



University of  
South Australia

# SUBMISSION

Department for Social Services  
Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper

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## Introduction and background

The University of South Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the South Australian Department of Social Services' Early Years Strategy (the Strategy) discussion paper. The submission has been prepared in consultation with staff in UniSA Education Futures - the Academic Unit that delivers Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and undertakes Education research.

UniSA Education Futures offers programs in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary teaching, at both Bachelor and Master levels. UniSA Education Futures supports more than four thousand students enrolled in 2023. UniSA is ranked number one in South Australia for graduate careers in teaching<sup>1</sup> and is listed in the world top 100 for Education<sup>2</sup>. The research undertaken by UniSA Education Futures staff contributes to innovation in education and preparation for learning, supporting, and informing new approaches to practice in the ever-evolving education sector.

## Policy priorities

This submission specifically addresses the Policy Priorities question within the discussion paper: 'What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why?'

Teacher registration of graduates from early childhood degrees that focus on birth to five years is critical to building and maintaining an early childhood workforce with specialist knowledge and commitment to working with children in prior-to-school contexts. Credentialling these early childhood educators as registered teachers signals to the wider community their status as tertiary educated professionals with high levels of theoretical and practical expertise. Pathways for registration ensure that early childhood graduates have a comparable career pathway with other ITE programs.

On a positive note, the Strategy refers to the *'Shaping our Future'* National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy. The document makes clear the responsibility of ITE providers 'for influencing supply and quality of teachers and educators and providing attractive and flexible study opportunities' (p. 7). It is important to note, however, that the development of ITE programs is undertaken in partnership with relevant accrediting and regulatory bodies.

The partnership approach, essential to operationalising regulation and accreditation of programs, presents challenges in its varied application across states and territories of Australia. In South Australia, early childhood education programs span birth to eight years, including both prior-to-school contexts and the early years of primary school. In some other states, there is recognition of complementary and articulated, but separated requirements for prior-to-school and school contexts, with, for example, birth to five years programs, as well as birth to eight years programs.

There are two accrediting bodies for early childhood ITE programs – the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leadership (AITSL) for programs primarily involving school years and primary curriculum content; and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) for the prior-to-school, birth to five years contexts. Programs covering birth to eight years must cover accreditation requirements from both AITSL and ACECQA. As a result, a majority of the content in an early childhood ITE degree relates to the primary school curriculum (to cover all curriculum areas as

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<sup>1</sup> ComparED (QILT): Graduate Outcome Survey 2018-20, Full-time Employment Indicator (Undergraduate). SA-founded universities only.

<sup>2</sup> 2023 Times Higher Education Subject Rankings.

per AITSL requirements). While elements are applicable to both early years and primary, there is a minority of curriculum that is focused on the needs of children aged birth to five years. If early childhood ITE programs are to truly prepare graduates to work with children aged birth to five years, particularly within prior-to-school contexts, it is imperative that program standards for early childhood ITE be re-examined.

The University strongly recommends that a degree that specialises in early childhood, birth to five years, be supported nationally to attract and sustain a teaching workforce of dedicated professionals working in prior-to-school contexts. This would require all state and territory Teachers Registration Boards and education jurisdictions to recognise birth to five qualified teachers, enabling them to register, be paid and recognised as teachers, and to work exclusively in prior-to school contexts.

The University recommends the development of articulated and flexible pathways to allow teachers to increase their qualifications, extending their eligibility to teach across multiple year levels. This would also assist in schools where there are both prior-to-school and school years offered, allowing for a more flexible yet specialised workforce. Articulated qualification pathways could be achieved through credit programs into both undergraduate and postgraduate ITE degrees, and should have part-time and external options, to allow in-service teachers to upskill. Some universities, in states where the birth to five qualification is already recognised, currently allow such articulation, with full credit applied for the birth to five qualification into other teaching degrees.

A national approach is needed to ensure equity and transferability of qualifications between states and territories. The present haphazard approach to teacher registration means that qualifications are not always recognised in states and territories different from that in which the initial qualification was gained.

The level of complexity in registering bodies and across jurisdictions problematises workforce distributions and capabilities. This results in poor outcomes for children and their families/carers and communities due to the high turnover of the workforce in prior-to-school contexts. A registrable birth to five degree is an essential step to develop an early childhood workforce with specialised knowledge and sustained commitment to working with children from birth to five years. A national approach is needed to achieve this strategic vision.

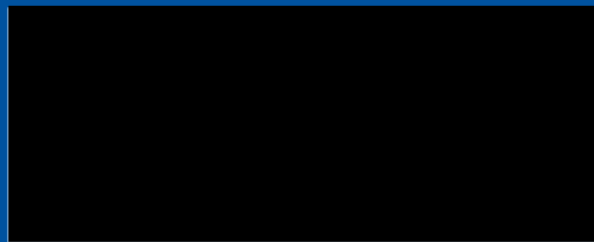
## Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the South Australian Department of Social Services' Early Years Strategy (the Strategy) discussion paper. For further information, please contact:



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Contact Details



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