

Teacher Registration in the ACT

ISSUES PAPER No 6 - Criteria for Registration

Introduction

This paper is one of a series that has been prepared to inform and encourage consultation and discussion on the need for and the possible elements of a teacher registration system for teachers in all education systems in the ACT.

The key document in the consultation process is *Teacher Registration in the ACT: Community Consultation Paper*, released on 14 May 2007. That paper sets out the background to the ACT Government's decision to investigate the issue of teacher registration, describes the purposes of a teacher registration system, canvasses the possible role and function of such a system in the ACT and sets out a process for consultation with stakeholders.

This paper addresses the specific issue of the criteria for registration. Its purpose is to provide information and to encourage discussion around the issue of how a registration body assesses teachers who are applying for or seeking renewal of registration and whether there should be different types and levels of registration. It does not necessarily represent the views of the ACT Department of Education and Training (DET) or of any other stakeholder involved in the consultation process. The Teacher Registration Project Reference Group has approved the circulation of this paper on that basis.

Background

As the Consultation Paper points out, education systems employ teachers with a wide range of qualifications in both generalist and specialist fields. There are also part time and casual teachers as well as policy and program development staff with teacher qualifications. Education systems also encompass teachers with different levels of experience and seniority with responsibilities that may involve management, mentoring and representing the profession to the community. A simple "one size fits all" teacher registration scheme may not necessarily recognise or encompass this variety.

The Present Situation

As the other Issues Papers have pointed out, teacher professionalism in all three ACT education sectors is currently maintained through a combination of eligibility criteria that focus on qualifications and character and professional learning and performance management systems that emphasise continual learning, regular performance feedback, support for new teachers and ongoing mentoring.

The ACT government system has four teacher classification levels – classroom teachers, executive teachers, deputy principals and principals. Promotion is by merit-based selection using criteria that focus on ability and experience.



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The system has teachers with specialist skills, including counsellors, librarians and ESL teachers. Approximately 6 per cent of ACT government teachers are employed on a casual basis, many of them retired former full time teachers.

The Catholic system uses a similar classification system as the ACT government system, which recognises classroom teachers, coordinators, assistant principals and principals. Promotion in the Catholic system is merit-based and there is a system of performance reviews for contract renewal purposes for coordinators, assistant principals and principals. The Catholic system employs teachers in specialist roles. The Catholic Education Office registers casual teachers before the casual teachers can work in ACT Catholic system schools. The Catholic Education Office audits the registration of casual teachers annually.

Registration and Level

A threshold issue in any discussion of types of registration is the need to identify and distinguish between the various ways of measuring and recognising teacher ability and experience.

As we have seen, teaching services have **classification levels** reflecting different levels of responsibility. The establishment and management of classification levels are the responsibility of employers. Teachers normally advance from level to level as a result of merit based selection processes that assess the most suitable applicant against relevant selection criteria. The number of vacancies at the higher levels of the structure will depend on organisational needs and the availability of resources.

Professional teaching standards may include teacher **career dimensions**. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) paper, *A National Framework for Professional Standards for Teachers*, which is discussed in more detail in Issues Paper No 2, *Professional Standards*, identifies four career dimensions: graduate; competence; accomplishment and leadership. The main interest of teacher registration bodies in identifying and supporting career dimensions is that they enhance professionalism by providing consistent benchmarks for professional development and performance management.

Finally, different levels of experience among teachers may be recognised through different **levels**

of registration. These are discussed in more detail in this paper.

There would normally be no direct relationship between level of registration or career dimension and advancement through the teacher classification levels of an education system, except that eligibility for promotion would depend, among other things, on being registered and that professional opportunities and self knowledge arising out of the use of professional standards might help teachers to compete for promotion.

On the other hand, if we see renewal of registration being contingent on professional growth then there may be a case for linking registration with career dimensions and other aspects of professional standards. This is discussed in further detail in the issues section below.

Models in Other Jurisdictions

There are three basic levels of registration used by most Australian jurisdictions. While terminology and detail differ between jurisdictions, the levels are essentially as follows:

Provisional registration is for teachers who are fully qualified, but not yet able to provide evidence that they have achieved the required standards of professional practice. Entry-level graduate teachers would normally be given provisional registration, although in some jurisdictions, teachers returning to the classroom after a long absence must also provisionally register.

Full Registration is for teachers who are fully qualified and who can demonstrate that they have achieved the required standard of professional practice. Teachers on provisional registration are normally expected to achieve full registration within a maximum time frame, which varies between jurisdictions (12 months with a 12 month extension Victoria, two years in Queensland, three years in Western Australia). Experienced teachers who are new to the jurisdiction can apply directly for full registration, subject to demonstrating the required standard of professional practice.

Permission to Teach enables schools “to offer people with relevant skills, knowledge and experience a teaching position, in situations where the position has been unable to be filled by an appropriate registered teacher” (Queensland). The permission would normally only be granted for a fixed period.

Moving from Provisional to Full Registration

Jurisdictions have a variety of processes, with varying levels of rigour, for assessing a provisionally registered teacher's suitability for full registration. Western Australia provides an interesting example. It uses a self-assessment process during which the applicant is required to undertake a program of self-knowledge and professional growth against the four elements of the Western Australian Framework for Teaching – Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, Professional Values and Professional Relationships.

The process is undertaken with the guidance of a Collegiate Support Person nominated by the applicant, a person with at least three years teaching experience, who is "enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well respected by their colleagues" and who will support the applicant's claim, on completion of the process, to fully registered status. A provisional registrant cannot claim full status with less than 12 months service, and the optimum time frame for the process is two years.

Renewal of Registration

It is important here to distinguish between the annual teacher registration fee (standard in all jurisdictions and sometimes referred to as 'renewal of registration') and the requirement, usually every five years in Australian jurisdictions, for teachers to seek to renew their status as a registered teacher.

As noted in other Issues Papers, registration frameworks in most Australian jurisdictions are relatively new, and practical arrangements and processes for the renewal of registration continue to be developed.. There is a general consensus, however, that renewal should not be automatic. There is also a consistent view that renewal should not simply be linked to time served as a teacher and continuing evidence of good character, but should also take into account ongoing professional learning and experience.

Some jurisdictions have made this explicit in their teacher registration body legislation.

- Tasmania requires that applications for renewal be:
accompanied by satisfactory evidence of ongoing competence; or professional development undertaken.

- Queensland's body's act requires evidence that:
the person has undertaken, during the relevant period of registration, the continuing professional learning required for registered teachers under the [Continual Professional Learning (CPL)] framework.

Although the CPL framework itself is still under development, the Queensland body anticipates "permanently employed teachers undertaking the usual range of professional duties in a school will have no difficulties in demonstrating CPL for renewal purposes".

- Western Australia's teacher registration regulations are quite detailed:
An applicant for renewal of registration must be able to demonstrate to the College that, during the period since the applicant was last registered, he or she actively undertook or participated in 3 or more activities...that would assist the applicant.
 - (a) to keep up-to-date in his or her area of expertise, or in education theory generally;
 - (b) to increase his or her understanding of a particular subject area or area of education theory; and
 - (c) to develop and consolidate his or her teaching skills and other skills relevant to the supervision and management of students.

The regulation lists the sorts of activities that would meet the renewal criteria. They include mentoring a student teacher; developing curriculum materials; reflecting on and evaluating teaching practices; undertaking and applying relevant research; integrating information technology into teaching, learning and assessment practices; participating in the activities of a professional education association; working with members of the community to improve public understanding of school education programmes and activities and undertaking relevant postgraduate studies.

- Victoria's teacher registration act simply requires "evidence satisfactory to the Institute that the applicant has maintained an appropriate level of professional practice in the preceding 5 years", there is a detailed policy framework being put in place to give it effect. Victorian teachers are currently required to demonstrate, with reference to a set of Standards for Professional Practice for Renewal of Registration, that they have had at least 80 days teaching and educational leadership in a school or equivalent practice in the preceding five years.

From 2008 onwards they will also be required to demonstrate that they have undertaken a defined quantity of professional development activities in the preceding five years. It has been proposed in the consultation process leading up to the new renewal regime, that this would require at least 150 hours of professional development over the past five years, comprising:

- 75 hours of formal and informal school based activities that contribute to their professional learning; and
- 75 hours of formal coursework related to professional knowledge and professional; practice standards.

The Victorian and Western Australian models both focus on the responsibility of the teacher to initiate these activities and to provide evidence to the registration body.

Other Types of Registration

Registration bodies in other jurisdictions recognise that there are different types and employment patterns of teaching, including specialist teachers, teachers who teach outside the classroom environment (in, for example, museums), and casual and part time teachers. While assessment processes for full registration and for renewal of registration generally take the circumstances of these teachers into account, there are no separate registration categories for them.

Western Australia appears to be the only jurisdiction that recognises associate membership. Under its legislation, the Western Australian teacher registration body can grant associate membership to a person who:

- *is a qualified teacher who no longer wishes to teach but who wishes to remain connected to the profession; or*
- *has made a contribution to education or teaching recognised by the College who, similarly, wishes to offer support to the profession through membership of the College.*

Associate members pay a reduced registration fee.

Issues

A key issue is establishing criteria and processes for full registration and renewal of registration are rigorous and open enough to ensure ongoing public confidence in teaching standards:

- could a self-assessment scheme provide this or should the registration body become more actively involved in areas like monitoring classroom practice?
- what about the affect on teacher time and resources in a small system? The proposed Victorian model for renewal of registration would, for example, require teachers to undertake 15 hours each year of formal professional learning activity. How does this compare with current loads?
- how should professional development actually be defined for the purposes of registration renewal. What is the optimal blend of practical teaching experience, formal and informal professional learning and non-classroom activities such as working with the school community?

A second issue is the interrelationship between criteria and processes for the renewal of registration and other benchmarks of professional ability and experience.

- To what extent should the expected standards and levels of professional development for the purposes of renewal of registration change over time as teachers become more experience? Should renewal be incrementally linked to the career dimensions identified in the MCEETYA framework and what are the administrative and resource implications of this?
- What, if any, should the relationship be between the renewal of registration process managed by the registration body and performance management schemes put in place by teacher employers?

A final issue is whether there is any need for amended membership arrangements for specialist, part time/casual and “associate” teachers. The consensus in other jurisdictions seems to be that registration should provide a standard professional imprimatur, irrespective of the nature or type of employment as a teacher. The only exception is the Western Australian system of associate membership for people with teacher qualifications who are not actually employed as teachers but who wish to maintain a link with the profession.