



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

15th Assembly

LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Public Hearing Transcript

9.00 am – 12.00 pm, Monday 10 November 2025

Litchfield Room, Level 3, Parliament House

Members: Mrs Oly Carlson MLA, Chair, Member for Wanguri
Mr Clinton Howe MLA, Deputy Chair, Member for Drysdale
Justine Davis MLA, Member for Johnston
Mr Chanston Paech MLA, Member for Gwoja
Mrs Laurie Zio MLA, Member for Fannie Bay

Witnesses: *Association of Independent Schools Northern Territory*

Cheryl Salter: Executive Director

Ian Smith: Director of Independent Indigenous Schools

Independent Education Union Queensland and Northern Territory Branch

Adele Schmidt: Research Officer

NT Christian Schools

Alice Mustin: Chief Executive Officer

Phillip Leslie: Former Chief Executive Officer

Northern Territory Principal's Association

Leah Crockford: Darwin Chapter Chair, Principal Leanyer Primary School

Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory

Lisa Hirschausen: Acting Director

Rachel Boyce: Board Member

Department of Education and Training

Susan Bowden: Chief Executive

Tony Considine: Deputy Chief Executive Strategic and Business Services

Victoria Eastwood: Senior Director Strategic Policy

Michelle Wright: Acting Director Strategic Policy and Reform

The committee convened at 9 am.

**INQUIRY INTO THE
TEACHER REGISTRATION (NORTHERN TERRITORY) LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025
Association of Independent Schools Northern Territory**

Madam CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Cheryl Salter and Ian Smith. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligations not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you each state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms SALTER: My name is Cheryl Salter, Executive Director, Independent Schools Northern Territory.

Mr SMITH: My name is Ian Smith, Director, Independent Indigenous Schools AISNT.

Madam CHAIR: My name is Oly Carlson, and I am the Chair of the committee. I have with me the Member for Drysdale, the Member for Fannie Bay and the Member for Johnston. Online we have the Member for Gwoja.

Ms Salter, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms SALTER: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the changes suggested in the Bill. One of the concerns we have as the representatives of the independent schools in the Northern Territory is regarding the governance clause that has been put in. What is important, particularly around any regulatory body, is that it is independent of the department of Education, and it represent all sectors. As independent schools, we value our independence and we operate within a strong regulatory environment anyway. We certainly need to have a regulatory body that does not impose things that impact on our independence and on the governing bodies being able to make decisions that are best for their students and their parent community.

Mr SMITH: I do not pretend to deep dive into regulations and so forth, but in my capacity, a couple of the amendments jumped out at me. I feel that the recognition of Aboriginal language was excellent, and I hope that there are the right structures in place to ensure that it opens pathways for Aboriginal language-speaking people. I felt from past experiences as a principal in a remote school that having two years to look at different staff was an excellent provision, and anything that we can do to enhance child safety is excellent. It just needs to be done, and no matter what extra admin tasks it provides to principals and so forth, child safety overrides it.

Madam CHAIR: I open the floor to questions.

J DAVIS: Thank you both for coming today. Cheryl, I am interested in when you said you had concerns about the governance structure. Can you talk about what your concerns explicitly are?

Ms SALTER: The changes that are proposed, because it is sitting under the department of Education, are that the director will be employed by the department of Education and will be answerable to the CEO, and we have a board that is independent and takes advice from the minister. In a perfect world that may work well, but what we have not seen is how that governance structure will work. We are not sure if there are any sort of risk framework or risk mitigation that has been put in place if you have a situation where the board is making a recommendation to the director that may not be aligned with what the department of Education is doing in that space.

At the moment too we have a review of boards. The Teacher Registration is under review, the Board of Studies is under review and the registrar's office, which regulates non-government schools, is under review. We are not sure what the outcome will be around that, and we cannot see how this change may impact that.

J DAVIS: Were you involved in any consultation in the development of the Bill?

Ms SALTER: We have had the TRB, or the board, review.

J DAVIS: In the development of the Bill itself?

Ms SALTER: No.

J DAVIS: In your submission you note your concerns you are raising here. You do not comment on the proposed clause 8, which would allow the minister to provide direction to the board. Do you have any comments or concerns about that?

Ms SALTER: I probably do not have any real concerns about that. It is a board that is one of the minister's boards and there should be that relationship between the minister and the board. There will be some things that perhaps the minister should not be giving directives around—for example, individual cases that are under special investigation.

J DAVIS: You had some questions about how it will actually work and what is the risk framework. You said you had not been consulted in the development. Do you have any views on what would be helpful around that if this Bill does pass—what you would need to put it in place?

Ms SALTER: As an independent sector we have always advocated to have an independent statutory regulatory body that is independent from the department of Education. I fully understand that we are a small Territory and that the money is not there to develop a whole department to regulate schools. We would certainly welcome conversations around how it may look and how it can happen.

Mrs ZIO: Do you have any thoughts regarding the benefits of the TRB having a closer relationship with the department of Education? Is there any benefit from that aspect of this Bill?

Ms SALTER: Regarding support and staffing services, it may be of benefit. The department of Education employs the most teachers and there are three sectors that are governed by this regulatory body. I think we have to be careful that it does not become driven by department of Education policy.

Mrs ZIO: In my previous roles the Teacher Registration Board has often had staffing issues and the capacity to move through the processes that we need to get the teachers ready for next year. Do you think that the development of this new Bill will support that work?

Ms SALTER: I have not seen the detail of how it will work. That is where some of our anxiety is coming from. We have not seen the framework of how it will work.

Mr PAECH: I have three questions for our witnesses in relation to the qualifications around First Nations languages. I want to understand, given the jurisdiction we are in and the level of First Nations languages spoken, what the current process is if you want to employ an unregistered person to teach language. Do you need an authority to teach?

Ms SALTER: Currently, you do.

Mr PAECH: If the legislation as proposed goes through, will that still be the case?

Ms SALTER: My understanding is that will be the case. It is just recognising that first language is also a language and they will need an authority to teach.

Mr PAECH: What are the impacts of the current framework for employing teachers of language on schools within the network of the independent Aboriginal community schools? Is the framework working currently for those schools?

Ms SALTER: One of the greatest challenges for any remote school is the tyranny of distance. Often it is the administrative burden that can get in the way. It can be just having the support out there for some of these teachers, or language teachers, to get together all their experience and qualifications and do all the necessary paperwork. That is often because of where they are and where the support services are.

Mr PAECH: This legislation will change the wording in the authority-to-teach process. The legislation currently states that if an unregistered person is not proficient in English, they may be granted an authority to teach if teaching a First Nations language. The Bill states that if an unregistered person is not proficient in English, they may be granted an authority to teach if they are teaching a language other than English. This means they may be granted to teach Aboriginal languages. Do you think that this change will have a material effect on the schools within the network of independent Aboriginal community-controlled schools?

Mr SMITH: I read the document and my first overriding emotion was that the devil is in the detail. I hope that any decision-making in regard to Aboriginal staff and teaching of language within the school was a decision made at the local level. I hope that helps.

Mr PAECH: That is great, thank you. Do you think that these changes around the language and the ability to teach with the authority will provide a greater avenue for employment in remote Aboriginal communities with local Aboriginal Territorians?

Mr SMITH: That was my fear. I felt that if the right structure and people making informed decisions were not in place—we have to look at the vast language groups out there—then it could hinder employment of local staff.

Mr PAECH: In the legislation as it is proposed, the lowering component, do you think that might potentially allow for greater participation of Aboriginal Territorians in the school workforce?

Mr SMITH: My educated guess would be that it would help with the initial employment, but I am one for equality. At the moment, from my personal perspective, a good team is a teacher and an assistant teacher and using the strengths of both, but we want to see more qualified teachers from the local community. Those next steps are that there needs to be support in place for those local people to get through their qualifications.

Mr PAECH: Initially this will help with gaining employment in the school, but other pathways like the RATE program need to be resourced to be viable pathways into being an educator.

Mr SMITH: Absolutely.

Mrs ZIO: Earlier you talked about ensuring safety in schools for children, and that should be the top priority no matter what. There have been other people submitting feedback in relation to this saying that alternative pathways for teachers of language be designed—I think the Member for Gwoja was adhering to this line of questioning.

If we were to change that to enable teachers of foreign languages to do that and maybe lower the requirement of the authority to teach, do you think that would have an impact on the safety of children in our classrooms, making sure there are advantages and disadvantages for kids? How do we manage that if we lower the threshold to allow people to come in? For example, Aboriginal teachers from community come in and help teach Aboriginal languages. How do we ensure that the safety of children is still there as that is our top priority?

Mr SMITH: There is still the working with children check that should be done, and I think that just needs to be clearly articulated in any government documents that go out with this.

Mrs ZIO: Just expanding on that a little bit, obviously an ochre card or a working with children card covers off on any criminal activity that may be present in the history of a teacher or a person who wants to work in a school or with children. It does not assist in managing behaviours in a classroom. That is different. If you go into a classroom, you have kids behaving in different ways and you have to be able to manage that. You need the skills and expertise to manage that so that you do not manhandle a child. If we lower the threshold for people to come into classrooms to deliver that sort of stuff, I have some concerns that the safety of children in that aspect would be at risk. Do you have any further advice on that one?

Mr SMITH: That is where the local decision-making is imperative. Especially in remote community schools, then if you are doing your job well as a leader of a school in a remote community, you know the community very well and will know from word of mouth if there are any concerns about people coming in. Sometimes legislation does not cover off on all the idiosyncrasies of people out there. As we have seen in capital cities and early learning centres and so forth, people get through. As legislators, we need to ensure that we can share information and do whatever we can possibly do to vet people in an appropriate way. After that, people like principals have a duty of care for the kids, so if someone is acting inappropriately they should not be at the school.

Ms SALTER: Can I answer that?

Madam CHAIR: Yes, go for it.

Ms SALTER: Within our independent schools, when authority-to-teach teachers go in there, they do provide for mentors and the principal has oversight of those teachers, so there is an expectation that those teachers—or those authority-to-teach teachers—are supported. It is a bit like having a graduate teacher. The same rules apply.

Mrs ZIO: I guess my concerns are that we have some community schools where we have longevity within the staffing in the school, with people staying there for quite a long time. We do have a lot of other community schools where the turnover is extremely high, so principals or leaders in that community may not have the knowledge or the ability to be able to make those determinations, so they have to use the community's knowledge to make sure. I guess my concerns are around that kind of environment where there is a high turnover of staff and not getting that opportunity to understand it, but I take on what you said; thank you.

Mr HOWE: Can you paint a picture for me of what Aboriginal teachers and the teaching of Aboriginal languages looks like? I understand the idea of a set lesson and a teacher who comes in for that. I am thinking of remote schools in this question. Does it extend to teachers' aides as you spoke of, and the helping of language throughout the day and translation? Can you paint a picture of how it looks?

Mr SMITH: I hope it is different depending on where you are and exactly what purpose there is of the schools. A personal example is when I first went to Tiwi College I was told that there was not to be any Tiwi spoken at all in the school. The board at that time felt that was the responsibility of parents and community. That changed over a period of five years. We introduced days where learning was done on country. That is where it was almost like a day of Tiwi.

There will be different structures depending on the mission of the school where there will be lessons. It could be the Aboriginal staff there interpreting or they will be teaching. At that time, the non-Aboriginal teacher might be then

providing a structure of how that is implemented. It really boils down to the mission of the school; whether it is done in on-country-type sessions, whether for a part day or a whole day, an excursion that lasts overnight or structured-type lessons in schools—a bilingual-type approach.

Mr PAECH: When we have language speakers in schools, is there a process where they are considered? What is the relationship with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, or are they NAATI qualified? Obviously, language is constantly moving and evolving, so is there a process in place to work with the person who is engaged in the school about what or how many languages and the level of languages they are at?

Mr SMITH: I do not have enough information to give you an accurate answer on that one.

Madam CHAIR: Can we take that one on notice? Is that possible?

Mrs ZIO: I think that might be for the Education department.

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to ask that during the Education department's session?

Mr PAECH: Yes, of course. Thank you.

J DAVIS: I want to follow up on the questions that Laurie was asking about child safety. What you explained in that discussion is that it is important to draw on local expertise and knowledge to make sure that what is happening in the classroom is safe. Do you have any thoughts about this Bill and whether there is anything that could be part of the Bill that could strengthen that? Is that the role of legislation? Obviously, child safety is everybody's priority.

Mr SMITH: There is an opportunity to have an explicit process as part of an induction for new staff. If there is something clearly stated then it gives principals greater power if there is something wrong to act on that immediately.

Ms SALTER: We are also regulated by the registration standards. They are pretty thorough and fairly new. The child safety principles are embedded in that. Every year, school boards are to tick off and make sure that they are meeting all those requirements. Our schools go through a routine assessment every five years.

The short answer is I am not sure that anything else in the Bill may strengthen that. For independent schools that may be different to government schools.

J DAVIS: With the concerns that Laurie was raising about this potentially creating risk—I know you have talked about it, but I want to be clear. Do you see the Bill creating risk around child safety?

Ms SALTER: No, I do not.

Mrs ZIO: In the Bill there is a transition period for early childhood teachers to register for 12 months. Do you see any issues in that transition period or do you think 12 months is a good timeframe for people to transition to this new process?

Ms SALTER: I believe so. I think it is. I am thinking of our early childhood people within our sector, and they have their teaching qualifications.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Cheryl and Ian, for coming before the committee.

The committee suspended.

Independent Education Union Queensland and Northern Territory Branch

Madam CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome Adele Schmidt via videoconferencing to give evidence to the public hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Adele Schmidt is from the Independent Education Union Queensland and Northern Territory Branch. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website, and a transcript will be made for the use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms SCHMIDT: Thank you, committee members and Chair, for the invitation to attend this morning. My name is Adele Schmidt and I am the senior research officer with the Independent Education Union Queensland and Northern Territory Branch.

Madam CHAIR: My name is Oly Carlson, the Member for Wanguri, and I am the Chair. To my left is the Member for Drysdale, Member for Fannie Bay and Member for Johnston. Online is the Member for Gwoja.

Ms Schmidt, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms SCHMIDT: Thank you, committee members and Chair, for the invitation to attend this morning's hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

The background of our union is that we represent around 16,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory. We consistently engage in industrial and education debate at both state and national levels through our education and industrial committees and through our nation counterpart, the IEUA, which receives input from teachers from all states and territories. Our members work in kindergartens, schools and post-secondary institutions and work with students from a wide variety of backgrounds in a wide variety of sociocultural contexts.

Regarding the Bill that is the subject of today's hearing, we indicate our broad support for two elements. One is the improvement of information sharing with teacher registration authorities in other jurisdictions as we believe this would be an enhancement to child safety and the other is the establishment of a registration scheme for early childhood teachers.

In relation to the second initiative, we draw attention to our union's earlier submission in response to the Early Childhood Teacher Registration in the Northern Territory discussion paper, released by the Northern Territory Government in 2024.

In that submission we indicated our position was that a single category model of ECT registration was our preferred option on the grounds that model recognises the legitimacy of Birth–5 as a specialist teaching context but preserves the integrity of accreditation processes for initial teacher education programs that prepare teachers to work with school-age cohorts.

In that submission we suggested a modification be made to the model to allow only provisional registration in the first instance with a requirement for further qualifications in order to progress to full registration. We would seek clarification that the intention of the Bill is to recognise Birth–5 qualifications as recognised by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority requiring further study to meet the practicum and literacy and numeracy teaching requirements of initial teacher education programs for teachers who intend to work in school settings.

In relation to amendments pertaining to registration requirements, our chief concern regarding changes to section 30 is that this opens up the possibility of a further erosion of initial teacher education requirements and specifically the duration of programs, noting that Western Australia has reintroduced the one-year graduate diploma and that program has been challenged by several jurisdictions, including Victoria and Queensland. Our position is that the recognised national framework for initial teacher education program accreditation has been established for some time following a significant period of national consultation, and an erosion of those standards should not be accepted by the profession.

In relation to the use of authority-to-teach provisions in the Act, we note that the proposed amendments are explained in terms of enabling those with relevant experience and expertise in First Nations languages and vocational education and training to more easily and consistently work across schools.

In relation to First Nations languages in particular, we inform the committee that our union's Yubbah Action Group, which is our First Nations advisory group, has a position that the use of alternative authority or permission to teach provisions is not an adequate nor appropriate long-term solution to meeting the need.

To recognise the professional skills and knowledge required to deliver First Nations language and culture instructions, our Yubbah group has worked collaboratively with other unions, as well as the Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee and First Languages Australia, to develop a set of industrial guidelines that specify appropriate professional wages and conditions.

We have previously provided a copy of this document to the NT Department of Education and Training and can provide a copy to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. That document makes it clear that any framework for registration of First Nations language teachers must be based on a recognition that First Nations language work is inextricably connected to local cultures and peoples, and it requires connections to local communities and country.

First Nations language work is a professional undertaking that requires significant knowledge, skills and experience, and there are currently few, if any, formal qualifications in First Nations languages. Even where these exist, local individuals in communities may not view these as prerequisites to teach language and culture in schools.

Based on advice from our Yubba Action Group, our position is that state, territory and federal governments and teacher registration authorities should engage in consultation with First Nations communities to determine how to approach regulation in this sector. We believe that similar consultation regarding how to enable VET practitioners to transition to school teaching contexts would also be beneficial.

Mr HOWE: Thank you for your submission. I fully understand your position with the upholding the profession and the concerns there. I noticed you said that there is some work that you were doing with your own advisory boards on how it can look. Could you expand on any of that?

Ms SCHMIDT: Are you talking specifically about First Nations language teaching?

Mr HOWE: Yes.

Ms SCHMIDT: We have had a very active First Nations advisory group for more than a decade now. That group has been part of projects. When the group first started, there was some talk around language and culture education, and the group came at the project in the first instance thinking, 'How can we improve access for kids so they can access education in their first language?'

That led to a workshop where we looked at what was happening in schools. One of the things that we uncovered was that there is a tendency for employers to enable that work through casual engagements, or less professional engagements, so we developed the first phase of the project to develop some industrial guidelines that set out pay and conditions that should be provided to the workers so they are recognised as undertaking professional work, because it is professional work.

The second stream of work that the committee has been involved in, the other action group, is talking to the Queensland College of Teachers about registration and some of the complexities in regard to registration. The Queensland College of Teachers has recently established the First Nations reference group, and this matter has been placed on the agenda by our representatives on that committee, so we have First Nations members who are representatives on the Queensland College of Teachers.

It is early stages, and I cannot report on what has been discussed in those meetings without possibly breaching our obligations, but it is early. There are some discussions that permission to teach and authority to teach, as they are used in those contexts, is not a sufficient recognition of the professionalism that is required to do the work. There is tension, bearing in mind the need for connection to community, because the people do not want to see just anyone turning up at the school and teaching language without permission and connection to their community, because that highlights cultural protocols. It is still early days and not much to report, but consultation is the key to finding the solution that will work.

Mr HOWE: We heard from a previous witness that they hope to see the local decision-making on that. Would you agree with that?

Ms SCHMIDT: Absolutely.

Mr PAECH: In your opening statement you spoke about the mutual recognition scheme, which I am aware will lapse in 2027, and teachers from that date will be able to use the automatic recognition scheme to teach in the Territory on the basis of their home registration without need for NT registration. Can you speak in a bit more in detail about your concerns? In your opening statement you spoke about the one-year graduate diploma program in Western Australia. What issues do you see will arise from that and are there any mitigating issues that we could look into or address?

Ms SCHMIDT: I can explain our chief concern is that we believe teaching is rightfully a regulated profession, and that there should be a professional benchmark for entry into the profession that takes into account the complexity and intensity of the job as it happens in contemporary schools, and that complexity and intensity will not alleviate. It is becoming more apparent every day—the complexity and intensity of teachers' work—and the framework for recognition of initial teacher education programs or accreditation of programs was established after a long period of national consultation and agreement among the jurisdictions about the fundamental requirements of teacher education programs. To have any dilution of that, the significant problem with that is that you are not preparing the beginning teacher for the complexity and intensity of the work that they will undertake.

While we understand the pressure for shorter programs is linked to workforce requirements or shortages, you are not solving those workforce shortages if you are preparing people for a short, sharp burst of intense work in the profession, but then they are not prepared or supported during the early years in the profession and they leave the profession anyway. We believe that the longer duration of the program provides better time allocation to prepare teachers for long, successful engagement with the profession.

Mr PAECH: One of our previous witnesses spoke about how this change with the authority to teach with language speakers might initially increase Indigenous employment in remote settings, but the need to have greater investment in alternative pathways to registration or people becoming teachers such as the RATE program are fundamentally important. Is that the similar view that the union shares?

Ms SCHMIDT: Yes. We do not have a definitive position on what the solution is. That is certainly not my place. I am the officer who provides support to our other action committees and I am privy to their conversations, but they are not in a position where they are advocating a particular response. They would just like to see broad discussion and engagement with community to actually devise or arrive at agreed parameters about it.

There is a recognition that working with children's safety is always a number one priority, and that should not be compromised in any way, but there is a need to recognise—even when we were talking about the one new graduate diploma from Western Australia—we are concerned about preparation. We also believe that there is, in this context, a need to recognise the full complexity of what a First Nations language and culture educator would bring to a school and that there are better ways than making use of something that was not built for that purpose.

Mr PAECH: Great. Following on from that, are there any particular classes of education workers that you believe should have a bespoke pathway for registration?

Ms SCHMIDT: I managed to hear a bit of the comments about the community and how assistant teachers are used in some of our jurisdictions. We believe they are used effectively. I heard that comment from the previous speakers.

We would support pathways that enabled them to transition into full teacher registration, recognising also that we have heard from some of our First Nations members that they do not necessarily want to be registered teachers with the teacher registration authority; they just want to teach their language and culture, which highlights the complexity of the situation and why there perhaps needs to be more consultation and discussion and less reliance on things that were not built for purpose.

Mr PAECH: Were you involved in any consultation in relation to this Bill?

Ms SCHMIDT: Elements of it, yes. We have not had a meeting to discuss the draft. As I said, we provided a submission in relation to the early childhood teacher registration amendment in 2024. To my knowledge, that is the extent of our consultation in relation to it. I am happy to be corrected if there is one that I am missing.

Mr PAECH: That is okay. I will jump in and be cheeky, Madam Chair, with one more question. What is the union's formal position on the amalgamation of the Teacher Registration Board coming under the department of Education?

Ms SCHMIDT: I do not know that we actually have a formal position. I would like to consult with members to find out what they think about that. That is probably all I can say at this point.

Mr PAECH: No worries, thank you.

Mrs ZIO: I have a question about the union's position. Obviously, the union supports and works with teachers to manage overworking and understaffing and all that kind of stuff—not to manage it, but you work with teachers on those grounds. Implementing Aboriginal first languages in schools is obviously really tough. There are so many different languages, and there can often be different languages in one community, so it is really tough to get people who can actually teach the language in community.

What is the union's position on the school's responsibility and the family and parental responsibility in that space, given we have overworked staff, shortages and adding that into the school's responsibility on top of what they already have in relation to the Australian curriculum?

Ms SCHMIDT: I do not think we can say anything about parental responsibility at all; it is not really our purview. Early in the initiation of our Yubbah Action Group—which is our First Nations advisory committee, as I mentioned before—we would often be approached by teachers in schools who wanted to do something in the space who would come to us and ask for some resources. The issue for us was that we did not feel that was appropriate, so the advice from the Yubbah Action Group was that it was not appropriate, and that what we should be doing is supporting and encouraging teachers to actually make connections with their local communities and have those conversations themselves in community to work out what would work in that context in their school with a particular cohort of kids.

Obviously, we cannot provide that level of support, but we would support—if anyone were brave enough to bring it in—the provision of time for teachers to actually engage in that work or appoint staff in schools who could actually facilitate that work and liaise between the community and school. That is a unique set of skills as well. I think in that context, what we are highlighting is something that we may not in relation to this submission but certainly on a federal level—and it varies in our various branches, the amount of un-resourced work that is asked of people in schools, not just teachers but support workers. It is like, 'Someone has to do it; can you just do it,' but that is not actually their role description and not their position; there is no-one who has that designated job; it happens if the person has the energy and can find the capacity to actually do it. We believe a better model would be if it was actually resourced in schools.

Mrs ZIO: Thank you. On that line, if we were to bring in a different level of authority to teach, if we were to bring in a different level for people to teach Aboriginal language in schools—we talked previously, and you might have heard it with the previous witnesses, about the safety of the child. I just wonder what your perspective is on lowering that ability. We talked about having a working with children clearance notice which covers the criminal side of the ability to teach. Being able to manage—I think you touched on it a little bit; I would like you to expand a bit. If you have people who

have a lower level of qualification required, given that teaching is a regulated profession—if you have people who have a lower level of requirements, do you think that puts at risk the ability to manage different children in that space and make sure that the child's safety is the first priority? Does that make sense?

Ms SCHMIDT: Yes, it does. What it highlights to me, listening to your question, is the position we articulated earlier that use of authority to teach—or permission to teach, as it is called in other jurisdictions—is not the appropriate solution. We believe you could manage the child safety requirements through the working with children checks or some alternative. I do not know what it is. As I said, I am not in a position to say that.

It would have to be determined through consultation with community about how to actually facilitate and enable quality language instruction in schools, and it happens. There are case studies of schools where it is happening at a very high level, very good quality—and finding out a bit more about how that works and what you could take from the authority-to-teach model that works well but what bits you would need to make a more bespoke solution, I guess.

J DAVIS: You touched on this briefly when Chansey asked about some of the governance issues. You noted in your submission that you were concerned that the proposed structure might compromise the independence of the Teacher Registration Board. I wonder whether you want to comment on that any further.

Ms SCHMIDT: The comment I would make is around the timeframe that we were given for review of the Bill. Realistically, to give good fulsome feedback on a change of that nature, we would ideally take the draft Bill to our education committee and scrutinise and have some conversation and go through our branch executive, but we have not had time to go through that process so I am reluctant to make any comment that would then be on the record without instructions from members.

Madam CHAIR: If there are no further questions, thank you, Ms Schmidt, for coming before the committee, for your submission and your time today.

The committee suspended.

NT Christian Schools

Madam CHAIR: Good morning. On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Alice Mustin and Phillip Leslie. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing which is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please each state your name and capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms MUSTIN: Alice Mustin, CEO of NT Christian Schools.

Mr LESLIE: Phillip Leslie. I was previously the CEO of NT Christian Schools until July.

Madam CHAIR: I am the Member for Wanguri, the Chair. We have the Member for Drysdale, Member for Fannie Bay and Member for Johnston. Online is the Member for Gwoja.

Ms Mustin, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms MUSTIN: Yes. Firstly, thank you, Chair and the committee, for the opportunity to speak to this legislation and operation of the education system.

To give you our context, we are a system of seven campuses stretched across the NT. We have three schools in Darwin, one school in Alice Springs, one in Nhulunbuy and one remote homeland school on Elcho Island. We also have NT Christian College as a senior secondary provider across these schools. We have an Indigenous boarding school at Marrara Christian College and we operate three early learning centres in our Darwin schools.

This is important legislation. I begin by commending the government for the speed and responsiveness shown in progressing these reforms. At a time when we face nationwide teacher shortages, these amendments demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting teachers, ensuring quality education and improving outcomes for every student across the Territory so that students are job-ready and they can be prepared to go on for further training or study.

I really appreciate how collaborative the education sector is, and that NT Christian Schools has been engaged through membership of Non-Government Schools Ministerial Advisory Committee, known as NGSMAC. We worked on the standards for non-government schools, which was well and collaboratively led by the government and Education. We have a strong relationship with our registrar and the CE of the department of Education. NT Christian Schools has also had input into teacher registration through membership of the employer reference group of the TRB. We appreciate the interest of Minister Hersey and her office in non-government school education.

NT Christian Schools supports the majority of the proposed reforms in the Bill and commends the government for the commitment to child safety, workforce flexibility and seeking to maintain high professional standards across the teaching sector. We support the passage of this Bill with some suggested amendments to strengthen governance, independence and uphold teacher quality. We strongly support these key areas: firstly, the strengthening of child safety through improved information sharing between jurisdictions and regulatory authorities; secondly, the introduction of mandatory registration for early childhood teachers by 2026; thirdly, reforms that promote teacher mobility between jurisdictions and support flexible sharing arrangements across schools and early childhood services; and, fourthly, the recognition of Aboriginal languages as specialist teaching areas.

We commend the inclusion of Aboriginal languages as a specialist registration area. This change strengthens pathways for Aboriginal educators and supports culturally responsive education, particularly important at Gawa Christian School and our Indigenous family group home boarding program.

At Gawa Christian School we have eight Indigenous team teachers, three of whom have been teaching consistently. They are in a permanent role. I have their years of service: one has been serving in the school for 21 years; another for 11 years; and another for seven years. It has truly been beautiful to watch this program develop together with a team teacher and a teacher they plan, teach and report in English and Warramiri languages. They support genuine two-way language learning, and this relationship has been strengthened over time.

One team teacher has expressed interest in becoming a fully registered teacher. We would like to see more culturally appropriate pathways and flexibility to support Aboriginal educators progressing toward full registration. We support the administrative changes aimed at improving efficiency and reducing red tape, such as aligning registration renewal dates under the board's discretion.

Our first area of concern relates to the structure and independence of the Teacher Registration Board. Generally, it would be good practice for regulatory functions such as the Teacher Registration Board to sit with a standalone agency. Currently, Western Australia and NT maintains an arm's length model within the department. All other jurisdictions operate through independent authorities.

Since our submission we have been advised by our registrar that establishing a fully independent authority outside the Department of Education and Training is not financially sustainable or viable at this point in time. We recognise that full independence remains the ideal model for the future should resources become available.

In the meantime, we must ensure that within this arm's length model, proposed perceived an actual conflicts of interest are well managed. The person in charge will be under instruction from the board but performance assessed by the CEO of Education, who is the largest employer of teachers in the NT. If not managed well, this arrangement may present difficulties for both parties. However, we note, that the registrar of independent schools already operates effectively under a similar structure.

In that case, success has been due in part to the quality of the people involved, but the arrangement must also be robust enough to endure personnel changes. We accept that as provided for in this legislation an arm's length model can operate effectively if governance safeguards are strong. Our concern is future focused to establish a structure that ensures strong governance and independence for the long-term.

Recommendations are that we strengthen those provisions to ensure operational independence; clarify the directors reporting and accountability arrangements to uphold impartiality between the board's statutory role and departmental management, which we believe this legislation is trying to outline; and align future legislative reviews with the ongoing regulatory model review across education quality bodies, which is currently taking place.

Our second key area of comment relates to English language proficiency requirements. We recognise and appreciate the Bill's intention to give the TRB greater flexibility in determining acceptable evidence of English proficiency, including the use of alternative tests or discretion regarding teacher experience in English speaking countries. With the ongoing national teacher shortage, we have relied heavily on internationally recruited teachers to fill vacancies, particularly in regional and remote areas. Given the high volume of international applications, we are reliant on the TRB to ensure national consistency in standards and professional expectations.

On the one hand, we welcome this flexibility. We have had applicants who have appeared proficient in English but have been unable to complete the formal International English Language Testing System (IELTS) process successfully and in those cases the ability for the board to make discretionary judgements would be valuable. However, clause 23, which deals with the competence to teach, raises some concerns around the wording around English language capability.

We acknowledge that the current approach relying solely on rigid and approved tests can sometimes be too inflexible. That said, the proposed reading in the Bill risks going too far the other way. As it stands, it could allow for interpretations that are too loose, opening the door for registrations to be approved for applicants who many not actually meet the practical standards for English required. For that reason we support the principle of flexibility, but we recommend that it be exercised with clear evidence-based benchmarks consistent with the AITSL national framework and accompanied by transparent guidelines.

Improving literacy remains a key improvement area across the Territory and maintaining strong communication standards is central to achieving better outcomes and closing the education gap for the students in our care.

In closing, I want to again commend the government and committee for bringing forward these timely reforms. NT Christian Schools welcomes the Bill's intent to improve child safety, support teacher mobility and uphold professional standards. While we support the passage of this Bill we continue to advocate for strong governance structures, independent oversight and high-quality teaching standards that will sustain excellence across Northern Territory education into the future.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Mustin, for your opening statement and your submission. I will now open the floor for questions.

Mr HOWE: Thank you for your submission. I will just come back to the last part of your statement around clause 23 because I think we have heard from every witness now this is a balancing act and that it is very fine. I believe you are the first to provide something to actually follow it up with. Can you speak in a bit more detail to what you would like to see so that we are enabling the language learning? One of the witnesses I think did speak to making sure it is very local decision-making on that. If you could, provide more detail around how we can get that balance right in the legislation.

Ms MUSTIN: Yes, I think the concern in the legislation was in the explanatory notes which gave in subregulation (5):

... will enable the Board to consider other matters or circumstances that the Board considers relevant as evidence
...

As long as the board can be really transparent in those guidelines and that they post up the different tests, but to have it align with the national framework and to be transparent in those decisions so that we can have equity.

J DAVIS: Thank you for coming today and for your very clear opening statement; that was helpful. Were you involved in any consultation processes as part of this Bill development?

Ms MUSTIN: No, we were not involved in this process.

J DAVIS: I just want to talk a little bit about the governance concerns that you have raised. What are your explicit concerns about the proposed new governance arrangements?

Ms MUSTIN: I think it was making sure that there is clear reporting and accountability arrangements. When I wrote this submission it was about looking at what the best model is for the future, and we were invited to speak into that as part a reference group. The hope was that we could actually have a standalone agency, so it was not coming from any particular concerns at this point, but looking at an arms-length model, the concerns around reporting and accountability arrangements, to make sure that is clearly defined, which I believe the Bill is trying to do.

Mr LESLIE: Critical is the relationship between the CE of Education and the director of this area when the director is taking their work advice and is responsible statutorily through the board, but then gets performance assessed by the CE of Education. That has to be really well managed, which I am sure the CE of Education could do, but it is difficult when that person is responsible for regulating the teachers coming into the Education department. They are the biggest employer of teachers, yet the CE of that area is essentially doing your performance review. That has to be managed really well.

As Alice said, that happens at the moment with the registrar of independent schools, so it is the same sort of model that is coming up. It works right at the moment and it just needs to be kept in balance so that there is not a conflict that ensues between that, especially when you are working to a board but then being assessed by someone else.

J DAVIS: In terms of looking at this Bill and how it could work best to achieve—as you said, you support the intent of the Bill. Can you see anything that could happen in this Bill to address that concern?

Ms MUSTIN: I am not sure. In this Bill, I think they have tried to put the safeguards in place in this arm's length model. While we have an arms-length model, it will be difficult to have the confidence that we hope for.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, do you have any questions?

Mr PAECH: Not at this stage. It was a comprehensive opening statement.

Mrs ZIO: Noting your concerns in the submission and as you have talked about today in relation to that relationship with the TRB and the Department of Education and Training, do you think that there are any positives regarding that being a closer relationship and working together? Is there anything you can provide in relation to that being a good outcome?

Ms MUSTIN: Possibly streamlining processes, understanding the needs in the teacher workforce. I noted at the start that we work collaboratively and hope for more collaboration between regulatory bodies and the Department of Education and Training. Perhaps streamlining and understanding the workforce and support for teachers will assist.

Mrs ZIO: Thank you. Now, moving on to a question that I have kept in my line of questioning in relation to other witnesses who have attended today, child safety is at the forefront of everything that we do to make sure children are our number one priority. Do you have any information that you could provide on what your position is in relation to—I note that you said that at Gawa you have Aboriginal language teachers and it has been working for a very long time—are they fully registered teachers?

Ms MUSTIN: They are team teachers. It has been that new category from teaching assistants. They are not fully registered teachers.

Mrs ZIO: How is that working in those communities in relation to the safety of the child? Do you have appropriate mechanisms in place to make sure that the people who do that team teaching—they have been there for quite a while. You have longevity in that, which is amazing. How has that worked on the community perspective? Have you had incidents in the schools in relation to the safety of a child?

Ms MUSTIN: The success of the Gawa community has been the longstanding staff that are there. The community makes decisions as to who is coming in and being a teacher in that space, and even who amongst the community is in that classroom. The community makes the decisions in that space. It is very protective of its students and the safety of the students.

We do all our normal processes like teacher training and abiding by child-safe practices. They meet their training schedules in regard to the child safety regulations that we adhere to. They do training at the start of each year about appropriate relationship practices and mandatory reporting. They do that in two-way language. They go through the principal, who is amazing. She translates everything and does the mandatory reporting training and even the risk assessments before excursions. They are very diligent in protecting their students.

In terms of what I have seen at Gawa, there are no concerns about the team teachers. They are probably making the place a safe environment because of the way they are conducting and their part in planning the practice in the classroom. They know these students so well and live with them in the community.

Mrs ZIO: That is good to hear. Stepping along the process, we have a system at the moment where teachers who are overworked and feeling the burden of the work they have to do in relation to the Australian curriculum and then some additional things along the lines of Aboriginal languages. There is flexibility in the Australian curriculum to be able to do learning on country and things like that to work it into the curriculum in the school and the context of the community. What is NT Christian Schools' position on managing the Australian curriculum and the additional burden and staff burnout in relation to that?

Ms MUSTIN: In relation to the language?

Mrs ZIO: Having that additional load and working with teachers and the Aboriginal language teachers in schools.

Ms MUSTIN: Gawa is definitely very different from our mainstream schools in terms of workload and burden. In Gawa the actual foundation is their vision for right learning comes first and the curriculum is part of the literacy programs that are engaged and entwined in that, so they would not see that as a burden. The way they look at what they are teaching is holistic on country in that space, so this is not adding an additional burden; they see that is putting language in the right place of how it should be taught and becomes their everyday practice.

In terms of our Darwin-based schools it is always a juggle of priorities, and making space for language learning should be part of what we do, particularly in the NT. I think there will always be burdens and competing priorities, but how we look at what is important and make space for what we value for the future are the decisions we need to make.

Have I answered your question?

Mrs ZIO: Yes, thank you.

To follow on from that, does that have an impact on literacy and numeracy? Does it flow over or does it work together?

Ms MUSTIN: I wish I could maybe give you a glimpse into the classrooms there. It is naturally weaved in, so they still have their literacy blocks that they do but then they do certain parts where they are focused on different dialect language learning, they are also doing it in two-way with the team teacher up-front. They are part of the planning of what they are going to teach that day in line with what the students need and what their interests are, so it is very much not

something that is extra or they are missing out on literacy. They see that learning is through modelling and the teacher is the one that they follow and so how our Indigenous teachers teach is learning at the right time and that the students follow. They will decide whether something needs to be focused on for literacy or not. I really welcome you to come and visit.

Mrs ZIO: I would love to.

My final question is around the ECTs (early childhood teachers) and their registration. That 12-month transition period, do you think that is a sufficient time to bring that online?

Ms MUSTIN: We already register our early childhood teachers. They are all fully registered in our early learning centres and have teacher conditions, so for us this is not an issue.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Mustin and Mr Leslie, for coming before the committee and thank you for your submission.

The committee suspended.

Northern Territory Principals' Association

Madam CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Leah Crockford. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time from your busy schedule to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing which is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for the use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms CROCKFORD: Good morning, everybody. My name is Leah Crockford. I am here in the capacity of representation for the Northern Territory Principals' Association. I am also Principal of Leanyer Primary School.

Madam CHAIR: My name is Oly Carlson. I am the Member for Wanguri and the Chair. To my left is the Deputy Chair, the Member for Drysdale, and the Member for Fannie Bay. To my right is the Member for Johnston. Online we have the Member for Gwoja.

Ms Crockford, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms CROCKFORD: Yes. First, the Northern Territory Principals' Association welcomes and appreciates the opportunity to speak about this Bill. We represent leaders across the Northern Territory from urban to very remote. Throughout this Bill we see the good intentions and that it is an important process—a step forward—for the profession; however, there is some finer detail that we would like to explore.

Madam CHAIR: I open the floor for some questions. I will go first. Were you involved in any consultation process relating to the development of this Bill?

Ms CROCKFORD: Yes, I was part of the consultation process. The Northern Territory Principals' Association executive put out for feedback from its members. It also met directly in chapters with its members. Across those chapters, they were asked to provide feedback to the executive. The executive then compiled that feedback ready to present. My understanding is that there was a letter written to the Legislative Assembly from Carolyn Edwards, President of the Northern Territory Principals' Association.

Mrs ZIO: The Northern Territory Principals' Association has some concerns or questions around the ECT specialist category. Could you provide a bit more information around the concerns from the NTPA regarding that?

Ms CROCKFORD: Firstly, I acknowledge that all early childhood educators, with the qualifications that they have, are very important and contribute to the care and education of young children. However, when you look at the training of particularly zero to five and when they move from Certificate III to maybe a diploma, in that qualification, there is no training in the Australian curriculum. It is all focused on the early years learning framework. Therefore, there would be some concern around people who would be registered in the Northern Territory as a teacher and not have equivalent qualifications.

Mrs ZIO: Also, in your submission, you have provided advice regarding the transition period for ECT to become recognised. The people we have listened to today and who have been witnesses for us—when we have asked the question, nobody has had any issues with that 12-month transition process. The NTPA has indicated that, specifically in remote areas, there might be some constraints on ECT being registered. Can you provide a bit more information regarding that position for the NTPA?

Ms CROCKFORD: It depends on which category. If these teachers will directly be registered as a fully registered teacher and not as a defined and distinct category, there could be some significant issues regarding the capacity of that person and the complexity that they will move into if they are in a primary setting, for example. How do they navigate—particularly teaching in a transition class—the skills and expertise that they need to fully function as a teacher in that space?

Mentoring et cetera is always important, but we need a base skill and understanding of teachers going into that space. How do they align their qualifications and understandings with the AITSL standards? Where does that sit? It is the process of registration. The NTPA is certainly fully supportive of where the Legislative Assembly wants to move. We know that there are mobility and recruitment issues and that they can be addressed. How we make sure this is consistent with one registration—simply because we know that state by state that changes.

The other question is, how do we ensure that this Bill aligns with the ACECQA. For example, there are clearly some qualified people currently—I can provide a specific example where you have a fully trained primary teacher, and they are not in early childhood or an early childhood-trained teacher; however, they have gone and done a Master of Child Play Therapy through Deakin University, which is all about child development. They are not able then to be registered or qualified to teach in a preschool setting. There are some questions there.

How do we as a jurisdiction actually have those conversations at the national level with ACECQA, because they are the laws and regulations. Do they intercept? Does this Bill intercept with the qualifications required of early childhood teachers? On the same hand, you can say that somebody who has done a Cert III for 12 months and then a diploma of Early Childhood for 12 months—so they are two-year trained, essentially—can go and work in an early childhood setting. But then you have somebody who has done the equivalent of six-plus years with a master's degree that is not qualified. There are some discrepancies in the qualifications.

Mrs ZIO: Thank you. Jumping onto the TRB changes and that potentially moving underneath the department of Education, do you think that there are some improvements that could happen from that relationship being a bit tighter in the space that you were talking about there, with the conversations that can happen around what those training requirements need? Are there any productive and really good things that could come from the TRB falling under the department of Education?

Ms CROCKFORD: I think there will always be positives, but then there are always risks. The closer relationship is clearly a good thing; however, I have heard other speakers say that maybe if they are the largest employer of teachers, how do they then manage particularly teachers that may not be performing? There are clear examples historically of qualified teachers who are registered through the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board and they are employees of the department of Education, so you have the code of conduct under the public service PSEMA and then you have the registration requirements and that code of conduct. Sometimes that can get a little bit blurry as to who is responsible for what. I think there are advantages, but there are risks.

Mr PAECH: I am fairly comfortable with the deputation by the Principals' Association.

J DAVIS: Thank you for coming today. You talked briefly in your submission about the ministerial directions and board independence, and I think one of the things you talked about was preserving the board's independence from the minister and the director's influence from the agency. How would you see that could be captured in this legislation? How could we address that?

Ms CROCKFORD: I think, at the end of the day, the legislation needs to potentially look at the proposed changes around the registration framework and the explanatory statement may need to be a little bit more explicit. Does that answer your question?

J DAVIS: Yes. Could you talk to what you would like it to explicitly say?

Ms CROCKFORD: It is around ensuring that if a regulatory body is responsible and accountable to the profession, how do you separate that regulatory body to the employer? The employer has clear responsibilities around managing their teacher workforce which is separate to the registration component and there that could provide a little bit of muddy waters. How does the CE and the minister manage that piece when who are they—are they the employer or are they the regulator?

J DAVIS: Do you see particular risks associated with that?

Ms CROCKFORD: It is hard one, potentially. There is never a risk when things are going well, is there? No. It is when you get into potentially legal situations with teachers, individuals. How does that support the employer? It is separate work. It makes it very difficult for the employer to be able to manage as the employer and then be their regulator.

J DAVIS: Thank you for saying there is never a risk when things are going well because a part of our job is to ask what happens when things do not go well—is this law going to work in the way that it is intended to.

Mrs ZIO: There are examples like QECNT where it sits in the department of Education where there are examples of how a regulatory authority can work within the department to make that work. Do you think that there is an ability for it to work well if you have the surrounding legislative and policy and guidelines to be able to support—when something goes wrong, there is a process that you follow that is independent of the department of Education? Given that it works with QECNT at the moment ...

Ms CROCKFORD: That is an assumption.

Mrs ZIO: Well, yes. Well, no. I have worked in that space, so I know that it does operate well. Do you think that there is the ability with the supporting frameworks underneath it for it to be able to work?

Ms CROCKFORD: Of course. There is always the ability to make something work. It is whether, for example, QECNT are still not separate to ACECQA. They still have to abide by the national laws and regulations. My statement is whatever happens with this Bill, will it support—is there not going to be a contradiction between the Bill and the ACECQA requirements? There is a potential—for example, qualifications. The Northern Territory may amend the Bill, which is a good thing. We see the intent is fantastic; however, the qualifications that fall under this Bill, do they align with ACECQA, because if they do not there will be a contradiction.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Crockford, for coming before the committee today; I know you are a busy principal. Thank you also to the NTPA for providing a submission.

The committee suspended.

Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory

Madam CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Lisa Hirschhausen and Rachel Boyce. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

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Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing?

Ms BOYCE: Rachel Boyce, Board member of the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory.

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: Good morning. Lisa Hirschhausen, Acting Director of the Teacher Registration Board.

Madam CHAIR: My name is Oly Carlson and I am the Member for Wanguri and the Chair. To my left I have the Member of Drysdale and the Member for Fannie Bay and, to my right, the Member for Johnston. Online today we have the Member for Gwoja.

Ms Hirschhausen, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: We have an opening statement to be read by Rachel as a Board committee member.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Boyce.

Ms BOYCE: Thank you for the opportunity to represent the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory. We would like to extend the apologies of the Chair of the Board, Lorraine Hodgson. In her absence, Acting Director Lisa Hirschhausen and myself, Rachel Boyce, as a member of the Board are representing the Teacher Registration Board.

The Teacher Registration Board is an independent statutory authority entrusted with the vital responsibility of regulating the teaching profession within the Northern Territory. Our mandate is to ensure that only individuals who are fit and proper, appropriately qualified and competent are permitted to teach in our schools safeguarding both the wellbeing of our students and the integrity of the profession.

The board broadly supports the proposed amendments to the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004*. These changes are both timely and necessary to ensure the Act continues to fulfil its primary objective—protecting the quality and safety of teaching in the Northern Territory. In particular, the provisions that strengthen and streamline information sharing are aligned with national priorities. They will empower the board to share relevant data with teacher registration and regulatory authorities across jurisdictions, thereby enhancing our collective ability to prevent harm to children.

While the board acknowledges that the amendments provide greater clarity around roles and responsibilities, it would be remiss of us not to raise the significant concern regarding section 4—clause 6. Specifically, the board wishes to emphasise the importance of formally recognising the Teacher Registration Board as an independent statutory authority distinct from the department of Education. This distinction is critical to maintaining the integrity, impartiality and transparency of the board's regulatory functions.

We thank the committee for its careful consideration of these matters and remain committed to working collaboratively to uphold the high standards in education across the Northern Territory. Thank you.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Boyce. I will now open it up for questions.

J DAVIS: Thank you for coming today. Can you explain the current relationship between the Board, the department and the minister?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: As clarified in our opening statement, we do recognise that the changes that are being made are clarifications and that the relationship that currently exists has existed over a long period of time. That work, in terms of the director working very closely with the office, and obviously the work of the office is to provide the administrative and support for the board to make the regulatory decisions. We then have the Education department, which is a line manager of the director and has provided in the past, the financial, the staff and the support to be able to run both the operational and the regulatory functions of the board.

J DAVIS: How will this Bill change that relationship?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: Acknowledging in the statement that we do not believe that it is changing, it is actually about clarify that. We still felt it important that the board's concerns about the level and need for independence to be noted.

J DAVIS: I am interested in what your concerns are about that. What do you think the risk is if that independence is impacted?

Ms BOYCE: The Northern Territory Education department is one of three sectors within the education landscape in the Northern Territory. It is the biggest employer of Northern Territory teachers. We, as a board, feel it is important for that transparency for all teachers across the Territory to understand that the board's decisions—as the regulatory authority—are made independent of one of the three employers of teachers within the Northern Territory.

Mrs ZIO: Thanks for coming today. My question, as I led with the other witnesses, is about safety of children being the ultimate priority for the department of Education, schools and everybody.

In relation to different layers of qualifications and then registration potentially being part of this process, I am interested to know what the TRB's stance is in relation to whether or not there would be reduced security for children if we allow different layers of registration? Do you think there are risks to children's safety that will be highlighted through that process? For example, if we have different levels of registration for teachers of Aboriginal language coming in and not being fully registered as a teacher in the Northern Territory with an authority to teach, do you think that puts a risk on the classroom?

Everybody in the classroom has an Ochre Card or working with children clearance notice. Somebody with an authority to teach has skills in behaviour management and different complexities with each child. If we do not have that layer of security for different levels of registration, do you think that puts a risk on the safety in the classroom?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: We already have different categories and classifications in our registration. The board obviously takes child safety incredibly seriously. When looking at registrations—whether it is an authority to employ or a straight-out registration—it has a number of frameworks developed that they work within to ensure that decisions it makes are consistent and that child safety is at the centre of those decisions.

That might mean, for example, for someone who is not a qualified teacher—let's say a VET trainer who is employed under an authority to teach—there are different things set up to ensure that their professional learning is up to date and they have a mentor who works with them. Obviously, they are subject specialists for VET training but not necessarily a subject specialist for the development and learning of students. We put conditions associated with that in terms of making sure they are being mentored by someone who can support them in that process.

We put other things in place, for example, for a languages teacher, say, if they were to be involved in the playground for yard duty that they are not employed as a teacher so they would not be able to do that themselves; they would need to ensure that the mentor or teacher working with them is there at all times to ensure that safety happens.

Mr HOWE: I have a follow-on from that. It is out of general curiosity about how the different qualification levels and different pathways to registration work. What do we currently have?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: Generally there are about five different categories. If you are an educator with a correct qualification, you put in an application to be registered. There is a system then that the office follow in terms of ensuring that the qualifications are correct.

In the past with our legislation there are some qualifications that cannot be passed because they are older. We have three-year qualifications and those sorts of things, so historical qualifications. One of the things the amendment does is actually allows us to register those teachers who, in the past, have let their registration lapse for a period of time and are no longer eligible to be registered. Some of those qualifications do not go that far back. For example, with my qualification, if I was to let my registration lapse for two years, I would not be able to be registered again. The amendments in this process have now enabled those historical qualifications to be registered. That supports that work around the shortage of teachers. Perhaps some of those older teachers who would like to come back to the profession do have a pathway to come back.

We also have pathways for teachers who are perhaps just finishing off their final practicum. If a school needs extra support they are able to come under another qualification. Again, a mentor is provided for that teacher and they have conditions around their registration as an authority to teach and then they are able to teach. We also have our VET trainers around that piece of work.

We have pathways around mutual recognition. If you have been registered in another jurisdiction, including New Zealand, there is an opportunity for you to have a pathway into teaching in the Northern Territory through mutual recognition.

Does that answer your question? I am sorry; I took a roundabout way to do that.

Mr HOWE: Yes, it does. I was curious as to the different levels, so thank you.

J DAVIS: This is a follow-up from the questions from the Member for Fannie Bay. I want to be clear. Do you see any increased risk to children's safety as a result of these proposed changes?

Ms BOYCE: As the previous speaker said, there is never a risk when things are going well. There is nothing in this legislation that would enhance a risk. Risk is how you manage it. That would be for employers of teachers and educators to ensure that they are managing the risk at a school level. Then, if matters are escalated through to the board, they are handled in an appropriate way. Whenever we look at someone who has been referred to the board, it is through the lens of the safety of the young people in our schools. It is the only priority—how kids are being kept safe.

J DAVIS: That is at the other end if something has gone wrong. In terms of preventing things going wrong—please correct me if I am wrong—but I think your line of questioning is that potentially weakening the training that people need to have working in the classroom may put children at risk; is that correct? Is that what you ...

Mrs ZIO: Yes, but no. It is more around the qualification that people have. If I am somebody working in a remote community and I can speak in Aboriginal languages and I am not a teacher and do not have a teaching degree, but coming in and knowing that there is reduced capacity in some remote schools—there are overworked people, increased red tape around some things and lower staffing levels—potentially, I might be left in a classroom accidentally or on purpose with these kids and not have the skills to manage if there is an incident. I think there is ability to mitigate those risks.

My question relates to making sure the people who are employed to teach in a classroom, whether they have the authority to teach or permission to teach or whatever that looks like, have the skills to manage a classroom in the potential instance where they are left to do just that. Does that make sense?

J DAVIS: I am not totally sure. Education is not my area. I am wondering whether your question is about having—I will leave it. It is okay.

I want to have it clearly on the record whether you have any concerns, as the Teacher Registration Board, regarding these changes—building on what the Member for Fannie Bay said—and if you do, whether there is anything that we need to look at to mitigate them?

Ms BOYCE: Within the legislation, no. It is how it is lived out in a school. The schools that have teachers under an authority to teach and care for the teacher and care for the students, we will put the supports in place to ensure that teacher or that person with the authority to teach is supported in the school.

There may be instances where that does not always happen, but that is not about the legislation. That is about on the ground, in the school and the resources available to that school.

Mr PAECH: I have three questions. One is, what does lowering the English language proficiency requirement mean for the mutual recognition with other states and territories?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: My understanding is that it is about making things equal across the jurisdiction as opposed to necessarily lowering things. It enables us to have a look at some other tests. Like all things, the board has a framework in which they work in terms of mitigating the risks and making decisions. The framework that they are operating in would still be there.

I am also aware that the lowering of the English language proficiency is something that is being discussed on a national stage by all jurisdictions. We put in place that framework to make sure that we are consistent.

This change will also enable us, for example, to take into consideration the letters we get from principals who have been working with a teacher and have been working in a school setting. They have been able to identify through observations and working with the teacher that whilst perhaps they might not have met the standards in terms of the assessment, they still see they are able to teach and be understood by the students. The board takes that into consideration currently within the framework they have established.

Mr PAECH: I am trying to work through the rationale behind this proposed legislative change, other than financial. Have there been any matters, legislatively or operationally, at the Teacher Registration Board that have led to any kind of need for this legislative change?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: Yes, there is a number of operational matters that the changes in the legislation will support the board. Some examples of those include, currently, for an authorisation to employ a VET teacher or a languages teacher from our languages schools, they can only be employed for a year at a time and then they have to resubmit every year. That is an incredible burden on the applicant, the school and the teacher who are putting in the application. It is also a burden on the office in terms of putting all that paper together. In terms of operational one of the changes in the legislation is about allowing, for example, VET teachers to be able to apply for two years. That means that the burden on administration would only happen every second year.

Every time you do a new application you also have to have a police check. That is also a financial burden to those who are applying, so that check now would last for two years rather than one year. That is one example of the changes that we will be able to support: the administration of the office and its operations.

Mr PAECH: Of those changes that you have highlighted, did the Teacher Registration Board reach out prior to the introduction of this legislation for any of those changes?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: I understand there has been some long-term conversations around making changes to the legislation, yes.

Mr PAECH: Great. I am wanting to obtain from the Teacher Registration Board if there are views of concerns or loss of confidence when you potentially will have the regulator regulating itself?

Ms BOYCE: Yes, as we highlighted in our introduction. While we recognise that the legislation is providing greater clarity around the relationship between the Teacher Registration Board, the minister and the CE of Education, we strongly believe that there needs to be transparency and there needs to be impartiality for the Teacher Registration Board to make decisions that cannot be influenced by the department of Education.

Mr PAECH: Would it be right to say that you are concerned with clause 8 of the Bill, which seeks to insert a section giving the minister the power to give you, the Teacher Registration Board, written directions around your operations?

Ms BOYCE: Our concern would be more around clause 6, which is the relationship between the Teacher Registration Board and its ability to fulfil its functions, and the department of Education being the body that administers the performance management of the Director of the Teacher Registration Board.

Mr PAECH: Okay, does the Teacher Registration Board have issues with clause 8, which inserts a section allowing the minister to give the Teacher Registration Board written directions?

Ms BOYCE: I would have to take that question on notice. It is not something that we discussed at length at our last meeting. We spoke more about clause 6.

Mr PAECH: Thank you. Madam Chair, it would be good to take that on notice please.

Madam CHAIR: That is noted, so we will take that on notice. Any further questions, Member for Gwojra?

Mr PAECH: No, thank you.

Mrs ZIO: I have a quick question about the changes for early childhood teachers coming on board. Do you, the Teacher Registration Board, see that it would increase your workload and provide a burden, and do you have the capacity to

manage that burden? Additionally, are you confident that the 12-month transition timeframe is a suitable timeframe to transition that process?

Ms HIRSCHAUSEN: We have no issue at all with the registration of early childhood teachers. We have done some numbers about how many that will actually be. At this stage it is not a huge amount that we will be able to absolutely support operationally, and the office has already started work on putting together a plan to ensure we can meet the deadline. A lot of those things are things like application forms and putting those sorts of things together. We do not see any reason that we should not be able to reach those timeframes.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, can you please restate your question that needs to be taken on notice?

Mr PAECH: I am seeking the view and position of the Teacher Registration Board. Clause 8 of the Bill seeks to insert a new section providing the minister the power to give written directions to the Teacher Registration Board. Is that view supported by the Teacher Registration Board and how will it affect the operation and independence of the board?

Madam CHAIR: Ms Boyce, are you happy to take the Member for Gwoja's question on notice?

Ms BOYCE: We are happy to take it on notice.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Boyce and Ms Hirschhausen, for coming before the committee today and for providing evidence.

The committee suspended.

Department of Education and Training

Madam CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Susan Bowden, Tony Considine, Victoria Eastwood and Michelle Wright. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for the use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please each state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Ms BOWDEN: Good morning. Susan Bowden, Chief Executive, Department of Education and Training.

Mr CONSIDINE: Good morning. Tony Considine, Deputy Chief Executive, Strategic and Business Services, Department of Education and Training.

Ms EASTWOOD: Good morning. Victoria Eastwood, Senior Director, Strategic Policy, Department of Education and Training.

Ms WRIGHT: Good morning. Michelle Wright, Acting Director, Strategic Policy and Reform, Department of Education and Training.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you. My name is Oly Carlson. I am the Member for Wanguri and the Chair. To my left, I have the Member for Drysdale and the Member for Fannie Bay and, to my right, the Member for Johnston. Online today we have the Member for Gwoja.

Ms Bowden, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms BOWDEN: Yes, thank you, Chair.

First of all, we thank the committee for the opportunity to appear as a witness to the inquiry into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The Bill amends the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* and the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations 2004*. This Bill is the first of two tranches of legislative reforms for the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act* and focuses on strengthening child safety, strengthening the integrity of the Teacher Registration Board, creating efficiencies and registration processes, and aligning the Northern Territory teacher registration requirements with the Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia, which is published by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

The second tranche will focus on more complex reforms to the governance of the Teacher Registration Board, including interaction with the Northern Territory Board of Studies, and stakeholder engagement for tranche two is currently underway. This Bill strengthens child safety through information sharing provisions that address gaps highlighted by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and further by the child safety review conducted by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

Further enhancing child safety, the Bill will require that all qualified teachers teaching in early childhood education and care settings are registered. That is, a qualified teacher with a minimum bachelor degree qualification or equivalent as approved by ACECQA who occupy teaching positions in early childhood education and care settings. As you would be aware, our teachers in preschools are already required to be registered. All states and territories have made a commitment under the National Workforce Strategy to implement the mandatory registration of all qualified early childhood teachers by the end of 2026.

This reform will establish the legislative framework required for the Northern Territory to meet this important commitment. The reforms will recognise qualified early childhood teachers as teachers as defined under the Act. The 'one teacher, one profession' model was chosen over having a separate category specifically for early childhood teachers following considerable range of evidence. This evidence includes findings and recommendations from national reports such as the One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia report of 2018, the national approach to early childhood teacher registration report of 2020, as well as the outcomes of consultation processes conducted by the Northern Territory on the Have Your Say website.

I have noticed that some witnesses have indicated that consultation did not occur. I would like to say, for the committee's record, that there was a consultation on mandatory early childhood teacher registration provisions; however, it was some time ago, in February–March 2024. This was through the release of a discussion paper on the NT Government's Have you Say website.

The consultation process was launched through social media, notices published in newsletters by principals, direct contact with over 450 targeted stakeholders, including government and non-government schools, preschools, education and care services, peak bodies, Aboriginal representative bodies, unions, tertiary training organisations, the Teacher Registration Board and jurisdictional teacher registration authorities across Australia and the NT and jurisdictional government agencies. The stakeholder feedback was considered, and the consultation remained open until 15 March 2024, but I acknowledge that was some time ago.

The 'one teacher, one profession' model treats all teachers equally, and all teachers must meet the standards established under the framework for teacher registration in Australia to be eligible for professional registration. Registering early childhood teachers as teachers alongside their primary and secondary peers and colleagues will elevate the profession, open access to existing professional development and career progression pathways, and attract more early childhood and education and care teachers in the Northern Territory.

The Bill includes amendments to the regulations that align with minimum qualification; currency of practice; and English language proficiency requirements with the Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia. The adoption of this framework was agreed by all Education ministers in September 2024. Under these reforms only early childhood teachers who meet the minimum requirements reflected in the framework will be eligible for registration. This will ensure that the integrity of the teaching profession in the Territory is maintained at a national standard.

The Bill also includes provisions that serve to clarify the role of the Director of the Teacher Registration Board, the role of myself as the Chief Executive of the department, and the role of the minister. These amendments do not change the existing law or introduce new concepts but rather reinforce existing roles and responsibilities established through the Administrative Arrangement Order and the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act* (PSEMA). Provisions are included to preserve the independence of the Teacher Registration Board and the Director of the Teacher Registration Board with respect to their statutory roles in regulating the teaching profession.

In the Northern Territory, as it is in most jurisdictions, it is possible for an employer to apply to the Teacher Registration Board for an authority to employ an unregistered person to teach. These authorities to employ provide flexibility for employers who are unable to recruit qualified teachers in quite specialist areas and subjects, such as specialist language teachers—for example, it might be a Japanese or a Chinese teacher—VET teachers who have a training qualification but not necessarily a teacher qualification - and instrumental music teachers for another example.

The amendment has been made to contemporise outdated language by replacing the term 'foreign languages' with 'languages other than English'. This amendment will ensure that Aboriginal languages are captured as specialist subject language where an unregistered person may be employed under an authority to teach in order to teach an Aboriginal language that cannot be taught by a teacher within the school.

Several amendments are included that will also address inefficiencies and reduce administrative burden for our workforce. These include the ability for the board to be more flexible on when teacher registration expires, avoiding peak periods. Currently the expiry date for all teachers is 31 December. By extending the period of time an authority to employ an unregistered person to teach may be issued—reducing the burden on employers for having to reapply at the end of every year.

Amendments associated with the mandatory registration of early childhood teachers teaching in early childhood education and care settings will be delayed—commencement upon 1 September 2026. This delay has been based on feedback to provide the time to enable the sector to prepare for the changes and for the Teacher Registration Board to ensure that it has the required policies in place to support early childhood teachers with professional development and career progression.

All other amendments will commence on the day after the Administrator gives assent.

That concludes my opening statement.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bowden. I will open the floor for questions.

Mrs ZIO: The committee understands that the proposed registration of early childhood teachers adopts option 2 of the 2024 discussion paper on the Early Childhood Teacher Registration in the Northern Territory. That option was a single category model with no conditions. The other options that were put on the table were a single category model with conditions and a two-category model. Could you explain why model 2 was adopted and how feedback from consultation has been implemented into this Bill?

Ms BOWDEN: The model that was opted for was the 'one teacher, one profession' model which treats all teachers equally and ensures that there is equitable registration. As I mentioned in the opening statement, this was based on a number of different reports that had been released nationally as well as the feedback from the broader early childhood education and care sector.

Under this particular model, it means that with the implementation of the 'one teacher, one profession' model, it is up to the principal to make sure that they are allocating classes or allocating what teachers are teaching in schools is based on merit as well as their qualification. Currently, teachers who are primary teacher trained or secondary teacher trained are all seen as one profession, one teacher. We are proposing that the early childhood teachers are also one profession, one teacher.

J DAVIS: You say that reflected feedback from consultation; we have heard in this committee that is not the preferred model. I am interested in that.

Ms BOWDEN: Thank you, Member for Johnston. It did reflect the feedback from the early childhood education and care sector, so they quite strongly reflected the one teacher model, but I will hand to Michelle Wright, who was quite heavily involved in that consultation and facilitated sessions.

Ms WRIGHT: It was quite an extensive consultation process where we went out to over 400 stakeholders. We also launched it publicly through social media. Unfortunately, we did not get a lot of response back from our Northern Territory stakeholders, and that could possibly be because there was such a great deal of consultation that had already occurred at the national level. The sector was very comfortable with early childhood teacher registration, and it felt that they had already given their voice. I think we got eight submissions back from more than 400 people. I think the actual discussion paper was downloaded more than 200 times, and we only got 35 individual responses back to the survey that we put out as well.

With the individual responses to the survey, the individual teachers were supportive of the 'one teaching, one profession' model. We found that the submissions that came in from the eight submitters were generally split between models, and one of the submitters did not have a preferred model. What we had to do then was move to the evidence as a whole. We could not just take in our Northern Territory consultation because it was so insignificant statistically across the whole sector. We could not take those views as representing the entire sector.

We went down that 'one teacher, one profession' model because it represented the most equitable model. For example, a teacher is a teacher no matter where they teach. That person meets the qualification requirements in the Australian framework and they meet the fit and proper person requirements, they meet the English language requirements, they have to meet all the requirements that a primary or secondary trained teacher has to meet and their qualification is a level seven bachelor degree qualification, and that is under the Australian framework for qualifications for universities. We do not separate our primary or our secondary teachers; they are all qualified professional teachers.

J DAVIS: Just to clarify, did you say that there were 400 responses but only eight were from the Northern Territory?

Ms WRIGHT: Sorry, I might have been a bit misleading. That was all in the Northern Territory, but we only got eight submissions back.

Mrs ZIO: The Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework notes that beyond information-sharing powers, information-sharing systems and guidelines are necessary for the implementation of a timely and consistent scheme. Can you talk about what the department of Education has done to prepare for the operational implementation of these new powers?

Ms BOWDEN: It is really important from a child safety perspective that introducing this Bill means that we can work with other jurisdictions to do those checks. It does not mean that it takes away the work of the Teacher Registration

Board to actually ensure that each and every individual is a fit and proper person as part of that. I might hand to Michelle; would you like to answer that one?

Ms WRIGHT: I am sorry, can you just clarify again, Member for Fannie Bay?

Mrs ZIO: We were just talking about what work has happened at department level to make sure that the information-sharing systems that are necessary, all the guidelines and all the work that needs to go is being worked on in the department.

Ms WRIGHT: Yes, I believe that is happening at the implementation level, so the Teacher Registration Board have an additional resource that has been provided to them to put in place their mechanisms for that information sharing. There are protections there that already exist in our Act that make sure that the sharing of that information must be in accordance with the law. There are protections against inappropriately sharing information. The Northern Territory Government is also required under the *Information Act* to ensure that it protects information at all times. That includes when they are transferring that information.

Ms BOWDEN: Member for Fannie Bay, I can add to that. We are also looking at the current database and systems used by the Teacher Registration Board. At the moment they are quite old. It is very heavily reliant on paper base. We are looking at a new data system so it will be more efficient and effective to implement these reforms.

Mrs ZIO: My next question is about the recommendations for the royal commission, noting that the information-sharing powers will need to be balanced with safeguards necessary to protect teachers' personal information. I am wondering what safeguards will be implemented in this scheme to make sure that we are protecting teachers' personal information.

Ms WRIGHT: Yes, those safeguards are the ones that already exist under the Act to ensure that it must be—under the new provisions, before they can share that information they must be reasonably sure that the sharing of that information will protect a child from harm. There is a reasonable assessment that they must conduct. Then they must ensure that they are not just sharing information without that in place. There are penalty provisions under the Act if they do.

Mrs ZIO: As the mandated registration of early childhood teachers is being undertaken to improve child safety, what safety mechanisms exist or are being strengthened to protect children in lieu of the registration for early childhood teachers who do not have to register under this Bill?

Ms BOWDEN: Those who do not meet the requirements for teacher registration still need to have a certificate level or diploma to work in the early childhood education and care sector. All of those individuals are required to have a working with children clearance as part of that—the police check and mechanism to ensure that is in train.

There are quite significant conversations happening nationally in the early childhood safety area, in particular looking at what could be done better nationally in terms of a register of individuals and national registration of early childhood education and care people in the sector. That is still part of the process, so it is very much a national conversation, given there have been some really quite tragic circumstances that have occurred nationally in this space.

Mrs ZIO: Is any further legislative or regulatory change necessary in advance of the lapse of the teacher exemption into the automatic mutual recognition scheme at the end of June 2027?

Ms WRIGHT: No. The current exemption is in place for all jurisdictions, which currently is expiring on 1 July 2027. There are still conversations occurring at the national level as to the future of that exemption and whether or not jurisdictions will apply to continue that exemption. At present, if that exemption was to go, it would be a matter of an automatic mutual recognition of that person's teacher registration without having to apply to our Teacher Registration Board.

Again, the details behind that are still being worked out nationally as to how long that would last before people would then have to apply in the Northern Territory. That is still a fair way in the future and there are still discussions occurring on that.

Mrs ZIO: Can you tell us a little bit more about the national regulations that this NT Bill is aligning to? How often are the national regulations regulated? Are the national regulations and registration standards suitable for the NT context?

Ms BOWDEN: There is a framework as well as the education and care national law. That outlines the qualifications for early childhood education and care teachers. There is the national law for early childhood education and care. As I mentioned previously, there is also the AITSL framework for teacher registration in Australia, so there are two key—one is a framework and one is national law—that this will align to.

Tony, would you like to add a little bit more to that?

Mr CONSIDINE: The national law goes through continuous updates. Recently, anyone following the media would have seen there has been plenty happening in that space. Through Education ministers' meetings that is discussed on how this information will be updated. There are mechanisms there to say that we will move the national law. It has been driven a little bit by some of the incidents we see in other states at the moment.

The framework is something that we all agree to in jurisdictions. That gives us a way forward. The framework is in a position where it can be modified with agreement of all jurisdictions, but through ministers.

Mr PAECH: I want to follow on from an earlier question I asked the independent schools. Is there currently a process in place whereby language speakers in remote communities are checked off or have a relationship with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service or are NAATI qualified? When we are talking about the lowering of the English language proficiency requirements, is there currently a mechanism or standard in place in the schools around language speaking?

Ms BOWDEN: That is an important question that we should be considering as part of this process. Currently from a safety perspective, those working in schools are required, obviously, to have a working with children clearance. In terms of level of language proficiency, there is not a particular framework that we use other than the standard that we use for our teaching assistants in our schools. There are some places that I think we could tighten up in that area. Certainly, under an authority to teach, part of the evidence that the Teacher Registration Board would look at would be the language proficiency—if there is any evidence of that. I totally appreciate that may not be the case. That is something we could strengthen in this process.

Mr PAECH: Just to be clear, currently there is no process where people are checked off with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service or whether they are NAATI qualified? How does the registration board make a determination to potentially provide that clarification or approval for someone if they do not know at what level proficiency in language they are?

Ms BOWDEN: Currently, no, they do not. What currently occurs is a case-by-case basis, based on the advice from the school.

Mr PAECH: Okay. It would be consultation and local decision-making around an endorsement of a person at the school, or amongst their peers, that they are at a particular level to provide that educational training and interpreting?

Mr CONSIDINE: I can add a little bit to this. When decisions like that are made, they are generally made in consultation with the wider staff that we have in there. We have in all of our remote schools significant numbers of assistant teachers. Many of them have many years' experience—as you know in your electorate—in the community who are native language speakers there. They are our source of consultation to make sure that when someone is coming in they have the depth to be able to communicate that and the nuance of the languages that I think you are looking for in your question.

Mr PAECH: I am trying to establish as well—there is currently no barrier in place with the Education department from engaging the local workforce in these schools to have them formally recognised through the Aboriginal Interpreter Services or NAATI qualification, there is no restriction to that pathway, is there?

Mr CONSIDINE: That is correct, Member for Gwojja.

Mr PAECH: Other than financial implications, what is the rationale behind bringing the Teacher Registration Board into the department where it is currently a statutory body?

Ms BOWDEN: To be clear, there are no changes in legislation regarding that. It is clarifying the powers and functions. Currently it is not clear. What we are doing here is making it very clear that the Director of the TRB is employed under PSEMA. However, the Teacher Registration Board is a regulatory statutory authority that reports direct to the minister. What we are attempting to do here is to provide more clarity around the separation of powers. It is not changing anything specifically in the Act; it is making it clearer that there is a very clear separation between employees and the board under PSEMA, as well as the role and responsibility of me, as the CE, and the minister.

Mr PAECH: Clause 8 of the Bill is about inserting the section to provide for clarifying, one might say, the minister's powers to give written directions to the Teacher Registration Board. What areas would a normal direction be?

Ms BOWDEN: That is particularly about the minister maybe directing in terms of performance of the board, and potentially policies, but it has nothing to do with their actual regulatory functions. That is kept quite separate.

Mr PAECH: Would that be their KPIs but not in relation to complaints that they receive?

Ms BOWDEN: No, that is quite separate.

Madam CHAIR: The committee heard concerns that a 12-month registration transition period for existing early childhood teachers may be insufficient for educators and employers, particularly in a remote and Aboriginal community context. How does the department plan to support early childhood education teacher registration to ensure that the registration requirements do not undermine the early childhood education workforce in the Territory?

Ms BOWDEN: In terms of our remote schools, our preschool teachers are already required to be registered so it is really the early childhood education and care sector. Predominantly those services are located in our larger urban and towns so we would be working quite closely with the sector around the timeframes.

We feel as though there is sufficient time for this reform to occur, but it will involve working closely with the sector. We will be using communication mechanisms, and to clarify, our Families as First Teachers educators are also currently registered. The target and the focus will be the early childhood education and care sector, which is operated by for-profit, not-for-profit and some community-based organisations. We would be working closely with those services on this change.

Madam CHAIR: The committee has heard that there would be benefits in establishing alternative registration pathways for some educational workers, in particular early childhood education and teachers of Aboriginal languages. What would be some of the benefits and disadvantages of this?

Ms WRIGHT: I think what you are referring to is that we would have a separate category for an early childhood teacher and then a separate category for, say, a specialist language teacher. They would be receiving teacher registration but they would be categorised into a single category. Is that what you are saying?

Madam CHAIR: Yes.

Ms WRIGHT: The disadvantages there are that the whole reason we have that authority to employ an unregistered person is because those people do not have the required qualifications or the other requirements as published in the national framework for teacher registration, so even if we had those separate categories, those particular teachers still would not be able to be registered because they do not meet those national standards.

We are having 'one teacher, one profession', so every teacher who is awarded teacher registration meets those standards in the national framework. Does that help?

Madam CHAIR: Yes. Several submissions recommend that policy guidance is needed to support the implementation of this Bill, including guidelines on acceptable forms of evidence of English language proficiency, equivalency assessment criteria for comparable qualifications and the excise of new information-sharing powers. Does the department have any plans to publish guidance in association with the Bill?

Ms BOWDEN: We feel it would be appropriate to have guidelines published to support the implementation. We would be doing that in time for the September 2026 implementation.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bowden, Mr Considine, Ms Wright and Ms Eastwood, for coming before the committee today. Thank you for your contribution towards the evidence.

The committee concluded.
