

 **Briefly**

- **Most states and territories now have teacher registration/ accreditation systems.**
- **Challenges ahead include negotiation of fees and consistent Australian standards.**
- **State registration bodies are working together to develop national standards.**

Call yourself a teacher?

The aim of universal teacher registration is almost complete in Australia.

ANGELA ROSSMANITH reports.

Australian teacher unions have long pushed for a system of registration or accreditation to raise the status of the teaching profession. Such systems of certification are now in place in most states and territories.

While teacher registration was introduced in Queensland and South Australia more than 30 years ago, certification has only recently been established in other states and the Northern Territory. The ACT has no registration process but its government is currently preparing a discussion paper on the possibility of introducing one.

The Western Australian College of Teaching (WACT) was established in September 2004 after a very long process of development, says Mike Keely, president of the State School Teachers Union of WA. "Our union endorsed it provided that teachers had the predominant voice. We believe no-one should be allowed to call themselves a teacher, or teach, without professionally approved qualifications. Registration ensures professional standards."

For most registration authorities, getting the legislation right

was the biggest challenge, says WACT chairperson Brian Lindberg, who represents the State School Teachers Union of WA on the college board.

Ensuring that membership data was accurate for every teacher was a big job, says Lindberg, as was the issuing of membership certificates. "The development of operational policies and procedures also took time," he says. "Making sure to involve the profession in decision-making has been another exhaustive task."

Child protection issues

In 2004, the Queensland government called for a review of teacher registration. The state's Board of Teacher Registration was founded 30 years ago, and its powers and functions needed reviewing, says Graeme Hall, assistant director of the newly established Queensland College of Teachers, which has replaced the board. The review was due in part to the increased emphasis on child protection issues across Australia, and also to the changing nature of the teaching profession.

Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) president Steve Ryan says the changes were based on one or

two indiscretions—sexual misconduct among others—which occurred in the private sector. "If they had been teachers in the state system, the employer already has in place strict child protection guidelines. They would have been investigated and dealt with at that level."

The professional practice of teachers is the only concern for the NSW Institute of Teachers, says chief executive Tom Alegounarias. Separate legislation addresses child protection in NSW.

NSW teachers are assessed on their demonstrated capacity to teach, he says. "They are accredited on the basis of a qualification together with how they operate in the classroom. Teachers accredited as competent have to maintain their accreditation through monitored professional development."

Challenges ahead

While the accreditation system in NSW is functioning well, there are plenty of challenges ahead, says Alegounarias. "We still have a long way to go because in NSW we will also accredit teaching at higher levels, at accomplishment and at professional leadership levels. The policies for those

accreditation processes are being worked out and will be completed this year. We have a policy to be implemented this year for new teachers, so we'll see how that works."

Registration fees have also emerged as an issue in some states. In Western Australia, teachers approaching retirement question why they should pay for a licence to teach when this was not a requirement for most of their employment, says Lindberg.

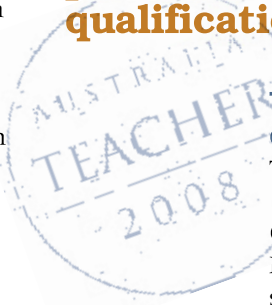
Meanwhile, in Queensland, recent large increases in registration fees mean teachers are being forced to fund disciplinary procedures as well as their own professional development, says Steve Ryan, president of the Queensland Teachers Union. "The union has negotiated with the department over this. It's the employer's role to pay for professional development, and not the role of any teacher registration authority."

Overall, the state and territory authorities are working well, says Lindberg. "The seven authorities have formed with New Zealand the Australasian Forum of Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities

(AFTRAA) to work through issues of mutual interest and to ensure as much comparability as possible."

Hall says the registration authorities are working together to develop a national standard, which they see as a priority. "Teachers probably would agree that we have consistent standards enabling them to move from state to state, and even country to country," he says.

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Teaching Australia concerns

The role of Teaching Australia (formerly the National Institute of Quality Teaching and School Leadership) in all this is causing some disquiet among state authorities. Teaching Australia has been established as a national body dealing with teachers' professional issues. It is a corporation, its sole shareholder being the federal education minister, and it is accountable

only to the minister.

"Teaching Australia has the same functions as many of the authorities," says Lindberg. "Given the unfortunately low level of resources governments provide for education, we must be vigilant to avoid duplication. For example, the four functions of Teaching Australia are four of the eight functions of the WA College of Teaching."

There is clearly the potential for duplication and conflict of interest, says Hall. "We continue to be in conversation with Teaching Australia to ensure there is no duplication."

The best approach, says Alegounarias, is to remember that the states and territories are directly responsible for effective practice and implementation, and the Commonwealth government is responsible for issues of national significance. "We can constructively negotiate effective, complementary practices that recognise each other's decisions, are efficient in terms of resource allocation, and have regard for the professionalism and interests of teachers," Alegounarias says. ●

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