

# AECTEN

*Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network*

May 4, 2018

## **Submission from the Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network (AECTEN)**

### **National Review of Teacher Registration**

The Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network (AECTEN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *National Review of Teacher Registration*. This submission has been developed on behalf of the AECTEN by Dr Marianne Fenech (University of Sydney), Associate Professor Susan Irvine (Queensland University of Technology), and Associate Professor Lennie Barblett (Edith Cowan University), in consultation with AECTEN members.

The AECTEN comprises leaders in early childhood teacher education degree programs in the higher education sector in Australia. It has five branches: New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory; Victoria; Queensland; Western Australia; and a combined South Australia/Tasmania/Northern Territory branch, representing in total, 43 higher education institutions from across Australia (see p. 7 of this submission for a full list of member organisations). Established in October 2016, members meet to discuss current issues related to the delivery of pre-service and post-initial early childhood teacher education, and to advocate and inform national policy on key issues relating to early childhood education and the early childhood workforce. In December 2017 AECTEN began operating as a network of the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

#### ***AECTEN Submission Summary***

The Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network (AECTEN) supports in principle, the expansion of teacher registration to include early childhood teachers working in prior-to-school contexts and school contexts in all jurisdictions. This national approach has great potential to support teacher quality and professional status.

To achieve its intended outcomes, the full inclusion of early childhood teachers nationally needs to be undertaken with respect for and recognition of the uniqueness of early childhood education as a discipline in its own right. Further consultation with the ECE sector is required to progress such a national approach to teacher registration. This consultation requires careful consideration of significant issues that include the need for early childhood specialisations in Birth – 12 initial teacher preparation programs, the extension of the national Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education to all early childhood teacher graduates, and revision of the Australian Professional Teacher Standards (APST) to more fully reflect the expertise, roles and responsibilities of early childhood teachers working across early education contexts

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(i.e., prior-to-school and the early phase of school). How ensuing standards could be utilised for assessment in initial early childhood teacher education programs needs also to be considered. Conversely, there is potential for revised standards to be used to inform program quality assurance.

Challenges specific to the prior-to -school sector, such as supervision and mentoring of graduate teachers and equitable access to quality professional development, also require attention and resourcing if the aims of national teacher registration are to be met. National consistency affirms respect for existing state/territory registration provisions and inclusion of a range of age groups to be covered in four-year preservice early childhood teacher education programs.

### **1. Scope of the national review – Early childhood teachers**

‘Early childhood’ is understood internationally as the period from birth to eight years of age (cf. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2001, 2006, 2017). Consistent with this definition, in this submission we use the term ‘early childhood teachers’ to refer to university qualified teachers who have completed a specialist early childhood teaching degree (ACECQA, 2018) to work with children from birth to eight years or birth to five years. This may be in a prior-to-school or school context.

National teacher registration needs to be underpinned by a commitment to an equitable and inclusive approach to the registration of all qualified teachers, working with approved (accredited) curricula in approved education settings, regardless of the age of children or students, education setting and/or geographic location within Australia. As noted, it includes prior-to-school and school settings.

### **2. AECTEN supports a commitment to develop a national approach to the registration of early childhood teachers practising in approved ECEC services and schools**

The introduction of a national approach to teacher registration that recognises and supports the professional work of early childhood teachers in both prior-to-school and school education contexts, is consistent with current national early childhood policy objectives. An inclusive national approach to teacher registration has potential to: (i) support and strengthen professionalism and quality within prior-to-school education settings; (ii) raise community awareness of the professional work of teachers in these settings; (iii) support the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector to attract and retain more qualified early childhood teachers; (iv) support the ECEC sector to meet the legislated requirement to employ additional early childhood teachers in centre-based ECEC services, to commence in 2020; and (v) allow early childhood teachers to seamlessly move between education settings (e.g., long day care, preschool and school) and across jurisdictions.

To progress a national approach to teacher registration that promotes and supports the professional work of teachers in any education context and is inclusive of ECTS teaching in prior-to-school ECEC

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services, the AECTEN calls for further meaningful consultation with the ECE sector to inform the design and implementation of the new inclusive system. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is well placed to lead such a consultation process.

### **3. Requirements for teacher registration**

Regardless of education setting, teachers should meet the same preservice requirements for the purposes of teacher registration. It is crucial that early childhood teachers working in prior-to-school education settings undergo teacher registration on equal standing with their primary and high school counterparts. There is a likely need to address some existing differences in jurisdictional requirements. For example, prior to registration, it would be reasonable for all teachers to be required to have successfully completed LANTITE. How this requirement would be implemented should be a focus of further consultation.

### **4. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)**

The link between the Teacher Standards and teacher registration is important. That said, the APST need to be inclusive of diverse education contexts and speak clearly to the work of teachers in those contexts. This includes early childhood teachers working in approved prior-to-school early childhood education services. Currently, the Teacher Standards are limited in their recognition of the scope of professional roles and responsibilities required of early childhood teachers. In pursuit of a rigorous and nationally consistent approach to teacher registration, we support a revised set of Teacher Standards that are inclusive of early childhood teachers' practice in both prior-to-school and school settings.

We believe that alignment with Australia's National Quality Framework (NQF) for Early Childhood Education and Care and, in particular, the National Quality Standard (NQS)<sup>1</sup>, has potential to strengthen the current Teacher Standards for all teachers regardless of year level taught. We strongly oppose any move to create a dual system of teacher registration, based on a separate set of standards for teachers in school settings and another for teachers in prior-to-school settings. We welcome the opportunity to comment further on a revised and more inclusive suite of APST in the forthcoming review of the Teacher Standards.

### **5. Implications for initial early childhood teacher preparation programs**

It will be critical that the development of a more inclusive national approach to teacher registration considers implications for initial early childhood teacher preparation programs in terms of quality, duration, professional experience and assessment. If all graduate early childhood teachers are to be

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<sup>1</sup> The NQS is mandated to be used in Western Australian schools from K to Year 2 and because of its success in assisting with continuous improvement, some schools use it for all teachers K to Year 6

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provisionally registered, then there will need to be quality assurance that ensures programs comprehensively provide preservice teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills, consistent with (revised) Teacher Standards. To this end we call for early childhood specialisations to be embedded into Birth – 12 teacher preparation programs. Consistency in approaches to the assessment of Teacher Standards in teacher preparation programs also needs to be considered.

An analysis of programs accredited by ACECQA in the period January 2012 – June 2017 undertaken by AECTEN in 2017, highlighted significant disparity in the provisioning of initial early childhood teacher education programs across Australia (See Figure 1 on p. 6 for a snapshot of accredited early childhood teacher education programs). AECTEN is particularly concerned about the shift in some states and territories in programs from birth to eight years to birth to 12 years, and the limited capacity of birth to 12 programs to adequately prepare preservice teachers to effectively practice in the prior-to-school sector.

### **6. Challenges to be addressed**

In addition to ensuring that the Teacher Standards appropriately recognise and reflect the professional work of all early childhood teachers, other challenges will need to be addressed to support the implementation of teacher registration for teachers working in approved prior-to-school ECEC services. These include:

- supervision and mentoring of, and support for, graduate teachers to move from provisional to full (proficient) registration
- availability of quality professional development (not technical training such as updated first aid qualifications) for teachers registered at the proficient level
- equitable access to support/mentoring and professional development. Early childhood teachers employed in rural/regional areas, in stand-alone services, and in services where they are the only teacher employed have less access than early childhood teachers working for large providers of early childhood services and teachers working in schools.

Without proper redressing of these challenges the aims and intended benefits of national teacher registration for early childhood teachers is likely to be compromised. We support the model successfully used in Western Australia, where the Teacher Registration Board sources mentors for teachers employed in stand-alone ECEC services.

### **7. Jurisdictional distinctiveness**

The expansion of national teacher registration to recognise and support the professional work of all early childhood teachers, regardless of education context, needs to acknowledge jurisdictional differences of a federated system. There is opportunity to learn from the experiences of different states and territories that have already implemented registration for early childhood teachers employed in prior-to-school ECEC settings. While we strongly support a national and inclusive approach to teacher registration, the goal for national consistency should not compromise existing

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state/territory registration provisions for registered graduates of Birth-8 programs who work with children in the early phase of school (K-2 years) or where inclusive teacher registration approaches are already operating well.

In Western Australia, early childhood teaching graduates apply for teacher registration upon graduating from their degree. Regardless of whether teachers choose to teach in a prior-to-school or school setting, they must be registered with the Teacher Registration Board Western Australia (TRBWA). Once provisionally registered, early childhood teachers in prior-to-school settings are able to progress to *proficient*, *highly accomplished* and *lead* as their colleagues do in school settings. Currently, progression from being provisionally registered through to *lead* occurs through a mentoring process with a registered teacher. This mentor can be in the same setting as the graduate teacher (that is, prior-to school) or they can be a mentor from another centre or school. For all early childhood teachers, regardless of the context, the same criteria for progression through to *lead* is required.

The current arrangements in Western Australia reflect the national initiatives to raise quality in the early years and maintain the professional status of early childhood teachers whether they be teachers in prior-to-school or school settings. This recognition has effectively met the needs of both national accrediting bodies (TRBWA and ACECQA). In addition, this meets the future needs of the children's services sector where all services must have two four-year qualified early childhood teachers, or equivalent, by 2020.

### **8. AECTEN contacts**

Dr Marianne Fenech (Chair)  
[marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au](mailto:marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au)

Associate Professor Sue Irvine  
[s.irvine@qut.edu.au](mailto:s.irvine@qut.edu.au)

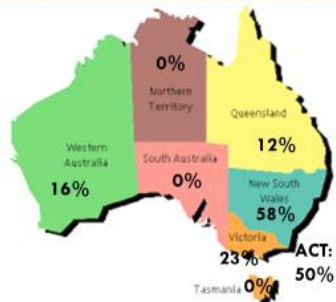
Associate Professor Lennie Barblett  
[l.barblett@ecu.edu.au](mailto:l.barblett@ecu.edu.au)

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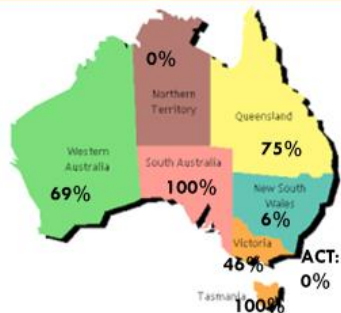
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Figure 1: Snapshot of accredited early childhood teacher education programs in Australia 2012-2017

## Birth – 5 accredited programs (Jan 2012 – June 2017)



## Birth – 8 accredited programs (Jan 2012 – June 2017)



## Birth – 12 accredited programs (Jan 2012 – June 2017)



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STATE/TERRITORY BRANCH	CHAIR /CONTACTS
<b>NSW/ACT</b> <b>NSW</b> Australian Catholic University Avondale College Charles Sturt University Macquarie University Notre Dame University Southern Cross University TAFE NSW The University of Newcastle The University of Wollongong University of New England University of Sydney Western Sydney University <b>ACT</b> Australian Catholic University Canberra University	<i>Chair</i>  Marianne Fenech <a href="mailto:marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au">marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au</a>          <i>ACT Contact</i> Kym Simoncini <a href="mailto:kym.Simoncini@canberra.edu.au">kym.Simoncini@canberra.edu.au</a>
<b>QLD</b> Central Queensland University Griffith University James Cook University Queensland University of Technology Southern Cross University University of the Sunshine Coast University of Southern Queensland	<i>Chair</i> Ann Farrell <a href="mailto:a.farrell@qut.edu.au">a.farrell@qut.edu.au</a>  Sue Irvine <a href="mailto:s.irvine@qut.edu.au">s.irvine@qut.edu.au</a>  Megan Gibson <a href="mailto:ml.gibson@qut.edu.au">ml.gibson@qut.edu.au</a>
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA /TAS/NORTHERN TERRITORY</b> <b>Northern Territory</b> Charles Darwin University Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education <b>South Australia</b> Flinders University University of South Australia <b>Tasmania</b> University of Tasmania	Nicola Yelland <a href="mailto:nicola.yelland@flinders.edu.au">nicola.yelland@flinders.edu.au</a>  Victoria Whittington <a href="mailto:Victoria.Whittington@unisa.edu.au">Victoria.Whittington@unisa.edu.au</a>  Georgina Nutton <a href="mailto:Georgina.nutton@cdu.edu.au/">Georgina.nutton@cdu.edu.au/</a>  Bronwyn Reynolds <a href="mailto:Bronwyn.reynolds@utas.edu.au">Bronwyn.reynolds@utas.edu.au</a>
<b>VICTORIA</b> Australian Catholic University Box Hill TAFE Deakin University Federation University Holmesglen University La Trobe University Melbourne Polytechnic Monash University RMIT Swinburne Victoria University	<i>Chair</i> Anna Kilderry <a href="mailto:Anna.kilderry@deakin.edu.au">Anna.kilderry@deakin.edu.au</a>
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b> Curtin University Edith Cowan University Murdoch University Notre Dame University of Western Australia	<i>Chair</i> Lennie Barblett <a href="mailto:l.barblett@ecu.edu.au">l.barblett@ecu.edu.au</a>  Marianne Knaus <a href="mailto:m.knaus@ecu.edu.au">m.knaus@ecu.edu.au</a>