



20 December 2018

The House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: [ee.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ee.reps@aph.gov.au)

### **ACECQA submission addressing the terms of reference for the inquiry on the status of the teaching profession**

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into the status of the teaching profession in Australia.

Early childhood education and care is an integral part of the Australian education system and lays the foundations for children's later learning and development. Participation in high quality early childhood education and care can effectively prepare children for a lifetime of learning and development. This emphasises the important role that early childhood teachers play in contributing to children's educational and developmental outcomes.

#### **The National Quality Framework**

The [National Quality Framework](#) (NQF) is the national system for regulating education and care services, setting standards for quality and safety so that all children attending long day care, preschool or kindergarten are supported to have the best start in life.<sup>1</sup> The NQF covers almost 16,000 education and care services and requires all centre based services to employ or engage an early childhood teacher.

The [Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority](#) (ACECQA) is an independent national authority established under the Education and Care Services National Law to guide the implementation and administration of the NQF.

The objectives of the NQF include improving the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services, and promoting continuous improvement in service quality.

Under the NQF, all services are assessed and rated by state and territory regulatory authorities against the [National Quality Standard](#) (NQS), which comprises seven quality areas. These include:

- staffing arrangements, including the organisation and continuity of educators and early childhood teachers, and whether professional standards guide practice
- educational program and practice, including whether intentional and responsive teaching, and critical reflection are used by educators and early childhood teachers

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<sup>1</sup> Family day care and outside school hours care services are also regulated under the NQF.

- governance and leadership, including the professional development of educators and early childhood teachers.

### Teaching in early childhood education and care

The early childhood education and care [sector is both large and diverse](#), with more than 7,000 education and care service providers approved to operate almost 16,000 services under the NQF (including more than 7,500 long day care services and more than 3,000 preschools/kindergartens).<sup>2</sup>

More than 80% of providers are approved to operate a single service, while the 10 largest providers each operate more than 100 services, for a combined total of more than 3,000 services.<sup>3</sup>

The high proportion of single service providers illuminates the different context of the early childhood education and care sector when compared to the school sector, particularly given that the majority of these services will most likely only employ a sole early childhood teacher. The mentoring and support structures that are typically embedded and routine within schools are often not available or possible in these services – a reality felt acutely in regional and remote services.<sup>4</sup>

Recognising the range of different state and territory [qualification requirements](#) in place, as well as ongoing workforce pressures and challenges, the NQF has progressively introduced higher qualification requirements since 2012.<sup>5</sup> A further step-up in qualification requirements will come into effect from 1 January 2020, when long day care services and preschools/kindergartens educating and caring for 60 or more children will be required to have [an additional early childhood teacher or ‘other suitably qualified person’](#) in attendance (a similar requirement has already been place in New South Wales for several years).<sup>6</sup>

Currently, four jurisdictions (South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales) require the [registration or accreditation](#) of all early childhood teachers. Apart from in South Australia, this is a relatively new requirement, with Western Australia introducing it in December 2012, Victoria in September 2015 and New South Wales in July 2016.<sup>7</sup>

The registration/accreditation of early childhood teachers by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities formally recognises the work of the early childhood teacher as part of the broader teaching profession. Of the 7,500 long day care services and 3,100 preschools/kindergartens approved to operate under the NQF, more than three quarters (76%) are located in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia,<sup>8</sup> meaning that most early childhood teachers are required to be registered/accredited.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see ACECQA (2018), [NQF Snapshot Q3 2018](#).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> NSW Department of Education (2017), [Regional and Remote Early Childhood Education Literature Review](#).

<sup>5</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Qualifications requirements](#).

<sup>6</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Additional staffing requirement from 1 January 2020](#).

<sup>7</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Early childhood teacher registration and accreditation](#).

<sup>8</sup> ACECQA (2018), [NQF Snapshot Q3 2018](#).

## Response to terms of reference

The four terms of reference of the inquiry are addressed below:

### 1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures

The issue of attraction and retention of early childhood teachers in early childhood settings is a challenge in all states and territories. Commencement numbers decreased between 2015 and 2016 for both early childhood and primary initial teacher training degrees. For primary initial teacher training degree commencements, this amounted to an 18% decrease, and for early childhood, it was a 12% decrease.<sup>9</sup> With the [impending introduction of the 1 January 2020 requirement](#) to have an additional early childhood teacher or 'other suitably qualified person' in attendance in services educating and caring for 60 or more children, and the known workforce issues impacting the early childhood sector,<sup>10</sup> this decrease in enrolments raises concerns about teacher numbers into the future.

In addition to the overarching issue of disparate pay and conditions,<sup>11</sup> early childhood teachers often face limited opportunities for career progression.<sup>12</sup> This is largely due to the institutional size and staffing structures of single service providers. This means that educators wanting to advance their career typically need to look for opportunities outside their place of employment which drains the leadership capacity within individual education and care settings.

A number of domestic higher education institutions offer birth to eight or birth to 12 initial teacher education courses that [qualify graduates to work as early childhood teachers](#) in before school contexts and/or in school contexts.<sup>13</sup> These courses are assessed and approved by both the relevant [state and territory teacher registration authority](#)<sup>14</sup> to ensure that there is appropriate school age curriculum content and professional experience, and [by ACECQA](#)<sup>15</sup> to ensure there is appropriate early childhood content and experience.

The recommendations from the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*<sup>16</sup> in late 2014 have framed much of the policy change in initial teacher education. One notable requirement – that primary school teachers must graduate with a subject specialisation – has placed increased demands upon higher education institutions. This requirement means initial teacher education courses must include relatively high volumes of school age content and professional experience in birth to eight and birth to 12 courses. This can result in the early childhood content and experience being displaced or overshadowed. Consideration should be given to reviewing the initial teacher education [Accreditation Standards and Procedures](#)<sup>17</sup> to improve the integration of the early childhood and school age content in these programs and their ongoing viability.

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<sup>9</sup> ACECQA (2018), [National Quality Agenda National Partnership Annual Performance Report](#), ACECQA, Sydney.

<sup>10</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Additional staffing requirement from 1 January 2020](#).

<sup>11</sup> Productivity Commission (2014), [Childcare and Early Childhood Learning, Inquiry Report No.73](#), Canberra, Volume 2.

<sup>12</sup> Productivity Commission (2011), *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, Research Report, Melbourne.

<sup>13</sup> ACECQA (2018), [NQF approved qualifications list](#).

<sup>14</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Early childhood teacher registration and accreditation](#).

<sup>15</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Qualification and training course approvals](#).

<sup>16</sup> Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) (2014), [Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers](#).

<sup>17</sup> Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2018), [Accreditation of ITE programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures](#).

Other initiatives flowing from the 2014 recommendations, for example the teaching performance assessment, appear to have been developed with teachers in schools as the primary target. These initiatives arguably reinforce a career hierarchy where early childhood teaching is viewed as inferior or 'second class' within the teaching profession.

This runs contrary to the growing body of research that indicates that children's participation in high quality early childhood education and care leads to better education, health and employment outcomes later in life.<sup>18,19</sup>

## **2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources**

Early childhood teachers in prior to school settings do not have access to the same mentoring and support structures as those embedded within the school system. As such, single service providers have a major role in supporting the professional development of their employees.

ACECQA and state and territory governments provide support for early childhood teachers through access to professional learning opportunities and advice through a diverse range of face-to-face and online programs and resources. However, even with this support, early childhood teachers and recent graduates, in particular, still experience isolation and stress.<sup>20</sup>

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) recent report, *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia*,<sup>21</sup> indicated that '[s]takeholders emphasised the importance of the mentor in providing high quality pedagogical leadership in the provisional to full registration process' and that lack of available mentors is particularly acute in early childhood settings.

While ACECQA supports the view expressed in the report, and agrees this is an issue that needs to be addressed, the question remains as to how much public investment should be made as opposed to investment being made by employers and individual teachers.

## **3. Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced**

The burden of out-of-hours, at-home work is a longstanding issue in early childhood settings and predated the introduction of the NQF. Teachers' roles are becoming more complex and there are increasing expectations of teachers across the education sector.

Early childhood teachers in prior to school settings work long hours. This is particularly so for those in long day care services. The long hours worked by early childhood teachers and their demanding workloads – including their responsibilities to plan, prepare and evaluate educational programs while also working directly with children to meet educator-to-child ratios – means a considerable proportion of their work is performed out-of-hours and at home.<sup>22</sup> This issue makes retention of

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<sup>18</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2015), [Starting Strong IV, Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care](#).

<sup>19</sup> Melhuish et al. (2015), [A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care \(ECEC\) on child development. CARE project](#). Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care.

<sup>20</sup> The Social Research Centre, (2013) [National Early Childhood Education and Care – Workforce Census](#), Final report, Melbourne, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2018), [One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia](#).

<sup>22</sup> Irvine, S., Thorpe, K., McDonald, P., Lunn, J., & Sumsion, J., (2016). [Money, Love and Identity: Initial findings from the National ECEC Workforce Study](#). Summary report from the national ECEC Workforce Development Policy Workshop, Brisbane, Queensland: QUT.

early childhood teachers problematic and, in turn, impacts on the outcomes for young children who stand to benefit from stability of care and attachment to their educators.

ACECQA has surveyed approved providers of education and care services several times between 2013 and 2018 to gauge their [perception of the level of administrative burden](#) associated with the NQF.<sup>23</sup> Key [findings from the surveys](#) have been shared with governments to help inform options for amending specific requirements and obligations under the NQF.

The research shows that while the perception of overall burden increased slightly in 2018 compared to 2017, overall support for the NQF amongst providers of education and care services remained very strong in 2018, and has been consistently above 95% since the survey began. Recent [changes to the NQF](#), implemented in October 2017 and February 2018,<sup>24</sup> are likely to have contributed to this slight increase in the perception of burden, but the majority of respondents considered these changes [more beneficial than burdensome](#).<sup>25</sup>

#### **4. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid ‘burn out’ among early-career teachers**

The lack of mentoring, support structures and access to professional development opportunities available in education and care settings,<sup>26,27</sup> particularly for single service providers, significantly impacts on retention rates and burn out for early childhood teachers. The 2018 [National Review of Teacher Registration](#) looked at teacher registration in Australia to ensure processes are nationally consistent, rigorous and focused on teacher quality. Two recommendations from this review directly relate to early childhood teachers. These are:

- Recommendation 5: Require all early childhood teachers in Australia, regardless of their employment setting, to be registered by teacher regulatory authorities, under a consistent national approach; and
- Recommendation 6: Amend the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to ensure their relevance and applicability to early childhood teachers.<sup>28</sup>

Prioritising the implementation of recommendations 5 and 6 should contribute to improved support for, and retention of, new graduates while also improving the professional status of early childhood teachers.

Over the next decade, the Australian Government will increase the level of [funding for school students with disability](#).<sup>29</sup> As in school settings, education and care settings are also seeing an increase in the number of children with additional needs. While some states and territories have increased funding for resources to support school readiness for these children, further resources and targeted professional development available across Australia would increase the capacity and effectiveness of teachers and result in better outcomes for children with disability.

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<sup>23</sup> ACECQA (2018), [Regulatory burden reports](#).

<sup>24</sup> ACECQA (2017), [Ministers agree to changes to the National Quality Framework](#).

<sup>25</sup> ACECQA (2018), [National Quality Agenda National Partnership Annual Performance Report](#), ACECQA, Sydney.

<sup>26</sup> Bretherton, T (2010), [Developing the child care workforce: understanding ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ amongst workers](#). National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

<sup>27</sup> Productivity Commission (2011), [Early Childhood Development Workforce](#), Research Report, Melbourne.

<sup>28</sup> The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2018), [One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia](#), pp. 28-29.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2018), [What is the Government doing to support students with disability?](#)

There is a critical need for current and reliable data on the careers of teachers and the challenges facing newcomers to the profession. With multiple stakeholders and a diversity of data sources (many incomplete), it is important to build reliable data on Australian teachers.

Teacher registration/accreditation bodies play a vital role in providing data that will help identify strategies to increase retention rates in the teaching profession. ACECQA is very supportive of the [Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy](#) being implemented by AITSL in partnership with the Australian Government, states and territories, teacher regulatory authorities, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.<sup>30</sup> The strategy aims to connect teacher workforce data from around Australia and deliver insights to support better informed investment and decision making, and deepen understanding of shared workforce issues.

If successful, the strategy will provide nationally consistent data on how many teachers graduate, how many get jobs, their professional development, and whether or not they stay in the profession. The data should also provide insights into the level of movement between early childhood teaching and primary school teaching.

Moreover, up-to-date and reliable data would inform discussion about the career paths and progression of teachers in prior to school and school settings and could underpin targeted investigation of factors that influence recruitment, retention and career progression.

ACECQA also supports the [Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census](#) (National Workforce Census).<sup>31</sup> This census is a nationwide survey of early childhood education and care services which collects information about service use, children with additional needs, access to preschool/kindergarten programs and staffing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry.

If you would like to discuss our response, or would like further information, please contact Michael Petrie, General Manager, Strategy, Communications and Consistency on (02) 8240 4232 or [michael.petrie@acecqa.gov.au](mailto:michael.petrie@acecqa.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



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<sup>30</sup> The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2018), [Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy](#).

<sup>31</sup> Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2017), [National Workforce Census](#).