

IEUA-QNT SUBMISSION

[14 March 2024]

Submission: Early Childhood Teacher Registration in the Northern Territory Discussion Paper

The Independent Education Union - Queensland and Northern Territory Branch (IEU-QNT) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Northern Territory Government's Discussion Paper regarding Early Childhood Teacher Registration in the Northern Territory [1].

About IEU-QNT

IEU-QNT represents ~16,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions in Queensland and the Northern Territory and consistently engages in debate concerning industrial issues through Industrial Committee and through its national counterpart, the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA), which receives input from teachers in all States and Territories.

In relation to the early childhood sector, our membership consists primarily of four-year trained teachers who are eligible for registration with the teacher registration authority, working in community kindergartens. Coverage of educators working in long daycare or other early childhood facilities lies with other unions. We would, however, indicate that this submission has been prepared in consultation with IEUA members and colleagues in other jurisdictions.

Given the significance of teacher registration to the regulation of the profession, both within the Northern Territory, and in other jurisdictions, we would support a modified version of Option 1, with Birth-5 qualified early childhood teachers granted initial provisional registration that is then converted to full registration following completion of additional qualifications.

More detailed responses to the Discussion Questions are provided below.

Response to Discussion Questions

Discussion Question 1: What is your preferred model (of EC teacher registration) and why?

1. Of the three models put forward, our union believes Option 1 (Single category model with conditions) is most closely aligned with the purposes of the various teacher education programs (both ACECQA and TRB approved) and the recommendations of the *One Teaching Profession* [2] and *Shaping our Future* [3] reports.
2. This model recognises the legitimacy of Birth-5 as a specialist teaching context, but preserves the integrity of accreditation processes for initial teacher education (ITE) programs that prepare teachers to work with older cohorts.

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3. We would however, suggest that Option 1 requires modification to allow only provisional registration in the first instance, and a requirement for further qualifications in order to progress to full registration.
4. This process would replicate that undertaken when registration was initially introduced, where three-year trained teachers were given initial, provisional registration, with a timeframe for completion of further study to meet the requirements of full registration.

Discussion Question 2: What do you see as the key issues with each option and what could be done to address those issues?

5. We note that Option 1 does remove some of the school principal's personal judgement regarding the suitability of specific staff members to teach in specific year levels and requires them to check qualifications. This is entirely consistent with the necessary status of teaching as a regulated profession.
6. We would also argue that Option 1 provides the best mechanism for recognising Birth-5 as a legitimate area of teacher specialisation, equal in status to primary and secondary qualifications and that granting initial, provisional registration provides an opportunity for Birth-5 qualified teachers to undertake further study to progress to full registration.
7. We recognise that all 3 of the options presented would require amendment to the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004 [4] and the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations 2004 [5].
8. We note however, that Option 1 could be accommodated with relatively straightforward changes to Part 2, Section 4 of the Regulations.

Discussion Question 3: Is there an alternative model that should be considered?

9. As indicated above, we believe that Option 1 (Single category model with conditions) is most closely aligned with the purposes of the various teacher education programs (both ACECQA and TRB approved) and the recommendations of the *One Teaching Profession*[2] and *Shaping our Future* [3] reports.
10. We would suggest that the initial legislative change should enable Birth-5 qualified teachers to attain provisional registration, with specification of a timeframe for completion of additional qualifications as necessary to meet the requirements for full registration.

Discussion Question 4: What systems and processes are required to assist EC teachers in non-school settings to access mentoring by a teacher who holds full registration and a principal?

- **Where should the responsibility lie?**

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- **What impact will this have on schools?**
 - **What impact will this have on services?**
 - **What benefits may arise from potential collaboration?**
11. Any model of registration for early childhood teachers must consider the resourcing necessary to ensure that those working outside the school sector receive mentoring and support that is comparable to that received by their counterparts in schools.
 12. Despite the known benefits of mentoring in retaining teachers within the profession [6, 7], funding and resourcing of mentoring relationships is not a feature of Australia's education systems.
 13. The responsibility for funding and resourcing cannot lie with teachers (either those from schools, or those from the early childhood sector) or individual schools/centres by requiring them to voluntarily take on additional work.
 14. Unless involvement in mentoring and engaging in professional, collegial interactions is adequately funded and resourced at a systemic level, the workload impost (for both mentors and mentees) will continue to undermine the goal of providing both quality professional experiences for teachers and quality learning experiences for students.

Discussion Question 5: Jurisdictions with EC teacher registration have either updated APST terminology, or created separate evidence guides for early childhood teachers. Do you believe that the same approach would be sufficient to support EC teacher career progression in non-schools settings in the NT? If not, what other support is required?

15. While the production of evidence guides and other resources that are specific to the early childhood context (e.g. [8, 9]) is helpful, this is not sufficient to ensure that the professional experience of beginning teachers is of a standard that encourages and supports their ongoing professional development.
16. Members of our federal union, working in other jurisdictions, have indicated that some early childhood graduates are waiting up to three and a half years to be allocated a suitable mentor and they are unable to progress through the pay scale until they achieve the Proficient (full registration) benchmark.
17. As noted in response to Discussion Question 4, relying on more experienced teachers to take on the additional task of mentoring beginning teachers in addition to their existing work is not consistent with the goal of providing high quality teaching and learning experiences.
18. There is an urgent need for funding and resourcing at the systemic level and we would encourage the Northern Territory Government to lead dialogue about how quality mentoring and professional development can be embedded within the broader education system.

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Discussion Question 6: Do you agree that it is appropriate for EC teachers to pay a registration fee to be recognised as a registered professional teacher? If not, why?

19. We recognise that statutory bodies such as the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory operate on a cost-recovery basis and that teacher registration fees are an important source of revenue.
20. It is however, important to recognise that early childhood teachers working outside the school sector continue to be paid less than their counterparts in schools [10].
21. In addition to their lower pay rates, early childhood teachers also report that they are expected to bear the costs of professional development. This is relevant because the introduction of mandatory teacher registration is likely, we presume, to trigger the same professional development requirements as for other registered teachers.
22. Registration requirements, as specified in the Professional Development Framework [11], indicate that teachers should undertake an average of 20 hours of recognised PD each year. Some members from within the community kindergarten setting in other jurisdictions have advised us that a lack of employer funding options has seen them spend in excess of \$3000 of their own money on PD in a five-year period.

Discussion Question 7: Do you have any other feedback on the Teacher Registration Act or Teacher Registration Regulations?

23. As noted in response to previous discussions, we would anticipate that the required amendments to the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004 and the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations 2003 to enable Option 1 would be straightforward.
24. The more significant matter of ensuring that the broader education system is able to provide quality professional experiences for newly registered, and pre-service, early childhood teachers that parallel those available to their colleagues in schools is likely to require considerably more than legislative change.

Concluding Comments

IEU-QNT thanks the Northern Territory Government for the opportunity to provide feedback on its Discussion Paper regarding Early Childhood Teacher Registration in the Northern Territory

Of the three options presented, we believe Option 1 (Single category model with conditions) would best preserve the integrity of the teacher registration system, by granting Birth-5 qualified teachers provisional registration, with the option to undertake further study in order to meet the requirements for full registration.

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We do however, remain concerned that mentoring and professional support for beginning early childhood teachers will create further, un-resourced workload imposts for both the beginning teacher and their more experienced colleagues.

It is also important that changes to the registration system must not create financial pressures for early childhood teachers, who are significantly underpaid compared to their counterparts working in school settings.

To overcome these problems requires changes to the way mentoring and professional development is funded and resourced at a systemic level. We would encourage the Northern Territory Government to advocate for access to mentoring and career development opportunities to be built-in to the education system, rather than added on to what is already required of teachers.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage in further discussion.



Terry Burke

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Independent Education Union of Australia -Queensland and Northern Territory Branch

Thursday 14 March 2024

References

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9. NSW_Education_Standards_Authority, *Proficient Teacher Evidence Guide Early Childhood Teachers*. 2022, NSW Education Standards Authority: Sydney.
10. Independent_Education_Union_of_Australia-NSW/ACT_Branch, *Teacher Comparison Chart*. 2023, IEUA-NSW/ACT: Sydney.
11. Teacher_Registration_Board_of_the_Northern_Territory, *Professional Development Framework*. 2022: Darwin.