



ACA Submission Paper: Teacher Registration

Summary

The current teacher registration process needs to be reviewed in the early childhood sector.

- There needs to be a nationally consistent approach to teacher registration - with qualifications recognised across jurisdictions
- These qualifications need to be reflected by the ACECQA requirements for Early Childhood Teachers under the NQF, and in alignment with their requirements.
- ECTs need better support to achieve full registration via a more structured mentoring program
- Professional standards need to be reviewed for the Early Childhood setting
- A review of the effectiveness of teacher registration on improving quality and outcomes for children should be conducted

Overview of ACA

As the national peak body in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents more than 2,500 members and approximately 360,000 families throughout Australia.

We work on behalf of long day care service owners and operators, predominantly private, to ensure families have an opportunity to access affordable, quality ECEC throughout Australia.

The ACA has existed in various forms for more than 30 years. Our experience means that we understand the critical role a quality ECEC program plays in the life of families and the importance of a viable long day care sector in preparing children for the best start in life and learning.

ACA's national and state bodies work collaboratively with all levels of government, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders to ensure that families are supported into the future with a sustainable, affordable and viable sector.

This document sets out ACA's vision for a brighter future for Australia's young children via a well managed, well resourced ECEC sector.



Teacher registration in Early Childhood

By far the most important issue with regards to teacher registration in Early Childhood settings is the differences in implementation of the standards by the Teacher Registration Boards (TRBs) across jurisdictions.

As highlighted in the consultation paper, early learning settings operate within the National Quality Framework - overseen by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

ACECQA publishes the qualifications they consider to be appropriate for those who wish to be considered an 'Early Childhood Teacher'. The accepted qualifications include those from Australia and overseas.

However, as pointed out in the consultation paper, each state and territory, 'jurisdiction', have their own TRB and there are clear differences in implementation across jurisdictions. There are differences in practice and application, and teachers often find that whilst registered in one state, they are ineligible to be registered in another.

In addition, the TRB requirements are not necessarily aligned with the requirements of ACECQA - leading to the situation where a 'registered teacher' is ineligible to be counted as an ECT under the NQF - or similarly an ECT who is recognised under the NQF, is not able to be registered.

Qualifications that entitle you to registration in one state, are not necessarily recognised in another state. You might live in NSW, and do your degree via correspondence with a university in another state - eg NT, and then find yourself unable to be employed as a teacher in NSW.

Whilst out of scope of this particular review it is worth mentioning that there is currently a workforce shortage of ECTs in the sector, and the upcoming requirements under the NQF in 2020 for more ECTs will only exacerbate this problem.

Reflecting the fluid nature of the Early Childhood Workforce across Australia, the Working With Children Check also needs to be a national register, rather than simply state-specific.

The National Teaching Standards are based on 0-12 year old children and have to be adapted to the relevant age group that an ECT is operating in when assessing them against the criteria. More work is required to provide exemplars in early education and care settings.

It can be incredibly difficult for provisionally appointed ECTs working in early childhood education to get access to a suitably qualified and experienced teacher to coach them through their provisional registration to full registration as an ECT. Given that in early childhood settings, teachers are often working alone (unlike schools where there are often more teachers), finding someone who is prepared to offer mentoring is problematic, and this will only be compounded in the years to come.

The jurisdictional registration bodies need to do more to support ECTs move through the process - linking them up with suitably qualified and experienced mentors, and offering a remote option (such as skype). In an environment with such pressure on the workforce, the inability for teachers to move from provisional to full registration due to a lack of suitable and available mentors, is challenging.



In some jurisdictions a minimum of 200 day practicum / professional experience is required. This is, for some inexplicable reason, not allowed (even for one block period) at the centre they are employed at. Whilst ACECQA might recognise these people 'working towards' a degree under some circumstances, these ECTs have to take annual leave to complete these practicum placements, and in the meanwhile, the centre may or may not be able to replace the ECT staff member. In states such as QLD, these 'working towards' teachers satisfy the requirements for the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme, the NQF quality requirements, and the NQF ratios. However, if the ECT was unable to be replaced during this period, these requirements would not be met – affecting affordability for services.

The cost for registration is between \$146 - \$265 with an additional annual fee. In states where registration is mandatory, this is an unfair fee to charge teachers, and if services cover these fees, the cost is passed on to families.

So far there is little data to indicate that the registration process has had a significant impact on the quality of ECTs and subsequently the outcomes for children. In order to justify this process and the associated costs, studies need to be done to determine if there is a link between registration and quality outcomes (and therefore outcomes for children).

Given that the obligations vary so significantly across jurisdictions, it is often difficult for teachers to understand registration requirements – ie do they actually need to be registered or is it voluntary in this state? A unified registration board would make for a far simpler understanding of who needs to be registered at any point in time to satisfy both TRB and ACECQA requirements.

There are also some curious issues that have arisen in some states as a result of the inconsistent approach of jurisdictions.

In South Australia (SA), the TRB will not register an ECT unless that have completed a 0-8 degree. Yet, national university course standards apparently don't recognise a 0-5 degree, consequently SA Universities don't provide a 0-5 degree, so there isn't a degree available in the state which satisfies the requirements of the TRB. In Western Australia the TRB does not recognise a 3 year degree nor a 0-5 degree (must be 0-8), and again this means that universities are not providing graduates who satisfy the TRB requirements.

In Western Australia (WA), if you are running a pre-school educational program and you are not registered with the TRB you could face significant fines (up to \$20,000). However, once again, ECTs recognised by ACECQA are not necessarily able to be registered by the WA-TRB.

In every case, our state bodies report excellent working relationships with the TRBs despite these difficulties and it is hoped that providing clear, consistent guidelines which are implemented and applied in every jurisdiction, will resolve these issues.



Case study

This early childhood teacher owns 3 services and consults to another 5 services in Western Australia. She is the Educational Leader for up to 621 children per day – and yet, the Western Australian Training Registration Board does not recognise her qualifications and in fact, will fine her if she delivers the program directly to children.

I completed my 3 year undergraduate Bach Social Sciences (Children Studies) in 1994, was this the most advanced Early Childhood Teaching degree available at the time. I have worked in the sector since 1993, at every level, from Qualified Child Care Worker, to Centre Manager to Area Manager and General Manager of Large groups. I now own 3 centres of my own. I have kept my skills and knowledge current and up to date through retraining, professional development and memberships to professional associations.

My qualification is listed as an approved Early Childhood Teaching qualification on the ACECQA Approved Qualification list

Over the past 20 years, I have created and designed the curriculum and programming systems in each of the groups I managed, most recently in the centres I own. I lead the development of the curriculum in every centre I am associated with and personally contribute to curriculum delivery by completing audits and feedback on the program cycle and how evident each element of the cycle is in the programs and curriculums delivered, and how connected to theoretical perspective, personal and centre philosophy and the frameworks by which we design our curriculums. I mentor and train my leaders and educators, or source effective training to fill gaps. My deep and thorough knowledge and understanding of child development, pedagogy and the frameworks within which we work forms the basis of all that I do with my teams.

As I don't have 4 year teaching degree, I am not able to become a registered teacher with the WATRB. As I can not be a registered teacher, I am not able to be counted as the Early Childhood Teacher and deliver a teaching program in any one of my centres. I can design it, review it, refine it, I can advise others on it, but I can't deliver it. In fact, if I were to be the teacher 'delivering' these programs I would be subject to fines up to \$20,000.

I am currently closely mentoring the registered ECT's I employ, as they do not have the specific skills and knowledge with the specific age group to which we provide education and care. The qualifications of ECT's I employ are either not Australian, are of primary school level (as they are "working towards" the approved qualification in early childhood), or cover from the age of 4 upwards. In my experience there are few true "ECT" in this sector whose qualifications are from birth to 8.

It is perplexing that my qualification allows for me to be considered the ECT by ACECQA, however I am then prevented from teaching due to the restrictions in the Teachers Registration Board requirements. It seems bizarre that I'm required to spend inordinate amounts of time mentoring and training ECT's that fit the Teachers Registration requirement but are not suited, skilled or experienced to work with our young cohort, and yet I am not able to deliver the educational program myself.

