

INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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(AITSL)

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Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in New South Wales

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AITSL acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, sea countries and waterways from across Australia.

We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and living cultures; and to Elders past and present.

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Introduction

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited (AITSL) is pleased to provide a submission to the NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in New South Wales.

AITSL is a Commonwealth company that provides national leadership for the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. Our vision is that Australia has a high-quality education system in which teachers and leaders have the greatest impact on the educational growth and achievement of every learner.

AITSL's work spans four main areas of focus:

- **Initial teacher education:** We provide support, resources, and tools to help ensure that every pre-service teacher is classroom ready upon graduation.
- **Quality teaching:** We help teachers be the best they can be and provide tools and resources to maximise their impact on student learning.
- **Educational leadership:** We help leaders become highly effective by giving them the tools, resources, policies, and practices needed to succeed in their important role.
- **Data and evidence:** We use evidence to develop policies, tools and resources that will have maximum impact in improving the quality of teaching and leadership. AITSL has also been trusted to develop the first national, longitudinal dataset on the Australian teaching workforce.

This response is provided in the context of AITSL's responsibility for overseeing 11 ministerially agreed national frameworks in policy areas where state and territory governments hold responsibility, including the:

- [*Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*](#) (Teacher Standards)
- [*Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures*](#) (Accreditation Standards and Procedures)
- [*Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia*](#) (Registration Framework).

Response to the Terms of Reference

Note that this response refers only to items within the inquiry's terms of reference that are relevant to AITSL's remit. AITSL offers nil response to items within the terms of reference not included below.

Safety, health and wellbeing of children in ECEC services

Registering early childhood teachers

The registration¹ of early childhood teachers is central to the protection of children. Teacher registration is the responsibility of teacher regulatory authorities (TRAs) in each state and territory. In New South Wales, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is the TRA responsible for managing teacher registration, among other functions.

In 2016, New South Wales implemented a comprehensive and coherent accreditation system for early childhood teachers. A key part of the accreditation system comprises compliance with child protection requirements. AITSL notes the strength of the NSW Working with Children Check clearance and the capacity to act quickly and efficiently to remove teachers who are suspected of child-related misconduct.

In 2018, AITSL published [One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia](#) (One Teaching Profession), the report of the national review of teacher registration in Australia. The review made 17 recommendations designed to improve teacher registration across Australia with goals to improve teacher quality and streamline registration processes across Australia.

One Teaching Profession recommended that all early childhood teachers in Australia, regardless of their employment setting, be required to be registered by TRAs, under a consistent national approach (Recommendation 5). The review noted that including all early childhood teachers in registration arrangements would support the continued professionalisation of the early childhood teacher workforce – particularly through engagement with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards) – and support the idea of 'one teaching profession'.

The review also noted that the language used in the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (Teacher Standards) is not inclusive of early childhood teachers' practice and employment settings. One Teaching Profession recommended that the Teacher Standards be amended to ensure their relevance and applicability to early childhood teachers (Recommendation 6). To date, AITSL has not been commissioned to review or amend the Teacher Standards.

As part of One Teaching Profession, significant work was also undertaken to strengthen child safety through teacher registration. This work was developed in to support the recommendations of the [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#) (Royal Commission).

¹ NSW uses the term "teacher accreditation", rather than teacher registration.

Information sharing between jurisdictions

The Royal Commission highlighted the gaps and risks that exist in the current teacher registration arrangements and made recommendations for TRAs to collect consistent information and improve the processes for sharing information.

In 2022–23, all TRAs signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to address these gaps by providing a national document of information sharing policies and practice. The MoU provides a framework through which TRAs from all states and territories can collaborate with transparency to meet regulatory obligations under each state and territories' legislation for information sharing, balancing the need to operate in the best interests of children and provide natural justice to teachers.

However, as of 2025, not all jurisdictions register their early childhood teachers; Queensland, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory do not register all early childhood teachers at this stage. This restricts the capacity to share information about all early childhood teachers across jurisdictions.

Extending registration requirements to educators

Currently in NSW, registration in the early childhood education and care sector is required for early childhood teachers. An early childhood teacher typically holds a degree-level qualification which has been accredited by NESA in line with the [Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures](#) (Accreditation Standards and Procedures) and/or is approved by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

However, the early childhood workforce is structured differently to the school workforce. The majority of people caring and educating children are not teachers, they are educators. Educators are defined in the [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#) as those people who have an approved:

- Certificate III qualification in education and care, or
- Diploma level qualification.

Educators are not required to be registered. This means there is no central register of both educators and teachers in the early childhood education and care sector.

In line with Action FA1-6 of the [National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy](#), it may be valuable to consider extending the NSW accreditation system to include early childhood educators. Action FA1-6 considers "developing options for a national registration system for educators who are not teachers".

This proposal would require careful consideration given the differences in salary, qualifications and working conditions between teachers and educators. However, a separate registration or accreditation system could be designed to register educators under a specific set of criteria appropriate to this part of the workforce.

Under a registration system, there would be a central list of all educators as well as early childhood teachers that includes information their qualifications and employment, as well as details about possible misconduct and their current Working with Children Check clearances.

Quality of ECEC services and the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending ECEC services

The place of early childhood teachers in the Registration Framework

AITSL is responsible for the [Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia](#) (the Registration Framework). This Framework sets out the 8 key elements of registration across Australia. The Registration Framework applies to registered early childhood teachers, which is underpinned by the Teacher Standards.

All early childhood teachers must meet a qualification benchmark for accreditation as a teacher in NSW. There are three qualification pathways for early childhood teachers; only two of the qualification pathways are underpinned by the Teacher Standards. The table below sets out the qualification pathways for early childhood teachers and the program accreditation requirements.

Qualification	Program accreditation pathway	Relationship to the Teacher Standards
Birth to age 5 program	ACECQA approved through the Requirements for early childhood program assessment	No relationship
Birth to age 8 program	ACECQA approved through the Requirements for early childhood program assessment NESA accredited through the Accreditation Standards and Procedures.	Application of the Teacher Standards in the K–6 content
Birth to age 12 program	ACECQA approved through the Requirements for early childhood program assessment NESA accredited through the Accreditation Standards and Procedures	Application of the Teacher Standards in the K–6 content

Notably, teachers undertaking a Birth to Age 5 program are not required to demonstrate that they meet the Teacher Standards at the Graduate career stage through their teacher education program. This means when they start teaching, they must meet the Teacher Standards at the Proficient career stage without any understanding of the skills and knowledge included in the Teacher Standards at the Graduate level.

The Teacher Standards were established before the majority early childhood teachers were required to be registered teachers. Early childhood stakeholders have requested that any future review of the Teacher Standards include a focus on early childhood teaching, a position which AITSL supports.

Relationship between the NQS, the EYLF and the Teacher Standards

The [National Quality Standard](#) (NQS) sets out the requirements for the delivery of an educational program in an early childhood service and supports the delivery of the [Early Years Learning Framework](#) (EYLF). The Teacher Standards describe what teachers need to know and do to be effective teachers.

AITSL has compiled [resources](#) in collaboration with ACECQA to help early childhood teachers, leaders and employers to understand how the Teacher Standards fit with the NQS and EYLF. These resources provide links for teachers and employers to see a continuum of teacher practice from Birth to Age 18.

A [mapping tool](#) connects the Teacher Standards to the NQS and the EYLF. It is designed to help early childhood teachers build their own understanding and to guide early childhood leaders and employers in providing the support needed for teachers to work effectively across these standards and frameworks.

Safety, pay and conditions of workers within the ECEC sector

In NSW, the Teacher Standards are linked to teacher remuneration. The [Crown Employees \(Teachers in Schools and Related Employees\) Salaries and Conditions Award 2022](#) has a standards-based remuneration scale. All early childhood teachers working in government preschools receive a pay increment when they move from Band 1 (Graduate) to Band 2 (Proficient). In addition, any early childhood teachers working in a government preschool who meets the Highly Accomplished or Lead career stages of the Teacher Standards is also eligible for a pay increment.

Standards-based remuneration is also available for early childhood teachers who work under the [Educational Services \(Teachers\) Award 2020](#). This Award applies to employers and employees throughout Australia in the school education industry, children's services and early childhood education industry. The Award comprises pay increments aligned to the 4 career stages of the Teacher Standards.

NESA has streamlined teacher accreditation requirements for all teachers, including early childhood teachers. The streamlining is designed to focus on assessing teacher practice and reduce administrative burden. For example, NESA designed a new process by using data from their history of certification submissions to implement an innovative strategy for certifying teachers at Highly Accomplished or Lead teacher (HALT) career stages of the Teacher Standards. It is anticipated this streamlined process will increase the number of teachers being certified and lead to more early childhood teachers receiving a pay increment that recognises their teaching excellence.

AITSL and NESA have worked collaboratively with the early childhood education and care sector to develop resources to support the accreditation and certification of early childhood teachers. However, AITSL is strongly of the view that the Teacher Standards should be reviewed, including in consultation with early childhood teachers, to ensure their practice is recognised in the Teacher Standards. This will reduce any barriers to meeting the Teacher Standards and subsequent industrial implications.

Collection, evaluation and publication of reliable data in relation to ECEC services

The Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative, which AITSL delivers on behalf of Education Ministers, unites and links data on initial teacher education and the teacher workforce to build a national picture of the teaching profession. The data derives from:

- Teacher registration data from TRAs, including NESA in NSW
- Initial teacher education data from the Australian Government Department of Education
- the [Australian Teacher Workforce Survey](#), an annual survey provided to all registered teachers which enables them to share their experiences of working in the profession.

All accredited early childhood teachers in NSW are included in this dataset. However, the national data only includes data on early childhood teachers for the four jurisdictions that register early childhood teachers: NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

The ATWD began reporting separately on the characteristics of the early childhood teacher workforce based on data collection from 2022 onwards. Although limited by the national registration picture, the data is able to give insights on the ITE qualification types (Birth–5, Birth–8, or Birth–12) obtained by early childhood teachers, providing greater visibility of how qualifications may relate to specific workforce experiences.

Teachers who work in prior-to-school settings are more likely to have a Birth to Age 5 qualification. Teachers with Birth to Age 8 or Birth to Age 12 qualifications tend to work in K–6 settings (noting that NSW does not offer Birth to Age 8 programs, preferring Birth to Age 12 programs).

The [*In Focus: Early Childhood Teachers*](#) publication of the ATWD notes that the demand for early childhood teachers continues to increase. The potential future supply pool of early childhood qualified teachers through ITE may not keep up with this increased demand.

Though overall early childhood/primary ITE program commencements and completions have followed a general upwards growth trend since 2012, program completions have declined in more recent years, by an average of 4.9% per year since 2018. This broadly reflects trends in overall ITE programs and coincides with a rise in commencements for early childhood ITE programs delivered online in recent years, which tend to be associated with lower completion rates.

Availability and affordability of quality training institutions for early childhood education qualifications

Refer to the response under *Quality of ECEC services and the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending ECEC services*.

