



National Review of Teacher Registration – Submission to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)

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of New South Wales

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Introduction

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is thankful to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) for this opportunity to contribute feedback into the National Review of Teacher Registration. P&C Federation supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well-planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents¹ and families.

The core belief of P&C Federation is that the education of our children and youth are the most fundamental means of ensuring individual and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource.

P&C Federation is only able to speak in relation to registration within the New South Wales public school jurisdiction. The following response is in relation to the specific questions asked by the review.

How is registration working across Australia

Teaching accreditation across state & territory boundaries

P&C Federation has seen differences in the way teachers are accredited in the various states and territories through involvement in teacher recruitment. Although there is an underlying national framework there appears to be a lack of consistency, not only across states and territories but within each of their systems as well.

Of significant concern to P&C Federation is the NSW Department of Education's recruitment process which appears to largely ignore the national framework and the associated proficiency levels. It instead focuses on whether or not a candidate is approved to teach and/or willing to teach. There needs to be more work done in ensuring all systems are working to the framework.

Registration is often seen in a negative, something that has to be complied with rather than the more positive "feather in the cap" viewpoint. There is no doubt that many teachers see registration as a hassle.

Are graduates ready to teach Monitoring of graduates

It is clear from the P&C Federation's involvement with teacher recruitment that there is significant variation in the quality of graduates entering the teaching profession. Indeed, one survey by the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) found that 54% of graduate primary teachers could not teach reading to a reasonable level and 51% could not do so for mathematics. It also found 60% of graduate primary teachers could not deliver lessons that catered for the range of students needs and 59% could not design or implement valid assessments.²

This variation is due to a number of factors: variations in university courses; variations in quality of practicums; and the universities motivation to keep student enrolments high. It is also reflected in a

¹ "Parent" refers to anyone with legal care of a child, such as a parent, carer or legal guardian

² APPA. *Initial Teacher Education: Teacher Preparation, Course Content and Specialisation at all levels but particularly in Primary Schools*. June 2015.

2016 review of the then-Board of Studies commissioned by the Department of Education, which found just 30% of teachers believed that the accreditation process is clearly communicated and easy to understand.³ All of these factors impact on the readiness and capacity to teach. Although the registration of teachers is a positive step, it is being undermined by the way in which universities are operating. P&C Federation sees a national reform of university funding and teaching practices as essential to prevent more of a decline in the quality of graduates and the future erosion of the reputation of the teaching profession.

Lack of Understanding outside the Profession

Although registration is well understood within the teaching profession, there is almost no awareness of registration by parents and caregivers. If one of the goals of registration is to improve the quality and reputation of the teaching profession then work needs to be done to ensure parent, caregivers and the broader community are made aware of the processes in place for registration and further accreditation. This would help to build a level of confidence amongst parents and caregivers that their child's teacher(s) has been through a process that ensures they are qualified and capable. This has been the experience in other jurisdictions: for example, Finland is often cited for its excellent teacher training, and this has contributed to the enormous respect for and confidence in teachers in Finland.⁴ There is no reason why there cannot be a similar level of positive relationships between parents and teachers in Australia.

Qualifications of mentors

There appears to be a lack of consistency across those that mentor new graduates or oversee practicums. In this crucial stage, graduates or practicum students need to be positively supported, given constructive feedback and have their confidence enhanced. There are many mentors within systems capable of doing so but equally many mentors that are abrupt, unsupportive, and overly critical or simply overloaded with work with little time for new graduates or practicums. Depending on the school situation the mentor may well be a teacher with only a few years experience or a long term teacher unwilling to embrace new methods. Training, support and validation of appropriate mentors is essential to support long term quality of new teachers.

Consistency across TAAs

The TAA's role in the accreditation process should be crucial to the long-term sustainability of a professional and capable teaching workforce. In its present form, the role of TAA has to compete with other priorities (in public schools in NSW the TAA is the principal at the school) and this can create inconsistencies in the accreditation process. It is therefore critical that TAAs are trained, supported and given enough time to carry out the TAA role in a consistent, efficient and fair manner. Ideally P&C Federation would like to see specially trained educators take on this role that are current but removed from the pressures of running a school.

³ New South Wales Government. 2016. *Review of the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards: Report of the Independent Panel*.

⁴ Australian Association for Research in Education. Is 'pedagogical love' the secret to Finland's educational success?. Tom Stehlik. 30 May 2016.

Casual teachers and accreditation

Casual teachers form a vital role in all systems however, they can face difficult challenges when seeking accreditation. The piecemeal nature of their employment along with a possible lack of substantive or current professional development may make it difficult or impossible for a casual teacher to be accredited at a higher proficiency. More support for these teachers would be advantageous.

Impediments to Gaining Higher Accreditation

P&C Federation sees the processes for becoming a highly accomplished or lead teacher as complex, time consuming and therefore unappealing to the majority of teachers. This is reflected in the relatively low numbers of teachers seeking these accreditations each year. Although the process is rigorous, the fact remains that application takes a lot of time and is at the individuals own cost for a relatively small end benefit. The Department of Education, as far as we know, does encourage but does not directly support teachers in seeking further accreditation, and apart from a modest salary increase, they are not necessarily given the kudos that such a position should deserve.

Early Childhood Teachers be part of a National Approach

P&C Federation would support early childhood teachers becoming a part of a national approach. However, the demands of early childhood teachers differ from those of primary and secondary school teachers, and any national approach must be cognisant of that.

How does teacher registration support entry into the teaching profession?

In light of the comments made in regard to the Department of Education's recruitment policy, teacher registration appears not to be a significant factor in supporting entry into the public school system. In the New South Wales government school sector, we firmly believe registration and a structured accreditation system would be beneficial in improving the quality of teachers. However, P&C Federation cannot comment on the impact of registration in other sectors or jurisdictions.

How can we ensure that registered teachers satisfy the fit & proper person requirement?

In the opening paragraph of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers it states that "*Teachers share a significant responsibility in preparing young people to lead successful and productive lives*". There is therefore a responsibility for accreditation authorities to ensure that any person placed in front of children has the appropriate qualifications, skills and aptitude to teach. P&C Federation would argue that current definition of fit and proper is too narrow to help ensure the right people end up in front of children. Strengthening the definition of fit and proper would also go some way to helping raise the status of the teaching profession.

In NSW, specifically the public system, the only measure of fit and proper is the use of the Working with Children Check. This has only been a relatively recent introduction and although it helps to identify those with previously documented criminal or unsatisfactory behaviour towards children it does not deal with the wider area that of those that are simply unsuitable to teach due to poor ability

or attitude. P&C Federation believes that a quality teacher is not only one that is cleared to work but one that has a demonstrated capacity to teach well by making learning engaging and valued and being able to do so with a deep knowledge base.

There is a strongly held view amongst a large number of parents that there are teachers in the system that are simply not suited to teaching and some that should simply not be placed in front of children. These teachers are impacting significantly on the education and development of children and damaging the reputation of a profession that is trying very hard to raise its status within the broader community. This is a difficult and controversial area but P&C Federation would suggest that it is easier to tackle this issue during initial teacher education process than it is once a teacher becomes employed. Ideally, aspiring teachers should be able to gain knowledge and experience beneficial to teaching from settings other than a classroom, and their transition should not simply be from school, to university and then straight to school.

