

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Education Council

National Review of Teacher Registration

from the

Federal Council

of the

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)**

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Summary

ICPA (Aust) believes that teaching and therefore the process of teacher registration in a rural and remote setting brings with it a unique set of challenges. A lack of adequate support and limited resources available in regional, rural and remote contexts, mean the opportunity to achieve and maintain professional proficiency for annual registration, may be problematic. These challenges also mean that retaining experienced, proficient teachers in these settings is difficult.

It is essential that high-quality, proficient teachers are attracted to and retained in rural and remote educational locations. While academic requirements are important, we also need to value different and multiple teacher characteristics, particularly when teaching in small rural schools, to allow teachers in these areas to move through the teacher registration process. Furthermore, provision needs to be made in the teacher registration renewal process for experienced, proficient teachers residing in rural and remote areas to be given realistic, flexible and alternative pathways to retain and renew their registration.

In rural and remote contexts, appropriate training and high-quality induction for those entering the teaching profession in a rural and remote context is essential to overcoming barriers and challenges associated with teaching in these contexts. This would also ensure improved recruitment and retention of teachers and achieve the optimum learning outcomes for students. Training in the identification and management of specific learning needs and disabilities should also be a key element in any teacher preparation to build the teacher's capacity to identify and assist children with special needs or learning difficulties.

ICPA (Aust) believes this could be achieved in the form of teacher education courses including a major in Rural and Remote Education with modules on teaching Specific Learning Needs such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Dyslexia and courses covering a range of unique challenges requiring specific knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to rural and remote areas.

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Review of Teacher Registration to identify ways to build on and further strengthen teacher registration in Australia.

Since 1971, ICPA (Aust) has represented families living in rural and remote regions of Australia, who are passionate about the sustainability and prosperity of the industries they work in. Research indicates that the ability to access affordable and appropriate educational services plays a major factor in determining if a family will remain in rural and remote locations. The goal for our 2500-member families is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for all children living in rural and remote areas, ensuring they have access to a continuing and appropriate education determined by their aspirations and abilities rather than the location of their home.

Remote and isolated locations in Australia provide the greatest challenges for improving provision of education options and pathways for children and families. In terms of educational and social development and to make sure their educational outcomes are not compromised, rural and remote students need the opportunity to undertake an education that is commensurate to their needs allowing them to realise their educational potential and presenting a pathway which provides educational parity with their urban peers.

Educational outcomes for rural and remote students require a national approach to ensure consistent, high quality educational delivery regardless of where or how that education is provided. Geographically isolated children must not be disadvantaged by limited or lesser quality resources, including teachers, in rural and remote areas.

“In order to increase the achievements and expand successful transitions and pathways for RRR young people in and across the board, committed and highly effective teachers and teaching in every location for every year level is essential.” Halsey, J 2018. Page 38 Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE): Final Report.

1. How is the national teacher registration framework working across Australia?

Elements of registration

- **How well are the implementation and content of the eight elements of the Framework working? Please consider consistency, best practice and challenges and barriers in your response. You may wish to share examples.**

The teacher registration framework focuses on rigorously ensuring only fit and proper people, with appropriate qualifications enter the teaching workforce. A sustainable rural teaching workforce requires other less tangible but not insurmountable preparatory qualifications. In the rural and remote context, a strict adherence to teaching qualifications per se may not yield teachers of the best fit. All too often inexperienced, ill-prepared teachers take on hard to fill positions in isolated locations. Certainly, these teachers likely meet the minimum required standards for teacher registration within the framework, however for individuals who are unprepared for living and teaching in rural or remote communities, along with a lack of adequate support and resources available in these contexts, the opportunity to achieve professional proficiency, is problematic. This in turn has significant impacts upon student outcomes in rural and remote locations.

Due to the nature of teaching in a rural and remote location, attracting experienced, high quality teachers is a challenge. The limited support and resources available in these locations means that retaining experienced, proficient teachers is difficult. Often high-quality teachers are lost to urban positions where resources and support, both professionally and personally, are readily available. That is not to say however that there are not proficient, top teachers in rural and remote communities. Due to family or business commitments they may not be able to teach full-time, however, they are often able to continue to provide relief and release teaching hours on a casual basis and to mentor new or young teachers. Unfortunately, due to onerous, unachievable teacher registration requirements, these teachers are often forced to let their registration lapse because they are unable to fulfil those requisites in their rural or remote community.

Teacher quality

- **How has the embedding of the Teacher Standards in the Framework supported teacher quality? In particular, how have the Teacher Standards influenced the way in which teachers move from provisional to full registration and through renewal of registration?**

If the biggest in-school effect on student outcomes is the quality of teaching and school leadership (Hattie, J 2003, p.3, Teachers Make a Difference. What is the research evidence?) then it is essential that high quality, proficient teachers are attracted to and retained in rural and remote educational locations. Put simply, teacher quality matters, no matter the context of the learning environment, and has a serious impact upon student outcomes and achievements. Teachers in rural and remote settings need to be given every opportunity to thrive and survive. While academic requirements are important, we also need to value different and multiple teacher characteristics, particularly when teaching in small rural schools, to allow teachers in these areas to move through the registration process. Furthermore, provision needs to be made in the teacher registration renewal process for experienced, proficient teachers residing in rural and remote areas to be given realistic pathways to retain and renew their registration.

Improvements

- **How could current teacher registration arrangements be improved to strengthen both teacher registration implementation and teacher quality? Are the eight elements of the 2011 Framework relevant and appropriate?**
- **How could improvements be implemented, acknowledging different legislative, regulatory, administrative and resourcing contexts? What are some expected benefits and success measures?**

Due to the nature of teaching in a rural and remote location, attracting and retaining experienced, high quality teachers is difficult due to the unique challenges and limited support and resources available in these locations. Often proficient teachers are lost to urban positions where resources and support are readily available. It is important that easily accessible professional support, assistance and incentives are available to teachers when taking on positions in a rural and remote location.

“To help develop the skills and knowledge to be a successful teacher in an RRR school, substantial opportunities are required during initial teacher education for candidates to deeply engage with and reflect upon being a teacher in an RRR context.” Halsey, J. Page 40 IRRRRE Final Report.

Alternative pathways within the framework need also to be considered for teachers residing in a rural and remote area to renew and maintain their registration and therefore retain quality teachers in these settings. The third element listed in the National Framework for Teacher Registration focuses on ‘Alternative authorisation to teach’ and states that jurisdictions may choose to implement provision for persons who are not eligible for registration to be employed in roles that would otherwise require registration. ICPA (Aust) believes that provision should be made for an alternative pathway for those teachers residing in rural and remote locations, who may struggle to retain their teacher registration due to the onerous registration requirements. These community members are essential for relief teaching as well as potentially more permanent positions in the future when they may again be able to teach on a more regular basis. They often have an intimate knowledge and understanding of their communities and can offer a long-term commitment to the rural or remote area they reside in. Some alternative pathways for retaining or renewing teacher registration could include a recognition of alternative, non-standard or mainstream professional learning/practice, whereby teachers in rural and remote locations may have participated in ‘teaching experience’ as a distance education home tutor or perhaps from a VET perspective, may have participated in industry training or even worked with apprentices in a work place.

“More needs to be done to grow the expertise of teachers who are already in RRR schools. Key to this is resourcing professional development which is delivered mostly in-situ and in partnership with a recognised professional development provider like a university or a peak professional body.” Halsey, J 2018, Page 43 IRRRRE: Final Report.

As an example, while some fully qualified teachers are delivering Distance Education programs in the home schoolroom, their time there does not count towards Recency of Practice. Pre-Service teachers who participate in Distance Education classrooms also do not have their teaching time recognised, partially due to the interpretation of their being “supervised” by another teacher, despite being the day-to-day managers of an often multi-age classroom for extended periods of time. A system where Pre-Service teachers and those who already hold teaching accreditation can be supervised through distance by a principal or senior teacher at the School of Distance Education (SDE) that they are working with so that their teaching hours, even if done so at an adjusted rate, could be counted

towards their teaching hours would be a huge benefit in enabling existing teachers to remain current and for Pre-Service teachers to consider working in a distance education home schoolroom.

Teachers embarking on their first appointment to a School of the Air (SOTA)/SDE require an additional provision for training and support specific to the distance education (DE) context, above what is currently offered to circumvent a high turnover of teaching staff in this area. Access to a practicum component at a DE school (and the additional resourcing in that school to enable this to occur) in the final years of undergraduate teaching degrees, and funding at the DE school to support at least two dedicated DE learning days for DE teachers prior to beginning first term would aid greatly in successful service delivery from the very beginning of the school year for DE students.

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

- **Should nationally consistent approaches to the registration of early childhood education teachers be considered?**
- **How could a nationally consistent approach to teacher registration support and improve the quality of early childhood teaching in school and non-school settings?**
- **How could the Teacher Standards be applied for early childhood teacher registration?**

Nationally consistent approaches to the registration of early childhood education teachers may prove difficult in rural and remote areas where there are teacher shortages resulting in preschool-aged children not even being able to access preschool at all. ICPA members have asked if primary school teachers or diploma qualified educators may be allowed to teach this cohort, where early childhood teachers cannot be sourced. Alternative pathways for teacher registration in geographically isolated areas are required to meet the level of disadvantage currently being experienced.

3. What role does teacher registration play for VET teachers in school settings?

- **Under current teacher registration processes, what are the specific challenges to delivery VET in schools for:**
 - a) **registered teachers**
 - b) **VET trainers and assessors****How could these be overcome?**
- **Is greater flexibility needed to support schools to utilise skilled VET trainers and assessors? How can this be achieved without compromising teacher quality standards and national consistency in teacher registration?**

Often teachers residing in rural and remote locations are forced to let their registration lapse due to the onerous teacher registration requirements in various jurisdictions. This means that high quality, proficient teachers may be instead participating in other fields of work, often where they may continue to work in a training or mentoring role to younger people, such as through an apprenticeship situation or perhaps as a governess in a distance education schoolroom. ICPA (Aust) believes that an alternative, flexible pathway could be made for these teachers to retain their teacher registration. These skilled teachers in rural and remote areas could then be utilised within rural and remote contexts to enhance and increase the VET programs offered in these areas.

4. How does teacher registration support entry into the teaching profession?

- **How do current teacher registration processes support graduates?**

- a) seeking provisional registration
- b) employed in different circumstances (e.g. casual, full-time or permanent)?
- Are there barriers/challenges presented by teacher registration for those entering the teaching profession? How could these be overcome?
- How could the pre-registration of initial teacher education students support entry to the profession? What would be the benefits and implications of such an approach?

In rural and remote contexts, high quality induction for those entering the teaching profession in a rural and remote context is essential to overcoming barriers and challenges associated with teaching in these contexts and circumstances. Graduate teachers taking on positions in rural and remote locations would, in the ideal world, be supported with:

- Training in the rural and remote specific aspects of teaching and the rural and remote experience
- Capacity building for the identification and management of children with special needs or learning difficulties
- An induction process to provide a welcoming and instructive introduction to rural and remote teaching
- Ongoing support to overcome barriers and challenges of teaching in rural and remote educational settings.

Appropriate training of Pre-Service and graduate teachers for the rural and remote experience and engagement in these communities is vital to ensure improved recruitment and retention of teachers and to achieve the optimum learning outcomes for the students.

Training in the identification and management of specific learning needs and disabilities should also be a key element in any teacher preparation to build the teacher's capacity to identify and assist children with special needs or learning difficulties. Most teachers will encounter situations where a proportion of their class/es have specific learning needs or disabilities. Specific training in these areas would provide beneficial outcomes for all students by assisting with early recognition, identification, assessment and the implementation of specific learning needs education. Support and resources to identify and cater for specific learning needs such as dyslexia will assist rural and remote teachers to cope. Neglecting to equip teachers, in already challenging circumstances, with knowledge of specific needs education is to set them up for failure and will contribute to poor teacher retention rates (and poor student outcomes). In 2016, Minister Birmingham said, *"The federal government had forced universities to start training all student teachers to "engage and teach" students with a disability."* ICPA (Aust) welcomes this announcement and encourage universities to ensure their student teachers are trained appropriately.

In order to attract and retain teachers, ICPA (Aust) believes education providers who offer teacher education courses, should implement a major in Rural and Remote Education with modules on teaching Specific Learning Needs such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Dyslexia and courses covering a range of unique challenges requiring specific knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to rural and remote areas: multi-age classrooms, multi-age curriculum tools, web conferencing, online learning tools and strategies for coping with the unique dynamics that exist in small rural and remote communities and schools. As an adjunct, students could complete rural and remote practicums ensuring graduate teachers would start their career with invaluable insight into the structure, practice and delivery of rural/remote education.

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

- How do regulatory authorities (within legislated responsibility) ensure the fit and proper person requirement of registered teachers?
- How can teacher registration processes support a nationally consistent approach to satisfying the fit and proper person requirement of registered teachers, at the point of registration and throughout their teaching career?

Retention of teachers in rural and remote areas is influenced by the very nature of the communities they reside in. When residing in such communities, teachers are often faced with the unique situation of having to interact daily with students and families both on a professional and personal level. This can raise some difficulties for teachers with regards to code of conduct, privacy, conflicts and other issues, which may impact on the regulatory requirements for teachers to remain registered. Teachers in rural and remote schools need to be supported to deal with the issues which can arise in these situations. While ICPA (Aust) fervently agrees with the requirement of teacher registration to ensure the fit and proper person requirement is adhered to, a recognition within the policies of teacher registration of these unique circumstances of teaching in a rural and remote location and the impact this may have throughout a teacher's professional career in these areas may need to be considered.

"The key point is that selection into teaching for RRR schools and communities has to be targeted and nuanced to give prominence to the importance of the intellectual and personal qualities and attributes necessary to becoming a successful teacher in these contexts." Halsey, J. Page 39 IRRRRE: Final Report

Conclusion

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the recommendation below from the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Final Report and the actions to progress this recommendation.

Recommendation: *"Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support."*

- *ensure that the challenges and opportunities of RRR schools and contexts are explicitly included in the selection processes for teacher education degrees/programs*
- *ensure that a candidate's academic and personal requirements for admission to a teaching degree/program are commensurate with developing the skills, knowledge and attributes to be a successful teacher*
- *provide funding and opportunities for initial teacher education students to undertake high quality extended professional experience placements in RRR schools and communities*
- *introduce a topic (suggest that it is weighted at the equivalent of a semester in size) into teacher education degrees on teaching and living in RRR schools and communities that students complete successfully as part of graduation requirements*
- *improve the availability and diversity of in-school/locally based professional development for teachers in RRR schools and communities including by using visiting curriculum and pedagogy specialists*

Halsey, J. Page 45 Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Final Report.