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Productivity Commission

Via online submission

Dear Commissioners,

Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care

On behalf of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited (AITSL), I am pleased to provide a brief response to the Productivity Commission's call for submissions in relation to its inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in Australia.

About AITSL

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 educational leadership across schools and early childhood settings. For over a decade, AITSL has worked to strengthen teaching through our [national frameworks](#), including the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (the Teacher Standards), which apply to teachers working in the early childhood sector.

As the national body for teachers and leaders operating across all levels of the education sector in Australia – and at the intersection of multiple Commonwealth, state, and territory departments – our work extends to teachers at all stages of their career, including their initial teacher education (ITE) and ongoing professional learning, through to preparation for leadership.

AITSL's focus is on ensuring 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. Our role also extends to leading the national conversation on teacher workforce supply through implementation of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative. This longitudinal dataset includes all registered teachers in Australia, including those working in early childhood settings.

Skills assessments for migration

For over a decade, AITSL has been the Australian Government-approved assessing authority for individuals who wish to migrate to Australia as a skilled migrant under one of [eight teacher occupations](#), including *Early childhood (Pre-primary school) teachers*. AITSL's skills assessment service contributes to Australia's focus on a high-quality teaching profession through the provision of a robust assessment process, aligned where possible to the [Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia](#) (the Framework).

For the early childhood teacher occupation, a high percentage of applicants (88%) have nominated an Australian ITE qualification. As such, these applicants generally do not need separate ACECQA approval of their early childhood teaching qualification.

Birth to Age 5 programs are approved by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and at present do not need to meet the national program standards set out in the [Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures](#) (Accreditation Standards and Procedures). Consequently, teachers exiting from a Birth to Age 5 qualification, that does not have ITE program accreditation, do not meet the Graduate Teacher Standards. Further to this, it also means that there is no requirement for graduates from these programs to undertake the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students (LANTITE)¹ or a teaching performance assessment (TPA).

In recognition that early childhood teachers play a crucial role in the formative education of children, the AITSL process for assessing qualifications for migration ensures that the practice of migrating teachers meets the same quality standards as Australian teachers, and that successful applicants have appropriate skills for entering Australian classrooms and early childhood settings. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further with Commissioners during the course of your inquiry.

One Teaching Profession

The National Review of Teacher Registration found that Australia's state and territory-based teacher registration system separated early childhood teachers from the rest of the teaching profession. The Review's report [One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia](#) (One Teaching Profession) identified the opportunity to extend the benefits of teacher registration to early childhood teachers and support the continued professionalisation of the early childhood teacher workforce, particularly through engagement with the Teacher Standards². This was strongly supported by early childhood stakeholders in particular.

Actions in the ACECQA *National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy* (the Strategy) align with the findings of One Teaching Profession to support a consistent approach to the quality assurance and regulation of the teaching profession³.

The Strategy, which was approved for publication by Education Ministers in October 2021, identifies actions that are consistent with the recommendations of One Teaching Profession

¹ Under the Accreditation Standards and Procedures agreed by Education Ministers, ITE students in Australia must sit and meet the standard of the LANTITE prior to graduation.

² AITSL 2018, *One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia*.

³ ACECQA 2021, *Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022-2031*.

including the registration of early childhood teachers in each state and territory, regardless of setting. Teacher registration and utilisation of the Teacher Standards as a measure of quality for early childhood teachers lifts the status of the teaching profession.

Separation of early childhood teachers from the broader teaching profession results in a misalignment of standards and expectations along with working conditions. This devalues the contribution of early childhood teachers, reinforcing the perception that early childhood teachers are simply 'childcare workers' and in turn, impacts the attraction and retention of early childhood teachers and ultimately learning outcomes for children in the critical formative years.

AITSL's support for the profession

The status of the profession is a critical factor in attracting and retaining teachers, whether they have grown up in Australia or recently arrived through skilled migration. It also drives policy, which should be based on making the most of the expertise of teachers.

AITSL is well-positioned to influence the attraction and retention of qualified teachers, particularly in the early childhood sector. In line with the recommendations of *One Teaching Profession*, AITSL has been making a significant effort to contextualise the support it provides to the profession to ensure it is relevant to teachers in the early childhood sector. For example, the tailoring of resources for early childhood settings within the *My Induction* app for beginning teachers, and specifically focusing on the early childhood cohort within projects to improve professional learning for teachers.

It is critical that teachers entering Australian classrooms are well supported. AITSL recognises that migrant teachers are an important cohort of practising teachers in Australia and is progressing specific work aimed at better supporting this cohort. Relevant stakeholders, including employers, teachers, and teacher regulatory authorities are emphatic that visa settings should meet employer needs and that a focus on quality is central to avoiding ongoing workforce challenges and poor learning outcomes that arise from teachers who do not meet employer expectations.

For many migrating teachers, the skills assessment application for migration purposes is their first step in their teaching journey in Australia. AITSL has a unique opportunity to build their understanding of the Australian context, the Teacher Standards, teacher registration, and cultural factors within schools and early childhood settings.

Notably, AITSL will have a key role in contributing to actions in the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, such as *Enhance mentoring and induction support for new teachers* and *Promote wellbeing resources for educators and teachers*. This work will align with related actions in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan agreed by the Education Ministers Meeting in December 2022.

Australian Teacher Workforce Data

Teacher shortages are a key issue across all states, territories, and education settings. It is a challenge that faces early childhood settings and school communities across Australia, and is particularly acute in rural, regional, and remote areas.

The [Australian Teacher Workforce Data \(ATWD\)](#) initiative is a data linkage project jointly funded by the Australian Government and all state and territory governments. It provides longitudinal national data on ITE and the teacher workforce, to identify trends in the teacher supply pipeline and teacher workforce characteristics and experiences.

The ATWD includes data on all registered teachers in Australia and will therefore provide a comprehensive picture of the early childhood teaching workforce once the Strategy's commitment to register all early childhood teachers is implemented.

The ATWD will help improve governments' collective understanding about the teaching profession, ensuring the profession is sustainable, and inform national policy on how to better support the workforce and improve student outcomes. The ATWD offers useful insights on the early childhood teacher workforce and will inform initiatives to increase teacher supply in early childhood education to address workforce challenges in this critical sector.

Additionally, rural, regional, and remote teachers are already recognised as a critical cohort of the teacher workforce, and attracting and retaining teachers in these areas is a known challenge. The ATWD provides the only 'lifecycle' view of teachers' career trajectories from graduation to retirement. This will assist governments in:

- modelling who is attracted to teaching in rural, regional, and remote areas, including the characteristics and experiences of teachers who stay
- understanding the characteristics of teachers who leave roles in these areas and reasons why
- identifying gaps in teacher supply.

The ATWD will enable governments to recognise that not all regional and remote areas face the same challenges. It will include geospatial modelling of supply and demand characteristics to identify specific supply and demand challenges in particular local labour markets.

Modelling of data in the ATWD available through the digital tools will help governments, education systems and employers to gain more useful insight into the supply challenges in local markets. Furthermore, the ATWD has the capability to provide information on the number of overseas trained teachers and their career characteristics along with the number of international students completing Australian ITE qualifications.

Through data and analysis provided through the ATWD, AITSL is well positioned to identify and develop resources specifically to support early childhood teachers including those entering rural, regional, and remote areas. Furthermore, the ATWD will enable AITSL to provide advice to governments on the challenges to teacher supply in early childhood settings.

Further information

AITSL looks forward to engaging with the Commission further as it undertakes this important work. Please do not hesitate to contact the AITSL Chief Executive Officer, Mr Mark Grant PSM, via email to ceo@aitsl.edu.au should you require further information at any time.

Yours sincerely,

Melbourne Laureate Professor Emeritus John Hattie
Chair, AITSL Board of Directors