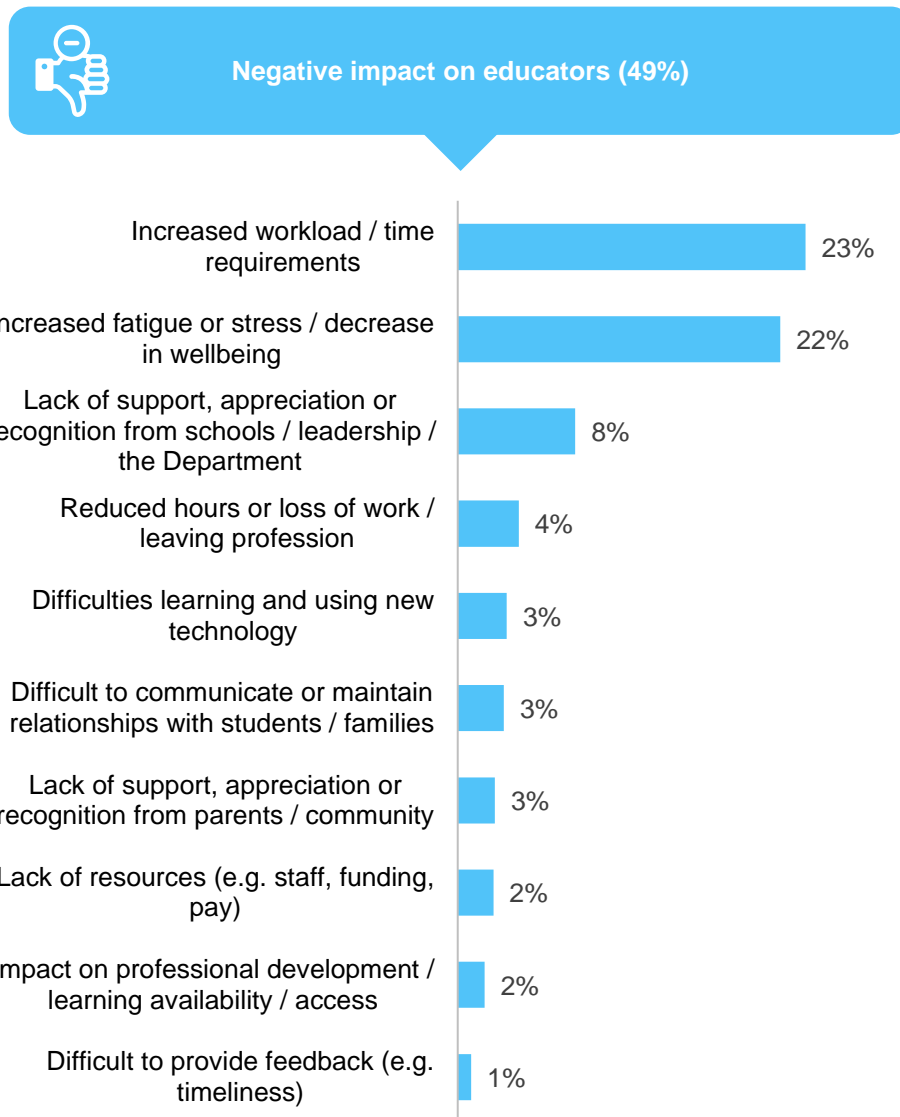
Negative impact on educators

Around half of stakeholders indicated the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on them as educators (49% – see Figure 5 overleaf). Increased workload or time requirements (23%) was the most commonly mentioned negative impact, followed by a decrease in wellbeing, including increased fatigue or stress (22%).

Other negative impacts included a lack of support, appreciation or recognition from their school or leadership (8%) and a reduction in hours or loss of work (4%). A smaller proportion of stakeholders also mentioned difficulties learning and using new technology (3%) and communicating and maintaining relationship with students and parents (3%), a lack of support, appreciation or recognition from parents and the community (3%), a lack of resources (2%), an impact on their professional development (2%) or difficulties providing feedback to students (1%).

Figure 5: Negative impact on educators

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)



Differences by demographic characteristics



Gender – female respondents were more likely than males to report experiencing decreased wellbeing / increased fatigue or stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (23% versus 17%).



Employment status – those in relief positions were most likely to indicate that they were impacted by reduced hours or loss of work (36% – compared to 2%-8% for those in other employment categories).



Education setting – respondents in special schools were most likely to indicate a lack of support, appreciation or recognition from schools / leadership / the Department (20% – compared to 6%-8% for those in other settings).

Just under one-in-four stakeholders indicated that they had an increase in workload and time requirements.

"Huge increase in workload! ... The number of meetings, especially online and out of school hours is too great to compare with pre-Covid work." – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

"Personally, I never worked as hard and as much (some days 12+ hours) as during the lockdown." – Early childhood middle career teacher, NSW

"Your focus is to load teachers up with more box ticking - why? Where are your strategies to reduce meaningless time wasters so we can focus on the core business of teaching? COVID has created the ideal environment for box tickers at the expense of teaching which is such a tragic situation." – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

"We are exhausted and burnt out. Stop demanding we do more paperwork and let us get back to our core business- teaching and learning." – Secondary middle career teacher, NSW

"I haven't gone to sleep before 1am every day since the start of COVID lockdowns and I don't have weekends or holidays. You interpret this." – Secondary early career teacher, VIC

"Many introductions of new ways to do things, new resources and new guidelines and expectations. Little time to fully unpack these and learn their value and limitations." – Primary early career teacher, VIC

"Increased my workload to the point that we are trying to get 24 months growth in 1 year because we have access to the tutor program which by the way does not reach all the students who need it. Principals have developed the mentality that this is a catch up year and are working teachers very hard with minimum APT of 2.5 hours which is ridiculous. No wonder teachers are burnt out and leaving the profession in droves. We are extremely over worked." – Primary experienced teacher, VIC

One-in-five stakeholders reported increased fatigue or stress, or an overall decrease in wellbeing.

"Very little time given back to teachers and we are now exhausted. Student mental health has been huge but little has been done for teachers nor has the time been devoted." – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

"Exhausted me beyond anything I've known before. It has taxed me emotionally provoking anxiety attacks." – Secondary experienced teacher, QLD

"[E]xhaustion is evident across all staff in my school and I fear we are at breaking point." – Primary school leader, NSW

"We're just all very tired. As "essential" workers, we worked throughout lockdowns and restrictions, we put ourselves and our health at risk. We felt like our government was throwing us under the bus. I am now fully aware of how disposable and unimportant I am to the government, to the teaching career and the workforce. Hasn't been a good year." – Secondary middle career teacher, NT

"A lot more stress and even higher expectations of teachers to develop/utilise programmes that are more impersonal and do not always suit the more practical students/subject areas." – Secondary experienced teacher, WA

"The overall workload has increased even more as a result of COVID. A large percentage of teachers are overwhelmed and disheartened with their profession and the requirements that are placed on them in the time frames they have. These ever continuing increasing workloads are slowly destroying the lives of excellent teachers, and there is never any end in sight. We need more RFF to assist us to do the administrative work that is required of us. We need a pay increase to ensure we can at least make a living that can support a family and we need more trust placed in us from the Department as well as the community." – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

Some stakeholders indicated that there was a lack of support, appreciation or recognition from schools, leaders or the Department

“Our principal was unsupportive as she did not believe COVID affected us at all ... We feel unsupported and unappreciated.” – Secondary middle career teacher, WA

“My concerns were brushed aside by management. I was made to feel as if I was demanding special treatment.” – Primary experienced teacher, WA

“The unsustainable workloads that are being passed down to classroom teachers cannot be comprehended ... How can management have so little perspective?” – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

Four percent of stakeholders indicated that the pandemic had resulted in a loss of hours and income, while others noted that they or their colleagues were leaving the profession.

“As an educator I lost a large amount of income as my days were decreased.” – Early childhood teacher, VIC

“I have struggled to find permanent work and even work as a relief teacher (primary school). Very little relief work during covid-19.” – Experienced teacher, WA

“I have chosen to semi retire due to over work and difficulty keeping up with expectations on teachers who are already 110% committed to their craft and are not always seen a positive light by the general community.” – Early childhood teacher, TAS

“I am leaving this profession. I love teaching but not all the other 'stuff' that now goes on around it. You are drowning brilliant teachers in cortisol.” – Primary experienced teacher, QLD

“Made me decide to retire after the online learning chaos.” – Primary experienced teacher, NSW

A lack of support, appreciation or recognition from parents and the community was highlighted by some stakeholders.

“Felt more isolated and far less supported by school and the community.” – Primary middle career teacher, SA

“Some parents have become extremely demanding putting extra pressure on school leaders.” – Primary school leader, WA

“[L]ittle or no acknowledgement or appreciation from outside of the immediate school environment.” – Secondary experienced teacher, TAS

“[P]arent expectations are higher than ever.” – Primary middle career teacher, VIC

Some stakeholders expressed concern about a lack of resources, including in terms of funding and staff pay.

“We never have enough staff or resources.” – Special education school leader, NT

“Lack of adequate resources and time.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

“Disadvantaged students are now even more disadvantaged and not enough money is given to schools to employ teachers that can [give] them the necessary intervention required.” – Primary school leader, VIC

A lack of access to or availability of professional development opportunities was noted by some stakeholders.

“Many of the TPL opportunities are now offered after hours online, but no extra time has been allocated to us.” – Secondary middle career teacher, NSW

“No face-to-face PD and there is no system in the Ed Dept to cater [for] Relief Teachers in such times.” – Secondary middle career teacher, WA

“[N]ot enough professional learning about digital platforms that are now heavily relied upon.” – Primary experienced teacher, NSW

Difficulties learning and using new technology was a challenge for stakeholders.

“Dependence on digital technologies has meant a steep learning curve to simply use the technology as a teaching/learning tool.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

“The challenges of working remotely and dealing with a never ending series of technological problems was exhausting.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

“Very difficult as an educator- had to upskill very quickly in additional online tools, completely change VET TAS' / Programs as no practical aspects of the course could be achieved- specifically as we are a low SES school and it wasn't equitable to ask students to conduct practical tasks at home. My students found it very difficult to not have access to me face to face- online TEAMS meetings etc was very important to engage students and give them a sense of connection and support from their teacher. Personally, as a head teacher and parent of 3 teenage students learning at home it was very challenging to teach, manage a faculty and support my girls in their online learning journey.” – Secondary middle career teacher, NSW

Maintaining or building relationships with students and families also proved challenging.

“Made it very difficult to maintain relationships with students, which significantly lessened the joy of teaching.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

“[L]ack of parent help in the classroom has impacted relationship development with parents.” – Early childhood teacher, WA

“The relationship with students has been compromised via remote and disrupted learning.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

A few stakeholders noted difficulties in providing timely feedback to students.

“The hardest part was having to correct every piece of work submitted. In the classroom a quick glance or short comment is often enough feedback.” – Primary experienced teacher, VIC

“I think the biggest challenge is providing timely feedback to students when it takes 2-3 times as long to review work as it would in the classroom.” – Primary middle career teacher

Impact on students



The following chapter presents a discussion of themes which suggested a positive or negative impact on students explicitly.

Positive impact on students

Only 2% of stakeholders mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive impact on students. This positive impact generally related to students becoming more independent and resilient.

There were no significant differences found in these comments across different demographic cohorts.

Comments about the resilience and adaptability of students included:

“The children have been able to adapt very well. They are resilient and I think in the future will be able to accept change more readily.” – Early childhood teacher, WA

“[I]t has taught students to be more independent learners.” – Secondary middle career teacher, VIC

“It has afforded many growth opportunities, enhancing resilience, adaptability, and readiness to embrace change.” – Secondary early career teacher, NT

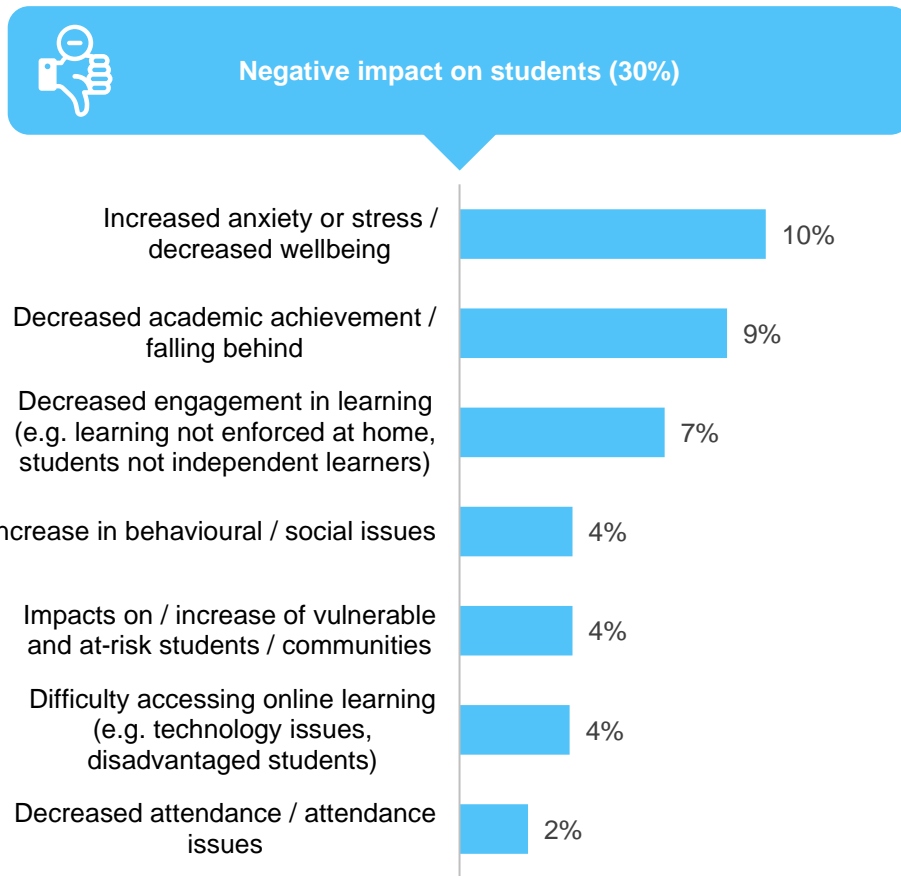
Negative impact on students

Just under a third of stakeholders indicated the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on students (30% – see Figure 6 overleaf). Increased anxiety or stress and decreased wellbeing (10%) was the most commonly mentioned impact, followed by decreased academic achievement and students falling behind (9%) or decreased engagement in learning (7%).

Some stakeholders also noted an increase in behavioural or social issues (4%), student difficulty accessing online learning (4%), impacts on or increased vulnerability for at-risk students and communities (4%), and decreased attendance (2%).

Figure 6: Negative impact on students

Base: AITSL stakeholders who provided a comment (n=1,014)



Differences by demographic characteristics



Remoteness – those located in remote or very remote areas were more likely to report decreased attendance / attendance issues amongst their students (22% – compared to 1%-2% for those in other areas).

One-in-ten stakeholders indicated that overall student wellbeing has lowered, and anxiety and stress levels have increased among students.

“For my students ... that already felt lonely or anxious, I felt that their feelings were amplified during remote and flexible learning.” – Primary early career teacher, VIC

“Our students are presenting with more mental health problems as a result of covid.” – Secondary school leader, NSW

“Students were extra anxious, bringing emotional support toys etc to school.” – Early childhood teacher, WA

“[M]y students’ collective mental health has plummeted.” – Secondary middle career teacher, WA

“I work with students with additional needs so a great deal of time has been spent liaising with students and their families to address wellbeing issues.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

“Many students were in shock when we came back. My Year 2 students had watched a lot of TV at home and I had to start from scratch with routines and basic literacy and numeracy skills. A few weeks later we had the July school holidays and the Victoria COVID-19 outbreak, so we felt like we had to start all over again in Term 3. My students' social and emotional wellbeing was, and still is, a great concern.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

A decrease in student academic achievement or generally falling behind was noted by stakeholders.

“It was sad how far our vulnerable students had fallen behind.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

“I'm finding the divide between students has become larger. Students who could self-regulate thrived, but those that couldn't are really struggling.” – Secondary experienced teacher, Victoria

“We have found a number of students are more behind than we expected.” – Primary school leader, VIC

“EAL/D students lost months of learning as they cannot access the work without assistance from a teacher for various reasons (language, no internet, no tech skills, etc.).” – Secondary school leader, NSW

“A major impact particularly on year 6 and kindy students as their learning was disrupted. Kindy were behind in learning and general socialisation at school along with learning routines.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

“Many Year 1 and 2 students are struggling with reading.” – Primary experienced teacher, VIC

There was also decreased engagement in learning because it may not have been enforced at home or students were not independent learners.

“Some students didn't engage in learning and learning wasn't enforced at home (out of our control) which made it difficult once we returned to face-to-face learning.” – Primary experienced teacher, QLD

“[Some] have developed a "lethargy" towards school and now upon returning they are working significantly slower and not getting through content.” – Secondary middle career teacher, VIC

“Students have lost the habits of a learner and so particularly in the upper grades this is taking time to embed along with trying to catch up on missed learning.” – Primary middle career teacher, NSW

“Many students became very disengaged in 2020. It was very difficult for the HSC cohort, particularly as guidelines kept changing and there was conflicting information.” – Secondary school leader, NSW

A smaller proportion of stakeholders reported an increase in behavioural or social issues.

“Student behaviour has escalated dramatically placing increased pressure and stress on teachers. This has led to a decrease in student achievement and wellbeing.” – Secondary middle career teacher, SA

“[S]tudents are out of control.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

“[M]ore wellbeing issues and socialisation issues presenting in the classroom.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

“The biggest issue for students is the gaps in their emotional maturity.” – Secondary experienced teacher, VIC

Stakeholders also reported a decrease in student attendance.

"[T]here was massive disruption to school attendance." – Primary experienced teacher, WA

"More children reluctant to come to school." – Early childhood school leader, WA

"Established routines were disrupted and it has become too easy for parents to keep students home." – Primary school leader, WA

"Many students missed out on most of the year, many didn't come to classes or turn in work."
– Primary early career teacher, VIC

There was a greater impact on, and increase in, vulnerable and at-risk students and communities.

"[I]ncreased student risk/vulnerability due to reduced access to supportive school environment." – Secondary middle career teacher, TAS

"[T]he class/economic divide has never been more highlighted than during the remote learning." – Primary experienced teacher, VIC

"There is a great divide with students who are economically disadvantaged, they have not recovered." – Secondary middle career teacher, QLD

"[D]isadvantaged students disengaged and many still have not returned to school. Many did not even access or use resources on the Internet or via posted methods." – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

"[F]ew provisions made for at risk, needy children." – Primary experienced teacher, QLD

Students had difficulty accessing online learning due to a variety of issues, including technology problems or being from a disadvantaged background.

"My students had no access to the internet. I live in a hard to staff, low socioeconomic area that was totally forgotten about." – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

"Being geographically isolated and having poor internet or access to it can be more isolating."
– Primary school leader, NSW

"Remote communities did not have the ability to teach remotely due to a lack of computers and internet in homes." – Special education experienced teacher, QLD

"Students from an EAL/D background had trouble working online." – Secondary experienced teacher, NSW

Conclusion

Stakeholders were asked to provide a comment on the impact of COVID-19 on educators or students in response to the ongoing pandemic. The majority of comments reported a negative impact that was personal in nature on both educators and students, rather than a direct impact on learning or teaching. Across both cohorts, the most commonly reported impacts related to a decrease in wellbeing, specifically concerning fatigue or stress in educators, and anxiety or stress in students. Female educators, part-time educators and school leaders were most likely to report experiencing a decrease in wellbeing. Additionally, a large proportion of comments related to workload, specifically a reported increase in workload or time requirements for educators, and falling behind / decreased academic achievement in students.

Of the smaller proportion of stakeholders that provided a comment about the positive impact of COVID-19, the majority were related to the positive effects on educators. Specifically, this period gave educators the chance to improve their knowledge and use of technology, particularly for those in part-time positions or those living in major cities. Stakeholders also reported that this period allowed them to reflect on or change their practice, establish a better connection between teachers, parents and the community to better understanding, and improve or learn new skills in general. Contrastingly, only a small number of stakeholders provided a comment suggesting a positive impact on students, all in relation to students becoming more independent, adaptive, or responsible.

Appendix 1: Sample profile

Gender		
	Count	%
Female	781	77%
Male	228	22%
Other	5	0.5%
Total	1,014	100%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background		
	Count	%
No	972	96%
Yes	14	1%
Prefer not to say	28	3%
Total	1,014	100%

Organisation type		
	Count	%
School	997	98%
Early childhood setting	17	2%
Total	1,014	100%

Teaching role		
	Count	%
Early career	79	8%
Early childhood	42	4%
Middle career	225	22%
Experienced	498	49%
School leader	170	17%
Total	1,014	100%

School sector		
	Count	%
Government	642	63%
Independent	187	18%
Catholic	178	18%
None of the above	7	1%
Total	1,014	100%

School type		
	Count	%
Early childhood	51	5%
Primary	422	42%
Secondary	479	47%
Special	45	4%
Not applicable	17	2%
Total	1,014	100%

Location (by jurisdiction)		
	Count	%
NSW	276	27%
VIC	209	21%
WA	177	17%
QLD	159	16%
SA	86	8%
ACT	46	5%
TAS	28	3%
NT	22	2%
Not provided	11	1%
Total	1,014	100%

Remoteness		
	Count	%
Major city	595	59%
Inner regional	192	19%
Outer regional	115	11%
Remote	15	1%
Very remote	8	1%
Not applicable	3	0.3%
Not provided	86	8%
Total	1,014	100%

Employment		
	Count	%
Full-time	725	71%
Part-time	151	15%
Contract	91	9%
Casual / relief	47	5%
Total	1,014	100%

Location (by country)		
	Count	%
Australia	1,004	99%
Overseas	10	1%
Total	1,014	100%

HALT status		
	Count	%
Certified	60	6%
Not certified	253	25%
Current undertaking	28	3%
Don't know	10	1%
Not provided	663	65%
Total	1,014	100%

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