

## **National Teacher Registration Review**

### **Northern Territory Department of Education response**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Northern Territory Department of Education (the department) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Expert Panel for the *National Review of Teacher Registration* (the Review). This submission outlines the Northern Territory Government's position in relation to national consistency of teacher registration and aims to address areas identified for discussion in the consultation paper. To ensure teacher registration reforms are nationally agreed and achievable, continued collaboration and consultation between jurisdictions is essential, and the national reform agenda driving teacher quality must be embedded with a degree of flexibility and autonomy to enable successful implementation in each jurisdiction.

#### **2. NT Context**

The department is the largest employer of teaching staff in the NT, with 161 principals, 2360 teachers and 157 assistant teachers delivering education from the early years to adulthood to more than 34 000 children and students in 153 government schools. Proportionally, the NT has almost double the school age population in the lowest socio-economic group compared to the Australian average. Six in 10 NT schools have an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score below 900, compared to approximately 1 in 10 schools nationally. Two in five students in the NT are Aboriginal, compared to one in 20 nationally, and one in four are very remote Aboriginal students compared to 1 in 250 nationally. These factors provide a profile of students significantly different from other Australian student cohorts, creating a diverse service delivery context and requiring more from Territory teachers to ensure every student has an opportunity to engage, grow and achieve.

The Territory welcomes the review into teacher registration to identify areas for improvement in ensuring the quality of the teaching workforce. The NT is currently reviewing its *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act* (the Act) and *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations* (the Regulations). Consultation with education stakeholders has identified a number of areas for local reform to strengthen and contemporise the legislation. It should be noted this review focuses on local issues presented and those issues being discussed nationally are not within the scope of the review.

While this submission responds to the questions raised in the consultation paper, given the context outlined above, the NT would also see the benefit of strengthening the administration and resourcing of teacher registration at the national level. Undertaking the full administrative requirements associated with teacher registration continues to be challenging for a small jurisdiction with limited resources. A national approach would be beneficial to assist the regulator to operate at arm's length. In a small jurisdiction, maintaining independence and anonymity when conducting disciplinary proceedings is challenging with a small professional population involved in all aspects of the regulatory system. The adoption of a single system approach would also help resolve issues with teacher mobility, particularly where barriers to information sharing exist. In the event a national approach to teacher registration is not adopted, the NT proposes that mutual recognition of registration across states and territories should be strengthened to enhance information sharing and ensure a more coordinated approach to registration.

### **3. How is the national teacher registration framework working across Australia?**

While the national teacher registration framework provides an expectation and standards for the profession, which is a necessary mechanism to ensure quality, there is an opportunity for better implementation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards), particularly around what it means to meet each standard, and in clarifying roles for teacher regulatory authorities, system and school responsibilities.

The renewal process for teacher registration could be enhanced by specifying the minimum professional learning activities a teacher must undertake as a condition of registration. Further regulation around professional learning requirements would be supported, such as a national evidence-base linked professional learning to teacher capability and professional learning included as eligibility criteria for registration renewal.

To ensure regulation around registration renewals is implemented in a way that meets the output of improving teacher quality, national bodies, teacher regulatory authorities and state and territory education departments would need to work together to assist teachers meet their obligations of registration. This may involve national bodies developing resources and materials, teacher regulatory authorities enforcing accountability, and state and territory education departments facilitating the professional learning needed to build capacity and capability in their employees and teachers employed in the independent and Catholic school systems. ‘

**4. Should early childhood teachers be part of a national approach to teacher registration?**

Nationally consistent approaches to the registration of early childhood teachers would enable all early childhood teachers to be recognised as professional educators, and provide parents and carers assurance that their children are receiving top quality education and care from professionals who meet consistent standards of practice. The quality of early childhood education is vital to its effectiveness, and the most important factor in delivering quality is a skilled and stable workforce. Educators and early childhood teachers in early childhood education and care services play a crucial role in early childhood education and care systems as they are the front-line workers responsible for engaging children and promoting their wellbeing, development and learning.

In the NT, early childhood educators currently working in the prior to school sector (long day care), who obtain provisional teacher registration, are precluded from progressing to full registration due to the requirements of the Act and the Regulations. The Act and Regulations require certain thresholds for provisional teachers before they can progress to full registration, such as the completion of 180 days teaching practice, providing evidence of meeting the Standards to a school-based panel, and having a registered teacher support them in their professional practice, before moving to full registration. It is not possible for these requirements to be met in the child care setting, creating a two tiered system whereby teachers can gain and maintain registration if they are working in a school setting, but not in an early childhood setting. It is inequitable and may contribute to high staff turnover.

The lack of nationally consistent approaches to the registration of early childhood teachers, including nationally consistent approaches for obtaining and maintaining registration, is a barrier to staff moving between jurisdictions. It is also a barrier to encouraging early childhood educators to participate in ongoing professional development to maintain currency of their qualifications and build individual capabilities. Nationally consistent approaches to teacher registration would also assist with the alignment of registration to the nature of the teaching degree studied. The requirements of a degree in early childhood teaching differ from those for a degree in primary or secondary teaching. To avoid a situation where a secondary school trained teacher is placed in an early childhood setting such as preschool, teacher registration should align with the field of study.

For the Territory, adding another category of registration for early childhood teachers would broaden the scope of work for the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory (the board). However, there are considerable benefits in registering early childhood educators in the prior to school settings. These include:

- raising the status of the profession whereby early childhood teachers working in long day care receive equal recognition as teaching professionals
- enabling the application of the provisional registration to full registration process, which has been shown to support the transition of new teachers to professional practice
- providing consistent teaching standards across the teacher registration acts and the *Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act*
- confirming that a person registered in the proposed early childhood division has approved early childhood teaching qualifications and has undergone the required criminal record checks
- providing an opportunity to consider aligning pay scales to the level of qualification or experience and, in turn, potentially attracting a broader range of people to the profession
- providing greater job satisfaction to early childhood teachers working in the prior to school sector and affording them opportunities to move across jurisdictions and across service types e.g. from a preschool program delivered in a school to a long day care service
- developing clear and consistent role expectations and career pathways for people working in early childhood.

However, mandated registration in the prior to school sector should be treated with caution as this would carry significant risk of further restricting the available workforce in the Territory and so preference should be given to legislating for voluntary registration.

Applying the Standards to early childhood teacher registration would mean that all Australian teachers, including early childhood teachers, would be subject to the same requirements to develop and maintain their practice regardless of where they work. This would support improvements to the quality of early childhood teaching and assist in addressing professional recognition issues in the early childhood education and care sector. It would also provide a common system of recognition for moving between a provisionally registered graduate teacher and a fully registered teacher.

## 5. **What role does teacher registration play for VET teachers in school settings?**

VET plays a key role in remote and very remote schools and is delivered to some of the most disadvantaged students in the Territory. Currently, registered teachers delivering VET in schools are required to meet both industry and teacher standards. Those VET trainers and assessors in schools that do not hold a teaching qualification, and therefore are not registered teachers, are only required to meet industry standards. The gaps for this staffing group are often present in

pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning which could be overcome with in-school support from a quality teaching and learning mentor.

An employer may apply to the board for authorisation to employ an unregistered person as a teacher for a period of time not exceeding a year. The Act provides that the board may grant authorisation if satisfied that the unregistered person:

- is fit and proper to teach
- is competent to teach each subject, at the level, specified in the application
- will be appropriately supervised to safeguard student learning outcomes.

There is an opportunity to consider whether VET trainers working in schools could be registered under an authority to employ arrangement. This could serve as a function to ensure these staffing groups are considered fit and proper to teach, and the appropriate competencies have been assessed. Reforms in this area of education would need to balance regulation with demand and ensure it does not eliminate the available pool of trainers and assessors in local areas, particularly in remote and very remote contexts.

## **6. How does teacher registration support entry into the teaching profession?**

Both the board and the department follow the same process to ensure teacher graduates move from provisional to full registration successfully, through induction, mentoring and probation processes carried out over an initial period of 12 months. The category of provisionally registered teachers ensure newcomers to the profession, or those returning to the profession following a career break, are given guidance and mentoring to assist them in their transition from provisional registration to proficient or full registration. However, there is an opportunity to review how the employer probation process aligns with the provisional to full registration process in the NT to ensure there is not duplication of effort.

The particular context of NT education delivery in remote and very remote schools results in some difficulties in the provision of support for new teachers given the isolation and limited resources. The NT would support examining alternatives to assist new graduate teachers in the initial stages of full-time employment, and for those new teachers who fill casual roles. An aspect to be considered is where the responsibility for the support would sit with the registration authority or the education employer. An additional factor to be considered in reviewing the pre-registration of teacher education students is the additional resources and administration measures required for such an approach.

Given the fundamental role assistant teachers play in the NT in engaging students, particularly in remote and very remote areas, there is a real need to consider the status and conditions for assistant teachers. In remote and very remote communities, schools benefit from the employment of local Aboriginal assistant teachers who support the engagement and education of students through cultural

and language knowledge. Nationally, there are currently no mechanisms for managing assistant teacher quality, or acknowledging their pivotal role in the teaching community. The NT supports further consideration being given to the appropriateness of including a registration status for assistant teachers, in providing a system of professional recognition and standing for assistant teachers in the teaching community. An authorisation to employ an unregistered person, similar to that for VET teachers, may be a workable solution in managing the categorisation of assistant teachers in the broader governance arrangements.

**7. How can we ensure that registered teachers satisfy the fit and proper person requirement?**

To combat the increased mobility of the teaching profession, nationally consistent information sharing would mitigate the risk of information ‘slipping through the cracks’, in preventing persons who are not fit and proper from commencing, or continuing, to engage with children in schools. Legislating for nationally consistent information sharing would reduce complexity and promote certainty in information sharing, by instilling confidence when information can or must be shared. To enable jurisdictions to share information within current legal parameters, teacher regulatory authorities should take steps to actively enter into information sharing arrangements between institutions with responsibilities for children’s safety and wellbeing, and those institutions and relevant professionals. Teacher regulatory authorities must have access to consistent information about a teacher moving into their jurisdiction, irrespective of where the teacher is relocating from. This supports the work of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* in that the recommendations broadly promote improving information sharing between jurisdictions by taking a national approach.

The disparity between the teacher registration and working with children clearance regimes represents one of the proposals for reform currently being considered in the NT. A registered teacher or authorised person must have a working with children clearance to both work in a school or educational setting, and maintain registration or authorisation. However, the NT would see the threshold for determining a person’s fitness and propriety to teach should be cast wider than that of working with children clearances, to ensure that teacher regulatory authorities can consider all aspects of a person’s history and behaviour, not just the risk of harm or exploitation the person presents to children. A fit and proper person is determined differently across the jurisdictions, where a national consistent approach would be beneficial in reducing potential risk to student safety and well-being. Notably, the suitability to teach element included the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership framework could be utilised in implementing this approach.

## 8. Conclusion

The department is committed to ensuring that every child in the NT has the best start in life and through early learning and school education, gains a bright future. Benefits for the education sector nationally could include consistency in entry, or re-entry into the teaching profession, including role clarity for employers and registration authorities, a streamlining of policy and direction, facilitation of teacher mobility across jurisdictions and sectors, and an ability to have secure information sharing processes that will in turn create safe learning environments for Australian children and students.