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**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION AND TRAINING ENQUIRY INTO THE STATUS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

INTRODUCTION

THE NSW/ACT EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION COUNCIL (ECTEC) IS FORWARDING THE FOLLOWING SUBMISSION IN RELATION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING THAT WILL INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION, CONSIDERING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES IN A RANGE OF AREAS. NSW/ACT ECTEC WISHES TO RESPOND TO TWO OF THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT'S TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THIS ENQUIRY AS IDENTIFIED BELOW.

TOR 1: INCREASING THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE PROFESSION FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS, INCLUDING WORKPLACE CONDITIONS, AND CAREER AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES.

TOR 4: INVESTIGATING WAYS TO INCREASE RETENTION RATES FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION, AND AVOID 'BURN OUT' AMONG EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS.

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TOR 1: Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures

Funding of Early Childhood Education and Care Settings

Fully publicly funded early childhood programs would be the most effective way of beginning to address all four terms of reference as outlined in this enquiry, but has particular relevance here. Fully publicly funded early childhood education would demonstrate the Government's commitment to early childhood education and therefore, have a dramatic impact on the valuing of early childhood teachers in the field and the attractiveness of the profession. Fully publically funded early childhood services would provide:

1. Increased access to early childhood services from all areas of the community, thus improving educational outcomes for all children. This will also ultimately lead to better success for children in the primary and secondary years of schooling. Better outcomes for children means reduced stress for teachers and further increases the attractiveness of teaching careers at all levels.
2. Increased participation of children in early childhood education leads to a breaking of poverty and family risk cycles, lower rates of crime and unemployment, improved early intervention and reduction in long term support costs across the community.
3. Increased utilisation of early childhood education and care services. Services with low utilisation rates mean reduced staff numbers, but these don't significantly reduce staff workload, this creates a pattern of increased work stress reducing program quality and increased staff turnover. The aim is for the sector to be more financially efficient with increasing opportunities for better pay rates and conditions for teachers.

Pay and working conditions

Equitable pay and working conditions across the teaching field are vital to demonstrate the Government's commitment to early childhood education. With critical shortages of early childhood teachers and high ECT turnover rates addressing pay parity is crucial to achieving the Government goals of valuing Australia's teachers. In regards to pay and award conditions the following should be considered:

1. Equity in pay levels and conditions would make early childhood teaching more attractive and help to acknowledge the equivalency of the qualification and the study required in comparison to other levels of teaching.
2. National standards on awards and child-staff ratios to support time out for teachers for programming, maintaining children's records and assessment, writing reports, applying for grants and funding, building community partnerships and participating in research and conferences, would also make the profession more attractive.
3. The current disparity in terms and conditions for early childhood teachers working in long day care as opposed to stand alone preschool centres promotes a two tiered system for the same teacher degree qualification. This in turn influences the quality of teachers employed and the quality of programs offered for children.
4. The current pay and conditions are ultimately a stressor for teachers, leading to issues of well-being and workforce attrition. To retain a high quality work force requires equitable pay and conditions for all teachers at all levels.

Teacher education programs

To ensure early childhood teachers are prepared for the workforce and equipped with the skills needed to get through their initial years of teaching the following should be considered by the Government with regards to preservice teaching qualifications:

1. The offering of scholarships and work time release to permit upgrading of qualifications from certificate to diploma and diploma to degree level is essential to meet the current early childhood education workforce gap. Our experience is students enrolled in teaching degrees are under much duress attempting to balance work, family and study, often exacerbated by pressure from employers to complete studies, particularly under the 'Actively Working Towards a Qualification' policy.
2. Include Birth-5 programs in the AITSIL accreditation process to ensure equity of pre-service program quality and demonstrate equity of importance is given to birth-5 years programs. This would increase participation of early childhood teachers and reinforce the valuing of the early childhood teaching profession.
3. Enable the accreditation of birth-8 year's programs in NSW as this reflects the international developmentally-based definition of early childhood. It will also increase the attractiveness and versatility of early childhood qualifications. Further it is important for the versatility of an early childhood education degree to be recognised and inaccurate to presume that an educator trained birth – 8 years will not be able to teach across the primary sector. Early childhood qualifications focus beyond implementing a set curriculum and are child-focused. Early childhood degrees extensively cover the full spectrum of teaching pedagogies, learning theories, discipline areas and developmental knowledge making them extremely versatile and mobile. Having all teaching qualifications assessed under the same requirements and all students assessed and accredited under the same requirements will also increase status and equality of teaching degrees across different age groups and settings.
4. Beyond the early childhood education workforce, teaching degrees can be a starting point for higher degree research or specialisation pathways and these must be promoted. Research to inform practice is essential and specialist skills in areas such as early intervention, language acquisition or play therapy are key to supporting teachers in the field. Yet, career pathways beyond undergraduate teaching in the early childhood sector are not commonly evident or promoted.

Public marketing

Increased public marketing of the importance of early childhood education and the early childhood teaching profession. This public marketing should;

1. Acknowledge that effective early childhood education underpins success for children in primary education and in life.
2. Include public advertising programs to promote and celebrate the work of early childhood teachers in the community.
3. Include public promotion of the potential of the career for men and other underrepresented groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
4. Include promotion of the broad range of fields that early childhood education qualified teachers can progress into including, working with children at risk, supporting children with disabilities, working in gifted and talented education, working with children in hospital care, working with refugee families, or progress into teaching in VET and Higher Education programs.

TOR 4: Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers

As stated previously fully publically funded early childhood education and the addressing of pay and conditions would be the ideal way to avoid burn out and increase retention rates for the reasons mentioned above. The following points highlight key strategies and areas of need:

1. Develop clear study and career pathways through partnerships between TAFE and higher education providers. Current disparities between diploma providers around course length and quality can lead to inequities for students and disadvantage them in subsequent degree level studies. Similarly, the articulation from diploma to degree can be fraught for students when each higher education provider states differing advanced standing criteria in relation previous diploma level study and work experience.
2. Provide funding and pathways for seamless transition between the Certificate III to Diploma to degree articulation pathways. Continuing funding early childhood courses in the VET sector and providing HECS places for higher education degree programs in teaching would assist in attracting and retaining more early childhood teacher's long term and support career paths.
3. Provide funding to increase options for internships or traineeships within diploma and degree level study. When students engage with the workforce early in their studies they understand the realities of the profession, increase their ability to function effectively in the field and build collegial relationships for their own learning. Ultimately, retention of teaching staff is more likely.
4. Promote mentoring programs for new degree graduates who are most likely to become leaders in their centre upon graduation. Fund current early childhood teachers/leaders in the field to participate in these mentorship programs and be able to obtain a TAFE mentor unit or qualification which would also be recognised by AITSIL for their PD for teacher accreditation.
5. Provide targeted programs for employing high quality graduates from early childhood teaching programs, some example programs already exist between Universities and the primary education sector.

6. Ensure quality health support strategies are in place to support staff mental and physical health in the workplace. Early childhood is a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding work and such strategies are vital for reducing burnout.
7. Increase delivery of services in community integrated hubs where both staff and families can access other specialist services and be supported and learn from each other.
8. Provide support for TAFE and higher education providers to develop and deliver AITSL professional learning programs for teacher accreditation that is pitched above Bachelor level to extend and develop teachers. Funding should be focused on the development of courses and for teacher attendance. Online options and/or travel scholarships to support upskilling of regional and remote located teachers.
9. Increase funding to teacher degree providers to ensure supports can be implemented for preservice students in lifting literacy and numeracy skills during their teaching qualifications.
10. Offer funding grants to TAFE and higher education provider degree programs to engage in applied research in the early childhood field and to build a professoriate for the sector and increase engagement in high level research, conference delivery and evidence based teaching approaches.
11. Recognise the unique needs of teachers in regional and remote locations where access to relevant and effective support, study programs and professional learning is often limited. They may be the only degree qualified teacher in their region. Capitalise on current online degree courses available, explore online mentoring sessions or forums and/or provide a phone or visiting support service for teachers.