

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry in Childcare and Early Childhood Learning by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) welcomes the Productivity Commission's Inquiry in Childcare and Early Childhood Learning and the important questions raised in the Commission's December 2013 *Issues Paper*.

This submission focusses on addressing the "current and future need for child care in Australia, including consideration of the... interactions with relevant Australian Government policies and programmes." (*Childcare and Early Childhood Learning – Productivity Commission Issues Paper*, Dec 2013 p.iv)

Background

AITSL, together with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), commissioned the University of New England's Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR) National Research Centre to report on the application of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) to teachers in early childhood settings.

As AITSL currently supports jurisdictions in implementation of the Standards, this investigation was seen as an opportunity for further consultation with the early childhood sector, including public and private preschools, long day care service and home based care.

The research focussed on providing advice on the support required to assist with the application of the Standards to early childhood teachers. This was achieved through a combination of desktop research, mapping and analysis of the Early Year Learning Framework (EYLF), National Quality Standards (NQS) and the Standards combined with broad consultation with early childhood teachers and representatives from key stakeholder groups.

The report's executive summary states that there is no real impediment to working out a viable solution that offers a genuine pathway forward for both AITSL and ACECQA in applying the Standards to teachers in early childhood settings. (*Consultation on the application of the Standards to teachers working in Early Childhood Education and Care services*, SiMERR, 2012 p.4i-5i). AITSL supports this view and believes teachers in all settings can benefit from using the Standards to define the work of teachers in early childhood and care settings and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching that results in improved educational outcomes for learners.

The report also outlines some considerations that need addressing in any potential application of the Standards to the sector, including the difference in purpose between the Standards, EYLF and the NQS, the language used within the Standards, and the contextual differences in which teachers work. AITSL continues to address these issues by way of supporting documentation for teachers in this setting.

Purpose of each framework

The report has mapped the NQS and EYLF against the Standards, noting that “each of these initiatives has a different purpose and audience:

- The Standards set out the knowledge, practices and professional engagement of **teachers** throughout their career
- The EYLF establishes principles, practices and outcomes for **young children** in prior-to-school age settings
- The NQS delineates quality areas, standards and elements for regulation of **Early Childhood Education and Care services.**” (SiMERR p.17)

Although the different purposes are noted, the mapping across the policy platforms undertaken by SiMERR suggests there is a convergence of intent between the NQS for the early childhood sector and the Standards. Given there is not a specific framework for teacher quality and improvement within the early childhood sector, the Standards could fulfil this role.

Language

The language used within the Standards, highlights the different terminology currently used in school and early childhood settings. “The language of schools (and school classrooms) is generally unfamiliar to teachers in Early Childcare settings.” (SiMERR p.4i) Whilst it is acknowledged that the Standards are written in a school-centred language, for example, *school*, *teaching* and *curriculum*, AITSL believes that with additional supporting resources that elaborate on meaning, this language can be redefined for early childhood settings.

Contextual differences

The context in which early childhood teachers work can vary widely. “Throughout the consultation, differences between the nature, management and working environment of the Early Childhood and school sectors were raised as issues needing to be considered when applying the Standards to the Early Childhood sector.” (SiMERR p.7-8) The purpose for implementing is clear; to provide a framework for supporting and improving the quality of teaching.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

The Standards were developed through a process of widespread consultation and validation. The Standards are robust, as evidenced through an extensive validation process that involved engaging the profession widely, and ensuring the Standards were tested in all educational settings, systems and locations across Australia.

The Standards are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. The Standards achieve this by providing a framework that makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers. They present a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public.

AITSL has already undertaken work to support teachers within the early childhood sector, with resources currently available including:

- *Illustrations of Practice* videos that bring the Standards to life and help teachers situate their own practice. This collection focuses on providing examples within the early childhood setting and was developed in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia
<http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Search?q=ECA&fc=Scope!2>
- The *Unpacking the Standards* workshop presentation that helps familiarise the Australian education community with the Standards
<http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Resources>

Accreditation of early childhood courses in initial teacher education

Another area in which AITSL is currently completing work that will further strengthen ties with the early childhood setting is in the Accreditation of Early Childhood courses in initial teacher education within Australia. Many early childhood programs offered by higher education providers prepare students to teach in primary school and gain registration as school teachers, as well as to teach in early childhood settings.

These programs are required to gain accreditation against the *Standards and Procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia* and the ACECQA requirements for early childhood qualifications. AITSL continues to work with ACECQA and state and territory regulatory authorities to determine ways of streamlining these accreditation processes. The aim is to reduce the regulatory burden and assist higher education providers to develop and offer quality programs for early childhood teachers.

Conclusion

In light of the research findings, and taking into account the issues that require consideration, AITSL commends the Standards as the framework for defining the work of teachers in all educational settings that make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching that results in improved educational outcomes for learners. The use of the Standards has the potential to strengthen the practice of educators within the early childhood setting. AITSL looks forward to the outcomes of this inquiry and continuing to explore further links with ACECQA and other stakeholders.