Response to the National Review of Teacher Registration Consultation Paper March 2018

SUMMARY

We welcome this consultation to inform the national review of teacher registration in Australia, inviting inputs to the panel towards the development of a well-rounded, thoughtful and positively constructive, set of recommendations. This submission comes from nationally and internationally recognised experts, who come from six Australian universities, in teacher education and teacher development research. Our backgrounds collectively encompass rigorous, influential evidence-based research and practice concerning domains core to the review: beginning teachers' goals and motivations, perceived competencies and needs, professional preparation and career induction, coping and wellbeing, perceived effectiveness and student outcomes, and professional learning and development. We were concerned at the reliance upon AITSL reports within the Consultation Paper, and urge for a comprehensive desktop audit of key research projects to inform the review. The recognitions, honours and awards bestowed on submission signatories speak to the quality of their knowledge and research evidence.

Our concern is that the review panel will hand down decisions that require teachers to spend more time on administrative compliance work, undermining their motivations and energies, thereby detracting from their core work and effectiveness, further undermining teachers' professionalism and expertise. Our submission is concentrated on the "emphasis on teacher quality" focus commissioned by the Minister for Education and Training, reflected within all five of the numbered requested areas for input, but targeted in our responses to particular areas below.

RESPONSE

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

There is a need for definitional clarity of the phrases "fitness to teach" and "fit and proper person", beyond their exchangeability within the Consultation Paper with narrow operationalisations concerning child sexual abuse, stemming from the *Royal Commission into Child Sex Abuse*. While this is certainly a critical issue, there are other important dimensions that should constitute fitness to teach, including but not limited to aspects such as psychological health and wellbeing. Despite the research nationally and internationally concerning incidence and elevation of burnout among teachers, and high attrition rates among beginning teachers, professional learning (PL) appears to be understood within the Consultation Paper as pertaining solely to curriculum, pedagogy and professional interactions. However, it would seem timely and necessary that teacher PL additionally embrace issues of teacher health and wellbeing, including strategies to optimise self-care, coping and wellbeing such as those learned by counsellors and psychologists as part of their professional preparation and ongoing PL. Like those professions, teaching is a responsible profession involving relationships and interactions with vulnerable youth.

The registration renewal process could make a considerable contribution to quality teaching through research and evidence-based professional learning opportunities that support teachers to transform their practice. This requires attention to and strengthening of:

1. *The alignment between the ways that professional development and professional learning (PD / PL) are positioned in AITSL documentation and the way in which the regulators conceptualise and enforce it.* While the Standards themselves construct professional learning in a reasonably transactional way, the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* is far more expansive and leans more toward what is described in the research literature as professional learning that has potential to transform teaching practice.

2. *The conception of professional learning.* The current conceptualisation of professional development / professional learning as hours to be logged (as is the case currently in some jurisdictions) and courses to be endorsed by the regulator (as is the case in at least one jurisdiction), discourages teachers from engaging in inquiry-based professional learning despite research having repeatedly demonstrated the effectiveness of such sustained and contextualised learning. Teachers are instead encouraged to seek short-term solutions that are perceived as providing 'bang for their buck' in terms of demonstrable or endorsed hours. This has led to an associated proliferation of edutainment / edupreneur-led enterprises, despite research evidence consistently providing no support for the effectiveness of these one-off forms of PL.

3. *The ways in which PD / PL are embedded in processes of registration and accreditation.* First, pursuit of a nationally consistent approach should not require teachers to attend to onerous administration and accountability requirements around professional development and professional learning. Second, the more expansive and research-informed definitions of professional development and professional learning evident in the Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders should be used to inform any processes linking professional learning and development to the maintenance of registration/accreditation for teachers. Third, if a system of 'endorsement' of professional development providers and/or programs is to be introduced on a national scale, care needs to be taken to ensure that inquiry-oriented, collaborative professional learning informed by the copious research that exists on the effectiveness of such approaches, is privileged over one-shot, 'spray-on' experiences. Fourth, if such a system is to be adopted, professional development and learning programs should be rigorously evaluated prior to endorsement, to ensure that they not only link to the Australian Professional Teaching Standards, but more importantly meet benchmarks of effective professional learning as suggested in the research literature.

Two recent examples suggest that this is not currently the case:
   a. A regulator offering teachers an hour of 'endorsed' professional development for the completion of a survey that they acknowledge will take 30 minutes to complete.
   b. The endorsement by a regulator of a 'repackaging' of an extended, research-informed inquiry-based professional learning program by a school-based participant in the original program into a two-hour 'train-the-trainer' experience which claimed to meet the same benchmarks in terms of supporting 'quality teaching'.

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

We endorse the proposition that Early Childhood teachers be included in the processes of teacher registration. Such a process should serve to raise the status and salaries of these educators who for too long have not received the recognition they deserve in contributing to the critical development of the core competencies of young children.

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

Professional Learning Requirements: There is a noticeable absence of consideration within the Consultation Paper of the content of Professional Learning (PL) and mentoring programs. Instead, there is a focus on the managerial aspects, such as mandatory hours to be completed. There is a need to shift the focus from measurement of hours, to the quality of the content of PL and mentoring programs. Mandated PL hours in the absence of a surety of quality content is at best unproductive, eroding early career teachers' time and energies to undertake core teaching responsibilities that impact student learning outcomes. At worst, misguided content may even produce harmful impacts. The mandating of PL hours to maintain registration is only one aspect of a more complex picture which requires attention to the quality of PL on offer.

Responsibility for Quality PL: Rather than teachers having to spend time assessing and evidencing the suitability of PL programs and experiences on offer from various sources including commercial providers,

responsibility should reside with AITSL to assess these offerings against the Teaching Standards to ensure alignment and quality, as well as addressing teachers' needs. The figure below presents Australian early career teachers' perceived competencies across a range of core teaching tasks (up to 7 years' teaching experience), from the FIT-Choice (*Factors Influencing Teaching Choice*; www.fitchoice.org) ongoing longitudinal study, documenting the experiences of initially 2,007 teachers from their entry to teacher education until they are now mid-career for those who remained in the profession. These teachers feel least efficacious to assist students who have special learning needs or are low performing, and to manage disruptive behaviour and enhance student engagement. On the other hand, they feel most confident to meet confidentiality and ethical requirements, value cultural diversity and interact with community, engage in critical reflection, curriculum development and assessment, and develop classroom structures and routines. Further research in this vein could show areas in which teachers perceive particular need for support, in order for providers to productively construct informative and helpful PL rather than the present *ad hoc* and oftentimes 'hit-and-miss' approach. Notably, the large number of teachers working casually or on short-term contracts have fewer opportunities to meet registration requirements, often with the added financial burden of having to pay for their professional learning, rather than opportunities to engage in PL organised by schools.
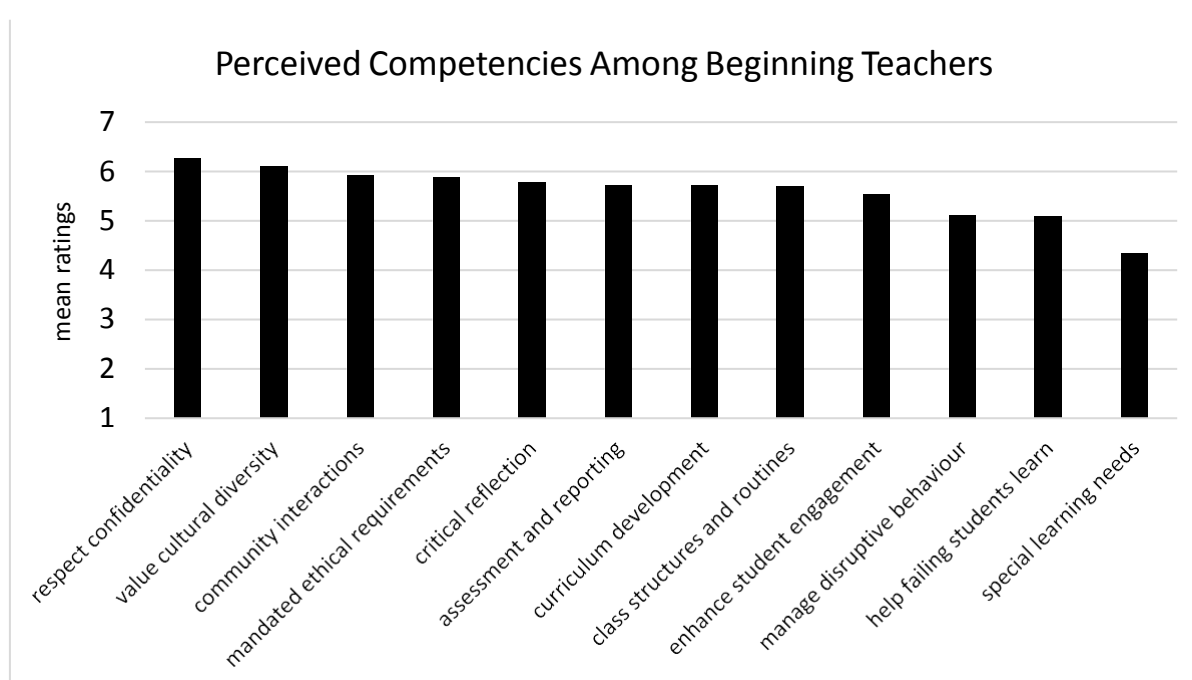
Mentorship: There is strong evidence for the variability in quality, understanding and enactment of mentoring programs in schools. These range from positive and supportive, through to neglect and tokenistic compliance. Simply assigning mentors does nothing to assure the quality of the mentoring experience, for which quality guidelines need to be developed. Sessional and contract beginning teachers also need to have access to quality mentoring experiences.

Enabling Teachers to Benefit from PL / Mentoring and Mentorship: In an important corrective to damaging media stereotypes, beginning teachers rarely choose teaching as a "fallback" career; their motivations are ability-related, intrinsic and altruistic social goals to help and nurture young people and contribute to society. The time available to teachers to undertake their work, which extends well beyond classroom teaching, is not endlessly elastic. Recent cries from The Hon. Andrew Laming for teachers to work a 38-hour week, provide an excellent example of public misperceptions with regard to the actual hours worked by teachers. Data from Australia, New Zealand, USA, the United Kingdom, and Germany show that teachers work on average 48 hours per week. Longitudinal data from the *Australian Principal Occupational Health and Wellbeing Project* (http://principalhealth.org/) show principals on average work approximately 60 hours per week. Principals also report their most significant stressors are due to current compliance requirements. Adding more administrative compliance requirements for the completion of hours of PL with no guarantees of quality will do little to grow professional expertise and bolster sense of professional responsibility and autonomy.

Excessive external prescription, rather than autonomous and participative decision-making concerning professional development needs and PL opportunities, will serve to erode teachers' sense of competence and expertise while also frustrating their positive goals and motivations to professionally develop and positively impact student learning and wellbeing. We could also learn from other contexts such as China and Finland, where PL is regarded as a core component of teachers' work and substantially scheduled within, rather than additional to, teachers' existing workload.

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