



victorian institute  
of **teaching**

# report of findings

Special needs professional  
development for renewal of  
registration

NOVEMBER 2016



# Contents

.....

Executive summary .....	3
Highlights – at a glance .....	4
1. Background .....	5
2. The special needs survey .....	5
3. Findings – survey respondents .....	6
4. Findings– characteristics of PD .....	7
5. Findings – impact on teacher learning .....	9
6. Findings – application of learning .....	9
7. Findings – impact on learners with disabilities .....	10
Conclusions .....	11
Attachment 1 .....	12

# Highlights - at a glance

## RENEWAL OF REGISTRATION 2016

Teacher professional learning about strategies to support the learning of learners with disability

By 30 September 2016:



**82,266**

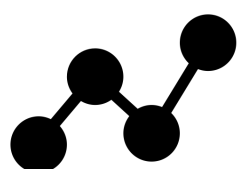
TEACHERS HAD UNDERTAKEN  
PD ABOUT LEARNERS WITH  
DISABILITY



**38,000**

TEACHERS HAD RESPONDED TO  
VIT SPECIAL NEEDS PD SURVEY

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS...



HAD UNDERTAKEN

**145,000**

INDIVIDUAL PD ACTIVITIES

WERE MOST LIKELY TO UNDERTAKE PD ABOUT LEARNERS WITH



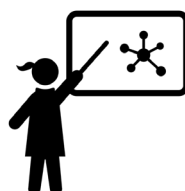
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (62%)

DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS (42%)

A SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY (41%)

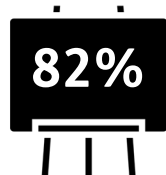


THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF THEIR PD TO IMPROVE  
CAPABILITY TO TEACHER LEARNERS WITH  
DISABILITY



**95%**

HAD APPLIED THEIR NEW LEARNING IN  
THEIR PRACTICE AS A TEACHER



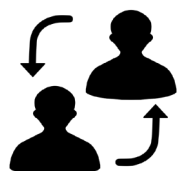
**82%**

HAD APPLIED THEIR NEW LEARNING TO  
SUPPORT THE LEARNING OF LEARNERS WITH  
DISABILITY



**> 33%**

HAD APPLIED NEW LEARNING TO INFORM / EDUCATE  
PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY OR OTHER PARENTS



**> 45%**

HAD APPLIED THEIR NEW LEARNING TO SUPPORT OTHER  
LEARNERS



PERCEIVED THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF  
PD ON LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR  
THEIR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY AT  
**7.29 ON A 10 POINT SCALE**

# Executive summary

.....

For the first time, registered teachers have been required to focus on developing their capability in a particular aspect of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. For renewal of registration in 2016 VIT has asked teachers to focus on APST 1.6:

*Strategies to support full participation of learners with disability*

This acknowledges the importance of the Victorian government focus on giving every learner the opportunity to learn in a safe, positive and supportive environment. Registered teachers play a prime role in this by building their capability to achieve such a learning environment for their learners with disability.

The requirement for registered teachers and early childhood teachers to engage in specific professional development (PD) activities to develop their capability to teach learners with disability rests on a number of assumptions. Primarily, it assumes that teacher learning contributes to improved practice and consequently makes a difference to learning outcomes for those with disability.

To test this assumption, teachers indicating they had engaged in special needs PD for their renewal of registration were invited to respond to a small number of survey questions targeted to understanding the impact of the learning that was undertaken. The questions collected data about the perceptions of teachers to both their own learning and the learning of those they taught with disability.

Over 38,000 Victorian registered teachers responded to the survey, ensuring the findings are valid and reliable. The findings are strongly positive and provide assurance of the impact of the special needs professional learning of teachers in relation to learners with disability.

Teachers indicated that they:

- Perceived high value in the PD they undertook to improve their capability to teach learners with disability.
- Were able to apply their new knowledge to their practice to support the learning of those they taught with disability.
- Were able to support the learning of their colleagues and parents they worked with.
- Found the strategies they implemented with their learners with disability also improved learning for their other learners.
- Perceived an improvement in the learning outcomes for those they taught with disabilities as a result of their special needs PD.

When data is disaggregated against the employment circumstances of registered teachers, including those who are working in casual relief teaching, outside schools and early childhood services and who are not currently teaching, the results remain consistently positive.

The survey results provide a snapshot of the perceptions of the teaching profession across Victoria. They indicate there has been significant impact of the VIT special needs regulatory requirement on the practice of registered teachers and this has led to improvements in the learning of Victorian learners with disabilities.



# 1. Background

## SUMMARY OF RENEWAL OF REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Registered teachers and early childhood teachers renew their registration annually.

This requires them to ensure their suitability to teach and their professional practice is maintained, giving currency of practice that allows registration for a further 12 months.

Maintenance of professional practice requires that teachers have taught a minimum of 20 days and undertaken at least 20 hours of standards referenced professional development (PD) activities in the previous 12 months. In 2016 teachers were asked to focus their PD for renewal of registration on building their capability to teach learners with special needs (disability).

The expiry date of teacher registration is 30 September of any year. If teachers do not complete their annual renewal tasks by that date they are kept on the Teacher Register until 31 December, giving them a further 3 months to comply.

This year, over 100,000 teachers are required to renew their registration.

## SPECIAL NEEDS PD REQUIREMENT

Teachers completing the renewal of registration application in 2016 are asked whether they have completed professional development (PD) activities related to teaching learners with disability since 1 October 2014. They have the option to answer 'yes' or 'no'.

- If they answer 'yes' they are advised that they may be selected to provide evidence of their special needs PD.
- If they answer 'no' they are advised that they must complete the special needs PD by their expiry date of 30 September 2017, to be eligible to renew their registration and continue as a registered teacher.

Further information about the Special Needs PD requirement for renewal of registration can be found on the VIT website at: [www.vit.vic.edu.au/registered-teacher/special-needs-plan](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registered-teacher/special-needs-plan)

# 2. The Special needs survey

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

A survey was constructed through Survey Monkey to understand:

- the content, method of delivery and hours of special needs PD teachers renewing their registration had undertaken;
- the impact of this PD on teachers' professional learning;
- if teachers had applied their special needs learning in practice and who to; and
- what impact this had on the learning of learners with disability.

Questions were constructed with options for the most commonly expected responses. There was no provision for 'other' responses or any free text boxes. While this limits the findings of the survey to broad understandings about the Victorian teaching profession, it also ensures findings are not skewed by different understandings of special needs that some teachers may have.

The high-level nature of the survey is appropriate for the large number of responses expected and is confined to quantitative data. A more detailed survey about the special needs professional learning of teachers was conducted in early 2016 by the Department of Education and Training. This provided the opportunity to explore more fully teachers' views about their current and future learning needs through quantitative and qualitative methods.

All registered teachers and early childhood teachers who indicated they had undertaken PD in special needs on their renewal of registration application form are invited to complete the survey.

The survey is not compulsory and responses are anonymous.

The survey will remain open until 31 December 2016, the final date for completion of a renewal of registration application. A complete list of questions can be found at Attachment 1.

# 3. Findings – survey respondents

## SPECIAL NEEDS PD

In all, 100,665 VIT invoices were issued to registered teachers and early childhood teachers who were required to renew their registration by 30 September 2016.

By 30 September 2016, 92,134 or 90% of teachers had renewed their registration.

Of these renewing teachers, 82,266 indicated they had undertaken special needs PD since 1 October 2014. This is 89% of renewing teachers. Table 1 indicates the breakdown for registration types.

Registration type	No. renewed	Special needs PD met	
Teacher	84,497	75,683	89.5%
Early childhood teacher	4,656	3,967	85.2%
Dual registrations	590	545	92.4%
Total	92,134	82,266	89.3%

Table 1: Special needs PD by registration type

Teachers who met the special needs PD renewal of registration requirement were invited to complete a brief survey about the impact of their PD.

## TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS

By 30 September 2016, 38,135 survey responses were logged. This is a 46% response rate from teachers.

Figure 1 identifies the employment characteristics of registered teachers completing the survey. Teachers employed in schools make up over three quarters of survey respondents and teachers in early childhood services make up 6%. Other survey respondents indicated they were working as casual relief teachers in either school or early childhood settings (9%), in education related fields (4%) or not working as a teacher at all (3%).

The teaching experience of survey respondents was reasonably evenly spread with a peak of 20% indicating 6-10 years' teaching experience and 20% indicating over 30 years' experience (Figure2).

## EMPLOYMENT TYPE

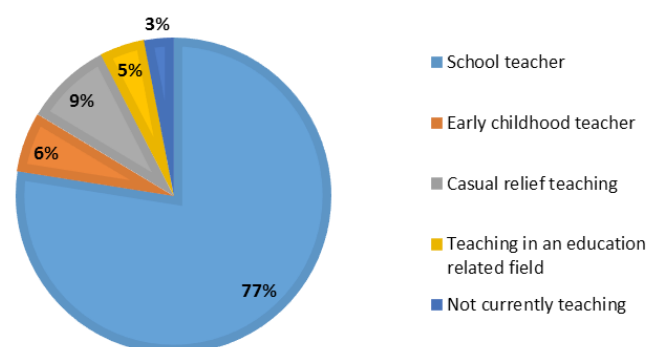


Figure 1: Survey respondents by employment type

## Q5 How many years' experience do you have as a teacher?

Answered: 38,076 Skipped: 92

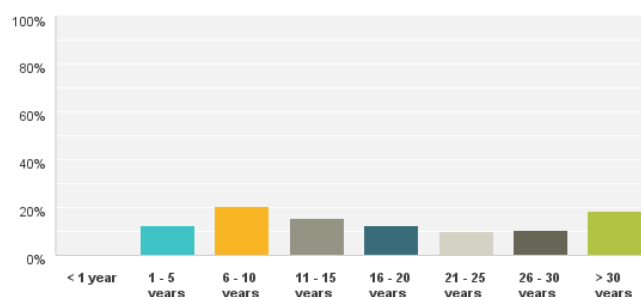


Figure 2: teaching experience of survey respondents

Of teachers employed in schools, 51% identified as teaching at a primary level and 43% at a secondary level. Just under 6% were teaching in a P-12 school. Primary teachers are under-represented in the survey as a proportion of teachers employed in primary schools. However, the large number of responses suggest that, despite this, the results will be a reliable representation of the perceptions of teachers in primary schools.

Teachers in government schools accounted for 57% of survey respondents in schools. A further 23% were teaching in Catholic schools and 20% in independent schools. This is largely proportional to the percentage of teachers employed in these school sectors, with slightly more independent school teachers responding to the survey.

## 4. Findings – type and characteristics of PD

Teachers were asked to identify, from a list of 15 activities, the PD they had undertaken to meet renewal special needs requirements (Table 2). In all, teachers reported over 145,000 individual activities they had engaged in to improve their capability to teach learners with disability. This equates to an average of 3.8 activities per teacher.

Rank	PD activity	Teachers engaging in activity	% of survey respondents
1	PD about learners with autism spectrum disorder	23,724	62
2	PD about differentiated instructional strategies	15,915	42
3	PD about learners with a specific learning disability, including dyslexia	15,527	41
4	PD about inclusive practices for learners with a disability	13,169	35
5	PD about learners with attention and self-regulating disorders (e.g. Oppositional Defiance Disorder)	11,482	30
6	PD about learners with intellectual disabilities	10,636	28
7	PD about learners with mental health needs (e.g. Bipolar Disorder)	8,804	23
8	Disability Standards for Education	8,715	23
9	PD about learners with a hearing disability	6,492	17
10	ABLES (Abilities Based Learning and Education Support)	6,071	16
11	PD about learners with chronic health problems	5,674	15
12	PD about learners with other physical disabilities	5,665	15
13	PD about learners with other disorders (e.g. Tourette's Syndrome)	5,404	14
14	PD about learners with a visual disability	4,889	13
15	Early ABLES (Abilities Based Learning and Education Support)	3,216	8
<b>TOTAL activities</b>		<b>145,383</b>	

Table 2: Ranking of special needs PD activities by teacher engagement

# 4. Findings – type and characteristics of PD cont...

PD activities most commonly undertaken related to learners with autism spectrum disorder. A large number of teachers also engaged in PD about differentiated instructional strategies, about learners with specific learning difficulties and inclusive practices for learners with disabilities.

Figure 3, below, shows the types of delivery of PD about teaching learners with disability.

Teachers were most likely to undertake their special needs learning through a workshop or seminar or curriculum days in schools or services. This indicates there is often support from school, service or sector leaders for the professional learning of teachers about strategies to support the learning of learners with disability.

Teachers also identified online modules, webinars and programs or professional reading as the way they learnt about teaching learners with disability. These types of activities can generally be undertaken by teachers individually and at a time that suits. Their representation in the data suggests that a significant proportion of teachers undertook activities that are self-directed and may be engaged in outside working hours.

Working with experts or communities of practice were also used by a number of teachers. Less common were action or inquiry-based research or instructional rounds.

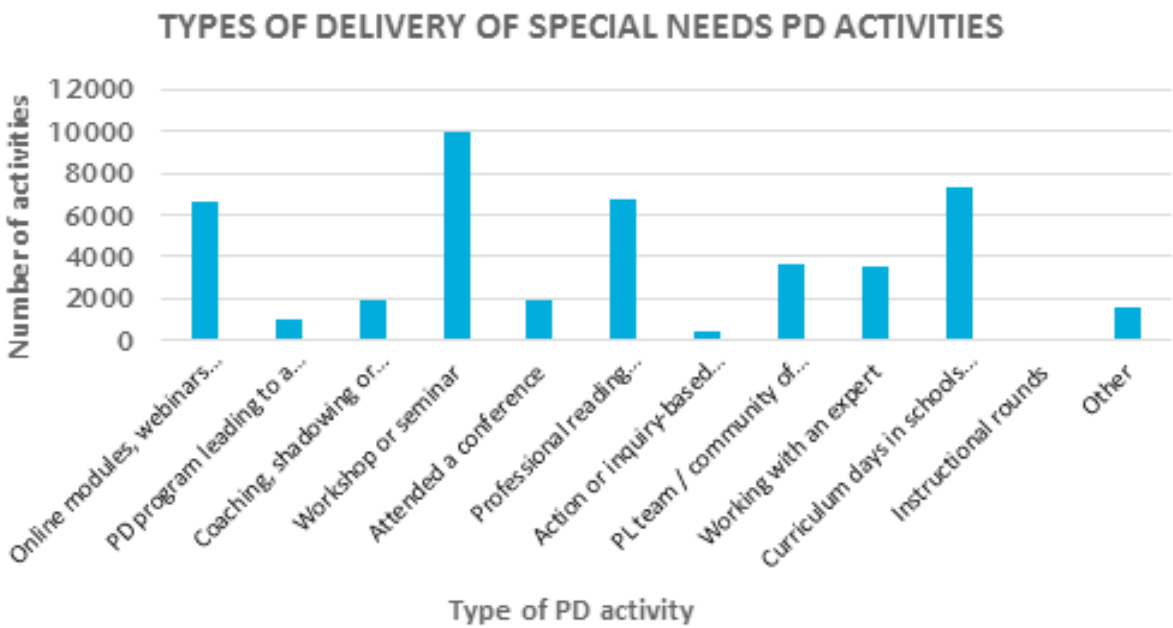


Figure 3: Type of delivery of Special Needs PD activities undertaken



# 5. Findings – impact on teacher learning

Survey respondents were asked to rank the positive impact of special needs PD on their professional knowledge and practice (Figure 4). The mean of all respondents was 7.65 on a 10-point scale. This indicates teachers perceive the PD activities they undertake are improving their knowledge and practice. Therefore, it can be construed that these PD activities are building teacher capability to teach learners with disability.

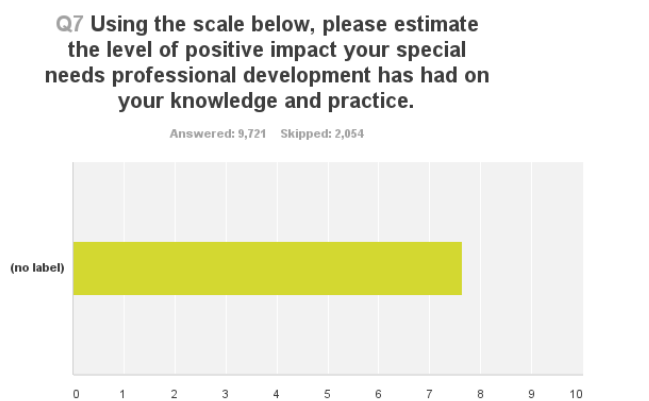


Figure 4: Positive impact of teacher PD - all respondents

Table 3 indicates the impact of the learning for different groups of survey respondents. All results show a strong positive teacher perspective about this aspect of their professional learning regardless of employment circumstances. Early childhood teachers perceive their PD had the greatest impact.

Employment type	Positive impact on PL (mean – 10-point scale)
Teacher in a school	7.68
Early childhood teacher	8.05
Casual relief teacher	7.79
Teaching in an education related field	7.88
Not teaching	7.77

Table 3: Mean rating of positive impact of special needs professional learning by employment type

Even those teachers not currently teaching could see the value of the PD they had undertaken. Those teaching in an education related field also attributed positive outcomes to their special needs professional learning. This could be indicative of the many encounters teachers in all circumstances have with learners who have disability and the applicability of much special needs PD to many teaching situations.

# 6. Findings – application of learning

The value of new learning for teachers is dependent upon opportunities to apply that new knowledge in their practice. Teachers were asked whether they had been able to transfer their learning about special needs into their practice.

There were 7 options about who they had applied their learning to and teachers could choose all that were relevant:

- Learners with disability
- Colleagues teaching learners with disability
- When team teaching learners with disability

- Learners without disabilities
- Parents / carers of learners with disability and other parents
- Colleagues at meetings, conferences, professional associations etc.

In all over 95% of teachers indicated they had opportunities to apply their professional learning in special needs. Figure 5 gives a breakdown of who teachers applied their new learning to.

## 6. Findings – application of learning cont...

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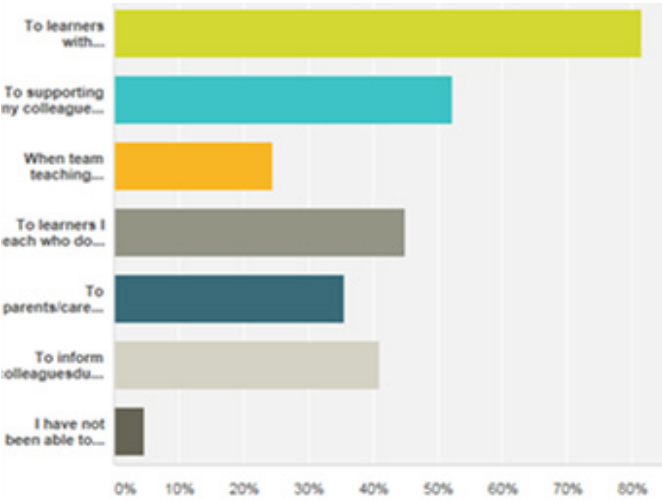


Figure 5: Application of Special Needs learning

The majority of respondents (82%) applied their learning directly to learners with disability. Over half supported colleagues who are teaching learners with disability. Many teachers were also able to inform their colleagues about new knowledge during meetings, conferences and when participating as members of professional associations.

Over 45% of teachers were able to apply their new knowledge to learners other than those with disability. This indicates that many teachers perceive value in the PD beyond their initial purpose and many teaching practices that support the learning of those with disability can improve outcomes for all learners.

Over a third of teachers were able to use their new knowledge with parents / carers of learners with disability or other parents / carers.

The findings in this question indicate that special needs professional learning is relevant to many teachers and there are numerous opportunities to apply new learning in practice. Furthermore, this knowledge is being shared across the profession and in the wider community.

## 7. Findings – impact on learners with disability

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Teachers were asked to estimate the positive impact of their professional learning on learning outcomes for learners with disability. Survey respondents perceived the PD they undertook as having a considerable positive impact on the learning outcomes of their learners with disability, resulting in a mean rating of 7.29 on a 10-point scale. The responses from teachers in different employment circumstances can be seen in Table 4.

Employment type	Positive impact on learning (mean – 10-point scale)
All teachers	7.29
Teacher in a school	7.31
Early childhood teacher	7.57
Casual relief teacher	7.23
Teaching in an education related field	7.21
Not teaching	7.29

Table 4: Teacher perceptions of impact of PD by employment type

The main reasons given by teachers for this impact were being able to better meet the needs of their learners with disability (83%) and being able to use more inclusive practices (70%). Over 46% of teachers identified that their learners with disability showed greater participation and improvement in their learning as a result of the PD in special needs they had undertaken.

Approximately half the respondents identified that implementing teaching strategies for learners with disability had also resulted in improved learning outcomes for their other learners.

While only 5.2% of respondents rated the improvement in learning of their learners with disability at 4 or less on a 10-point scale, it was worth interrogating their reasons for this. The majority of these teachers indicated that it was too early to tell or they needed more time to assess the outcomes for their learners. Other reasons given to a lesser degree were that only some learners benefitted from the teacher’s new teaching practices or because the PD was not relevant to the learning needs of the teacher’s learners with disability.

## 8. Conclusions

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Findings from the survey of teachers who have completed special needs PD for their renewal of registration show clear impact of the VIT special needs policy, both on the learning of teachers and on those they teach who have disability.

The findings are about teacher perceptions and validity and reliability of data is high, given that over 38,000 responses were received from teachers. This also lends credibility to the responses associated with teachers employed in different circumstances or not teaching at all. Even the smallest cohort – teachers not currently teaching – recorded over 1,100 responses to the survey questions.

That 90% of renewing teachers had undertaken PD in special needs indicates that many teachers are seeking to develop their capability to teach learners with disability and are taking this regulatory requirement seriously.

The special needs PD teachers have undertaken has impacted positively on their learning with the vast majority of teachers rating the activities they undertook very highly.

The range of activities and methods of engagement were varied but a prime focus for many teachers was PD supporting the learning of learners with autism spectrum disorder and improving their knowledge about differentiated instructional strategies. This indicates where greatest need lies in relation to learners with disability, even though it may also account for the focus of much PD that is available.

The majority of teachers were able to apply their learning from their special needs PD. This is indicative of the number of teachers who interact with learners with disability and underlines the importance of this Victorian government priority.

While the application of teacher learning was primarily to learners with disability, there were also opportunities for teachers to improve the learning of their colleagues and parents who may or may not have children with disability. This suggests that the impact of teacher professional learning extends broadly into the wider community. Teachers also recognised that teaching strategies for learners with disability can improve the learning of all learners. This suggests the benefit gained from special needs PD is often universal to teacher practice and applies even when the focus is not on learners with disability.

Teachers responding to the survey perceived a significant positive impact on the learning outcomes of learners with disability that resulted from their special needs PD. Furthermore, the small number rating the impact low were most likely to identify a lack of opportunity to apply their new knowledge or insufficient time to assess learning as the reason why they rated this aspect low. Few teachers felt their PD did not improve learning for those with disability.

The majority of teachers reported that their special needs PD had enabled them to better meet the learning needs of their learners with disability.

The consistent positive perceptions of teachers across a range of teaching circumstances (and not teaching currently) indicates that the impact of the special needs registration policy has had the desired effect of improving the capability of teachers to teach learners with disability.

VIT is confident that the greater capability Victorian teachers have developed through their renewal of registration special needs PD will be transferred to teaching practice and support the nurturing of safe, positive and supportive learning environments for learners with disability.

### NEXT STEPS

The impact of new teaching practices can take time to be understood and evaluated. Teachers continually assess and modify their teaching approaches to achieve the best learning outcomes. Thus, it's likely that teachers may have a different view in 12 months' time about the PD they have undertaken to improve their capability to teach learners with disability.

To interrogate this more fully, VIT intends to invite teachers who completed their special needs PD in 2016 to participate in a further brief survey in September 2017 when they renew their registration. This survey will ask about the impact of previous and further PD teachers have undertaken to develop their capability to teach learners with disability. The comparison of data between surveys will provide an understanding of the impact of the special needs regulatory requirement after 12 months and test whether the impact of PD continues beyond initial learning.

# Attachment 1: Special needs survey questions for teachers renewing their registration

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## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Before we begin the questions about your PD on learners with special needs, please answer these questions about yourself.

### 1. Are you:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

### 2. What is your current employment situation?

- ☐ Employed as a teacher in a school
- ☐ Employed as a leader in a school
- ☐ Employed as a teacher in an early childhood service
- ☐ Employed as a leader in an early childhood service
- ☐ Casual relief of emergency teaching
- ☐ Employed as an educator in an education related field? (e.g. TAFE, zoo, hospital, university)
- ☐ Not currently teaching

### 3. What level do you teach? (for teachers in a school)

- ☐ Early years (prep-year 3)
- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ P-12

### 4. What is your school sector? (for teachers in a school)

- ☐ Government
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ Independent

### 5. How many years' experience do you have as a teacher?

- ☐ < 1 year
- ☐ 1-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21-25 years
- ☐ 26-30 years
- ☐ > 30 years

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

6. Please select all the special needs PD areas you have focused on from the list below. If you have not completed professional development in an area, please leave it blank.

PD topic / area	How was this PD mainly completed?	Hours taken
<input type="radio"/> Learners with autism spectrum disorder	<input type="radio"/> Online modules, webinars or programs	<input type="radio"/> < 1 hour
<input type="radio"/> Learners with attention and self-regulating disorders (e.g. Oppositional Defiance Disorder)	<input type="radio"/> PD program leading to a credential (e.g. Graduate Diploma)	<input type="radio"/> 1-2 hours
<input type="radio"/> Learners with other disorders (e.g. Tourette's Syndrome)	<input type="radio"/> Coaching, shadowing or mentoring	<input type="radio"/> 3-5 hours
<input type="radio"/> Learners with a specific learning disability, including dyslexia	<input type="radio"/> Workshop or seminar	<input type="radio"/> 6-10 hours
<input type="radio"/> Learners with mental health needs (e.g. Bipolar Disorder)	<input type="radio"/> Attended a conference	<input type="radio"/> 11-15 hours
<input type="radio"/> Learners with intellectual disabilities	<input type="radio"/> Professional reading incl. online reading	<input type="radio"/> 16-20 hours
<input type="radio"/> ABLES (Abilities Based Learning and Education Support)	<input type="radio"/> Action or inquiry-based research	<input type="radio"/> >20 hours
<input type="radio"/> Disability Standards for Education	<input type="radio"/> PL team / community of practice	
<input type="radio"/> Inclusive practices for learners with a disability	<input type="radio"/> Working with expert in your workplace	
<input type="radio"/> Learners with chronic health problems	<input type="radio"/> Curriculum days in schools or services	
<input type="radio"/> Learners with a visual disability	<input type="radio"/> Instructional rounds	
<input type="radio"/> Learners with a hearing disability		
<input type="radio"/> Learners with other physical disabilities		
<input type="radio"/> Differentiated instructional strategies		
<input type="radio"/> Attendance at meetings / briefings by relevant experts (e.g. speech therapists, psychologists)		

# Attachment 1: Special needs survey questions for teachers renewing their registration cont...

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**7. Using the scale below, please estimate the level of positive impact your special needs professional development has had on your knowledge and practice.**

10-point scale ranging from 'none at all' (1) to very positive (10)

**8. To whom have you applied your new learning about teaching learners with disabilities?**

- ☐ To learners with disabilities
- ☐ To supporting my colleagues who teach learners with disabilities
- ☐ When team teaching learners with disabilities
- ☐ To learners I teach who do not have disabilities
- ☐ To parents / carers of learners with disabilities and other parents / carers
- ☐ To colleagues at network meetings, conferences or within professional associations
- ☐ I have not been able to apply my learning

**9. Using the scale below, please estimate how much of a positive impact your professional development has had on the learning outcomes of learners with a disability?**

10-point scale ranging from 'none at all' (1) to very positive (10)

**10. From the options below, please indicate why you feel your special needs professional development has had little effect on your learning or the learning outcomes of learners with a disability. (for teachers rating Q.9 1-4)**

- ☐ The professional development did not meet my learning needs.
- ☐ The learners were not responsive to my new teaching practices and did not improve their learning.
- ☐ The learners were responsive to my new teaching practices but did not improve their learning.
- ☐ Only some learners benefited from my new teaching practices.
- ☐ It is too early to tell / I need more time to assess the outcomes for my learners.

**11. From the options below, please indicate why you feel your special needs professional development has had a positive effect on your learning or the learning outcomes of learners with a disability.**

- ☐ I was better able to meet the needs of my learners with disabilities.
- ☐ I was able to better meet the learning needs of my other learners.
- ☐ My learners with disabilities showed an improvement in their learning.
- ☐ My other learners showed an improvement in their learning.
- ☐ The learners of my colleagues showed an improvement in their learning.
- ☐ There was greater participation from my learners with disabilities.
- ☐ I was able to use more inclusive practices.
- ☐ My colleagues were able to use more inclusive practices.



## **Victorian Institute of Teaching**

Level 9 628 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC 3000  
PO Box 531, Collins Street West VIC 8007

**t.** 1300 888 067

**f.** (03) 8601 6101

**e.** [vit@vit.vic.edu.au](mailto:vit@vit.vic.edu.au)

**w.** [vit.vic.edu.au](http://vit.vic.edu.au)

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