

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THE HON JULIA GILLARD AC, Commissioner

THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO EARLY CHILD EDUCATION AND CARE

**TUESDAY, 23 MAY 2023
AT 01.45 PM**

This transcript is intended as a guide only and as an aide memoire with respect to the audio-visual record, which constitutes the official record of the hearing on 23 May 2023

SARAH ATTAR, Counsel Assisting

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Commissioner, we now have a panel representing the University of South Australia and Flinders university and I call from Flinders university, Professor Pablo Munguia and Professor Deborah West, and from University of South Australia, Dr Susie Raymond and Professor Anne Marie Morgan.

< **DR RAYMOND SWORN**
< **PROFESSOR MORGAN AFFIRMED**
< **PROFESSOR MUNGUIA AFFIRMED**
< **PROFESSOR WEST AFFIRMED**

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Can I start by asking each of you to introduce yourselves to the Commissioner and outline the various departments you represent, perhaps going from my left to right.

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

I am Dean, Education for the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work at Flinders University. This is one of six colleges at the University. My qualifications and expertise centre around education quality, curriculum design, authentic assessment and the connectivity between pedagogy and industry.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you.

PROFESSOR WEST

I'm Professor Deborah West, I'm the Vice President and Executive Dean of the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work. As such I have the senior executive oversight of all things to do with the College, including our various programs, which span those disciplines. My expertise, I'm a social worker, clinical social worker by training but I really, throughout my higher ed career have focused on overall ed quality curriculum design, student focus and really the outcomes around employability and the relevance of our degrees with industry.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you.

DR RAYMOND

Hello Commissioner, my name is Dr Susie Raymond. I am the Program Director for Early Childhood, the Early Childhood Programs at Uni SA. So I manage the undergraduate and also

the postgraduate early childhood program. My experience is, I've spent a long time in schools and preschools as a teacher, myself, and I'm a registered teacher and then I've spent the last 12 years in the university context.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

I'm Professor Anne-Marie Morgan. I'm the Dean of Programs in Education Futures at Uni SA. So I'm responsible for all the programs in the education area, including all the initial teacher education, uh, funds. My experience over the last 10 years has been leading faculties and schools in education, social work, arts, social sciences so a broad background.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We've just had some evidence before lunch to help us understand the regulatory scheme in South Australia with respect to the accreditation of initial teacher education programs and the registration of teachers in South Australia. It might be helpful if I could ask one representative from each institution just to start by outlining what undergraduate and postgraduate courses are currently offered and perhaps just a little bit of an indication as to what your enrolment and completion rates have been like, well perhaps a little bit pre covid and more recently, to help us get a sense as to the current student base.

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

Sure. At Flinders University we have undergraduate as well as masters of teaching accredited degrees. They are for early childhood education. So this would be your birth to eight, primary and secondary as well as inclusive and specialised education. And so the master's programs mirror the degrees and a bachelor level. Our enrolment numbers have declined since say 2019 taking into account the fact that we went through COVID and, you know, enrolments also changed significantly during that time as well. What was the other part of the question?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

That's a helpful overview. Perhaps I might invite one of our Uni SA members to balance that out.

DR RAYMOND

Well we have a variety of, I mean Anne Marie can talk about all our education programs, but we have a variety of initial teacher education programs in early childhood, primary and secondary at undergraduate and also postgraduate. And then we also have in-service teacher programs such as our Master of Education and we have TSOL programs and a whole range

that don't necessarily involve the initial teacher education side of things. Our enrolments have been pretty consistent, although we did have a dip in the COVID year and our retention rate is about 84%.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We're going to look today at having a broad ranging discussion about the concept of birth to eight versus birth to five and a discussion about whether or not South Australia should be looking - as you're aware, we're here today to unpack some of the issues around workforce - whether a viable model to trial here would be a three year birth to five degree focusing on birth to five. Now we've been helped by our witness before lunch to understand that presently a degree has to be four years to be accredited within South Australia and accredited against the AITSL standards. So I don't need to ask any of you to speak to the regulatory framework, but I would like to start by asking you all, if we perhaps we step back before we come to those topics, if you could share your insights as to what you see as the most important competencies for people who are going to deliver high quality education in the early years, perhaps if we go the other way and start with you [indicates Professor Morgan].

PROFESSOR MORGAN

So we do believe a higher education qualification is important that covers a number of areas, content knowledge, developmental knowledge of children in the age range we are looking at, pedagogical knowledge, theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge through placements in schools, working with the industry, so working with other teachers and people who have been teachers, working with parents, working with community. So all of that fits within the degrees and is all covered, you know, in the process of preparing teachers.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Perhaps before we come to Flinders University what model would the University of South Australia prefer? Would it be to focus on a birth to eight or a birth to five?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

We really think there is a great need for a birth to five at the moment. I mean there are shortages across the whole education sector and at all levels, but in early childhood, and especially if we are moving to a universal three year old preschool as well, we have a great shortage of teachers, early childhood teachers, properly registered teachers. And we think that the current arrangement of requiring our early childhood education degrees to go to eight year olds puts too much emphasis on the requirements of the F - 2 years in school. Because the AITSL accredited programs have a very big emphasis on curriculum and the AITSL teacher standards. And there's a lot of inclusions that need to be in a degree to meet that. If we had a dedicated birth to five, we could spend a lot more time on all those competencies we just talked about, the developmental needs of children, you know, up to say, six years old, or, you know, thereabouts as a sort of transition model, to look at the nature of children at that age,

the kinds of pedagogies that work for them, the theoretical knowledge that we have that is rapidly increasing as we, you know, have access to, you know, MRI imaging in other ways of looking at brains and so on. So we really think that it is timely, very timely, to have a birth to five degree, to do that, to meet that need.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I want to allow us time to unpack that. But before I ask for some Flinders based views, what's the current, split's not the right word, but in the current birth to eight year, what rough percentages are we looking at in terms of devoted content for that birth to five period?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yeah, it's rough in that, what is applicable to each age group, you know, has some overlap, but really it's around about 30, 70, 30, early childhood, preschool and 70 the F to 2.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I want to come back to models you are exploring in terms of a three year degree and unpack a bit about what they'd look like, but I want to give Professor Munguia and Professor West an opportunity to contribute to the debate. There's very differing views as to whether birth to eight is better in terms of preparing broad spectrum knowledge and transition from one cohort to another, in terms of learning. What's your preferred model in terms of first of all, leave the years aside in terms of three or four years, but birth to eight versus birth to five.

PROFESSOR WEST

I think I'd take a step back almost from that question, because I think if we look at it as early childhood, and we say it is probably the most complex and most important period of education for anybody in lifespan, obviously requires in depth knowledge of all of the things that have been talked about. One of the challenges in that is do we want, under current regulations, and you've heard about those earlier, but under the current regulations, if we actually want qualified teachers in there, we need a four year degree because we need to meet all the AITSL things, assuming that that's not changing. I would be very loathe to think that an early childhood educator or an early childhood teacher would be less than a four year qualification because they are a teacher. And I think it devalues the fact of the actual lifespan and complex nature of it. The current break down, the 70/30, which is about what, we would agree with that, that is actually inappropriate because we can't put in enough of the early childhood piece. And the other piece of it is that right now, if we look at employment outcomes for a birth to five qualification, our students who graduate wouldn't actually be able to work in the Department of Education because they require the placement in the F to year two, so there's a number of kind of elements to it. Ideally, if you took away those regulations, it had more focus on early childhood, they were employable across the range of employment spaces then yes, it would be birth five, however, in the current regulations and with the employment restrictions that are in place, we need to keep it as a four year degree as a teacher, because I think we need to

distinguish between a teacher and an educator. So the educators in the three year programs and the teachers qualify as teachers in four year programs.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I'll ask Uni of SA in a moment to talk us through the sort of models that they're looking at in terms of three years, but I'm interested to understand if you can help us what content you would be concerned you would lose if you reduced a four year teaching degree to three, but to focus on birth to five, are there any particular concerns you would have about a year's loss in terms of what that looks like content wise?

PROFESSOR WEST

Well currently we simply, it's not a teaching degree. And so therefore people are not graduating as a teacher because we can't meet the AITSL requirements under a three year degree. And that's, so all of the standards that are in there, in order to fit that in and the way that it's all structured, we actually can't meet that. So they wouldn't be a teacher.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

No, it would require regulatory change. I make that clear. I'm asking you to assume in a way that if we were able to accredit here and recognise three year degrees, such as is being tried elsewhere interstate, would you have concerns about three years in terms of providing quality content?

PROFESSOR WEST

Not particularly, but it would have to change across the board, because I think again, if you put an early education degree and you say that you can squeeze that into three years and you have a secondary teacher, that's a four year qualification that actually doesn't compute when you think about the complexity of early childhood and the pedagogical knowledge, it would need to actually be some consistency. So, you know, if you're taking things out, you know, as has been said, there's a lot of content on the primary years that isn't necessary for early childhood, but what we're missing is the early childhood content.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Can I perhaps come back to you Dr Raymond, you have put some thought as I understand it into the feasibility of a three year birth to five focus degree. Obviously there are regulatory impediments at present. Can I ask you how we can ensure that rigour and high standards of expectations in terms of early childhood teachers would be built into a three year model and how you would perhaps allay concerns that four years inherently allows for more focus on some of those broader skill sets that are required across the age ranges?

DR RAYMOND

Yes. So to think about if we are having, if we have a three year birth to five degree, then we are able naturally to have more content that relates to children in prior to school context than what we could ever do in a four year birth to eight degree. And that's because of the regulatory differences. So in a birth to five degree, it would only focus ever on children birth to five and that transition to school. And I think to say that the AITSL standards are the only framework in which we can assess rigour and quality neglects to acknowledge ACEQUA as the national accrediting body for birth to five, and also the National Quality Framework that is used to accredit birth to five programs currently interstate. So I think it's, for me, it's about developing a birth to five degree that aligns to the National Quality Framework, that is accredited by a national body and then ensuring that the content that we provide in our, in our initial teacher education program aligns to that. And if you look at the ACEQUA standards that we would need to adhere to, they are rigorous, they contain content, they contain curriculum, but what they also contain is a much more holistic and multidisciplinary approach to working with very young children, aged birth to five. So it provides greater opportunity to do what this Royal Commission is hoping to do, which is to develop a framework that enables services and provisions to wrap around children and families, to put in a preventative approach that in a birth to eight degree we don't have the capacity to be able to do that. So that's the value of it. You also have the opportunity to develop teachers who want to work in the birth to five context, and, you know, the research is pretty clear and I've provided the Commission with lots of papers to read about those students who are enrolled in a birth to eight or a birth to 12 degree, dual degrees, do not want to work in prior to school context. So the fact that you are developing a birth to five degree means that you have students coming in, who want to work in that context.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Pay has obviously been an issue that's come up and for various reasons, that's not the sole focus of today, it's highly relevant, but not the sole focus. A real concern of the Teacher's Registration Board before lunch was a concern based on whether or not we create a second tier or class of teachers if we create a three year degree and a concern that we might be, I think boxing in was the phrase used, a cohort of teachers who were then prevented from moving to upper or lower primary if they chose. Can I invite both institutions to share some thoughts on, your views and, and if we can combat those concerns.

PROFESOR MORGAN

Yeah so let me say first though that we already have within this four years the TRB refers to the, the possibility of an undergraduate degree in something else that has maybe no content relevant to early childhood, it might have some subjects relevant to school curriculum, which is usually what they're assessed on. But that is then followed by a two year masters. So to say that a dedicated three years is not going to be sufficiently rigorous it just doesn't add up for me, around what we can include in there. We absolutely have to register these people in the early spaces as teachers. And that's why we'd be seeking legislative change to do exactly that. And

I understand that in other states, in fact, the experience is they are paid as teachers and sometimes at bonus levels. So I think that as an outcome of this Commission, I would want it to be you know, suggested, recommended that we do not go to two tier system of pay and conditions, but that we do register the ones working in early childhood who have had university training as a teacher.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Can I ask either Professor Munguia or Professor West, I know you haven't explored three year models given that regulatory framework, but do you see a role within which sufficient rigour could be built into a program to produce teachers of high standards in early education?

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

I think so, but I think it's again important to distinguish the role of a teacher and the definition of a teacher. From the TRB perspective and regulatory perspective, a teacher is someone who can actually work in different classroom scenarios. And that's still, I think, a valid idea, a valid proposition. However, in early childhood education, but in doing so, that's why we have a four year degree, right? And it's consistent for primary and secondary. If we create a three year degree and I'm here, I'm thinking, scoping long term, looking for a sustainable solution. If we scope a three year degree that at the same time has lower pay and then has to be a three year degree, that would be a teacher in birth to five, and the pay hasn't been matched up to primary secondary standards, how, what would be the incentive of those individuals and what would be the messaging? I can get a three year degree that is not a four year degree, that's one year less of study, but it doesn't allow me to then be registered as a teacher, because if I want to go into primary, I need to upscale again. If on the other hand, we think of early childhood being a space where very skilled workers are needed, and we understand that it would be much more valuable if we had a four year degree and then create scaffolded solutions to allow for individuals to enter the workforce, gain professional development, gain experience, and then through different models, we can actually create articulations or ways by which they can gain up scaling as they join the workforce. A three year degree or a four year degree, they're not going to be available for another, those individuals are not going to join the workforce for a few years time. So the problems that we have now are still going to be there next year. So we need to find other ways to start merging and finding solutions for the workforce that is needed now, as well as the future.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

What are some of the models that you are looking at in terms of solutions in a closer time fashion, rather than looking at graduates, sorry, looking at students embarking on a new degree? You mentioned further opportunities for leveraging masters and the like, can you talk us through what options are being considered and why?

PROFESSOR WEST

So there's certainly, you know, if we have people that are already working in the sector, maybe diploma qualified or three year qualified, but the idea of doing the masters is there, which would then give them, you know, notionally with fast track masters, which we all have, which are 18 months. So, you know, in that sense, it's the upskilling to get the teacher registration. The other piece, and it's not to say we haven't explored the three year, we haven't explored a three year teaching qualification. Certainly happy and have explored three year qualifications around early childhood educators, if I'm just making that distinction because of the earlier point. But there's other models to do this. And I mean, we certainly have degree apprenticeships in other fields of practise. We've been in discussion with, around education, for degree apprenticeship type models, which would then allow that the continual competency based learning, to be able to progressively upskill. There's lots of evidence, you know, about upskilling of people who are working in the sector, but in that way, it's scaffolded through and that it gives them the full range of opportunities and in fact, as a teacher and they might kind of leave at the third year level and they would come out as an educator. And I think one of the questions in, in my mind anyway, is the fact of when we talk about quality and we talk about what we're actually trying to achieve here, quality for the children and in the sector that some of the question marks appear around, you know, the value propositions around educators and teachers and what that actually means and what do we actually need. And if we look at that in relation, there's other ways to actually solve kind of the workforce challenges, so to speak, if everything's up for grabs.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Are there any particular innovations that you'd like to recommend to the Commission?

PROFESSOR WEST

Well, I mean, I do think the degree apprenticeship model is one of those. I mean, it's very well tried and tested in the UK.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

In the early years?

PROFESSOR WEST

In a whole range of fields from engineering all the way through. We've certainly done things in that space already. We're doing one in aged care, for example, we have one in the defence industry, so there are models like that.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Can you give us a little bit of an idea as how they work and what's the balance of practical vs theory?

PROFESSOR WEST

Yeah it's largely, if I give you an example of, so basically these are people who are either already existing working in the sector, or they're employed in that context to work there. They have their amount of training that they do. Balance wise they're generally in the workplace for, it can be somewhere between two and four days a week but their education is actually overlapped and projects are all relevant. So they're doing some study while they're working and so they're applying straight away. And then basically if you think about it in a competency based model, you're able to progress people as they tick off competencies and thinking about some of that, which then integrates with higher education around learning outcomes and what that looks like. So it does take some kind of different ways of thinking. That can be a one year. It can be a three year. It can be, you know, various lengths of time. The main thing is looking at what our accreditation requirements are in order to meet the AITSL requirements so that they come out as teachers, but to be able to scaffold them through. So they're actually working as they're going through, but they're getting more relevant experience and they're hands on and helping with the workforce issue.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Would you support amendments within South Australia to allow recognition of ACEQUA accredited just birth to five degrees as I understand can happen in some of the Eastern states? I mean, I know at the moment we work under the AITSL framework and that's embedded into our legislative scheme, I'm interested in your thoughts about the quality and the rigour of the ACEQUA framework.

PROFESSOR WEST

I think the ACEQUA framework's very rigorous. The question mark in my mind is can that be something that registers them as a teacher? Because ACEQUA does much more than teaching qualifications. They do the workforce, they do all of that side of things. So to me the whole piece is if they can register as a teacher them great.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Acknowledging that would take some change in South Australia on a number of fronts, we did hear some strong views before lunch, well that the concerns of the Teacher's Registration Board were perhaps that the ACEQUA framework for both diploma and degrees in the birth to five were characterised as not as rigorous as the AITSL standards. And I'm interested to know whether you have any thoughts about that. I mean both cover literacy, maths, science, they cover them, obviously in different ways. One's primary curriculum focused, one is applying the

early years framework, which it has as its base a play-based pedagogy. But is there anything in your mind that makes one inferior or superior to the other?

PROFESSOR WEST

I don't think inferior or superior. I mean, I think as Dr. Raymond said they are very rigorous. They cover a whole range of things. The key thing I think is the difference between what they're trying to achieve and the scope of what they're trying to achieve. You know, AITSL is really looking at teachers as a profession. ACEQUA is broader than that in the context of the workforce and the requirements and the quality assurance that goes in with that. So I think, you know, it's the difference between what we're actually looking for here and the focus of it.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And if I can come back to our University of South Australia panellists, if accreditation were possible for a three year birth to five degree, do you have a plan as to when that would be able to be rolled out?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Um, yes. We have a tentative plan that we could do it with legislative change for next year, for 2024.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And some of the concerns in the evidence raised before lunch surrounded issues such as concerns as to whether there was enough leadership embedded within ACEQUA requirements, whether there was enough focus on those real quality leadership skills that we need from teachers. How do you envisage the content on curriculum and focus on professional standards for teachers?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Well we believe the ACEQUA standards already address leadership and there's nothing different about leading in an early childhood context from another schooling context. So I don't see any problem with it being an accreditation as a teacher, it's only the legislative barrier. We also, as you know, have suggested some additional models for, and this addresses the point of whether they are a teacher and can work anywhere else. At the moment, the Teachers Registration Board just registers teachers and it doesn't matter what year level they are. But it is not accurate to say that employers employ somebody who's a year 12 physics trained person to work in an early childhood setting, for example, or vice versa. You know, while there is that, we register teachers, employers employ people for the jobs that they need. There is a bit of out of field teaching and moving to accommodate shortages. But I don't see that as a barrier in itself. And we are also proposing that as well as a three year birth to five that we could then articulate that into extending to birth to eight and then addressing the AITSL

standards and graduating with a masters and the articulation allows you a year's credit into the masters. So there is only a year left to do. And given that about half of that year would be in a school, you get all the practical experience, et cetera, that you need to have that qualification. Then you'd meet all the AITSL requirements, you are a teacher in the broader sense. So it's a way of easily adding on a bit of extra qualification to address those concerns

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And, sorry, this is my bad note taking. Does that bring us to four years with, if you take into account the articulation process?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yes.

DR RAYMOND

And the advantage of that model is that it actually flips the script on how the percentage that is spent focusing on children, birth to eight, at birth to five, sorry, to be 70%. And then the school based content is actually 30%, but it would fit within the current requirements to meet the requirements of ACEQUA and also the AISTL standards. So it is actually possible, but what we would want would be that those three year graduates who want to exit out of the bachelor to be qualified as an early childhood teacher, birth to five in South Australia, which requires legislative change so that our Teachers Registration Board recognises them as teachers and qualified and registered. So that would be the difference. And the, we know that our university students are different, and there's a high percentage of students who come into our initial teacher education program to do early childhood, who already have a diploma of early childhood education and care. At the moment, the maximum amount of credit that we can possibly give them is six months, because we don't have enough birth to five content in our current birth to eight degree to grant them more credit. But in our three year birth to five degree, we can give them 12 months credit, which is the maximum amount of credit that we're allowed to under the regulations. And then in two more years, they also then have a Bachelor of Early Childhood, which hopefully can register them to teach and be paid as a preschool teacher here in South Australia. And then for one more year, if they wanted to, they can upskill through the pathway, into our Master of Teaching to give them the birth to eight, which then, you know, the terminology from the TRB this morning about the transferability of teachers, early childhood, across different settings, that would actually enable them to do that if they wanted to. It's about the choice that they want to make about where they want to work, where their passion lies.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Again, assuming that we lived in a world where regulatory change occurred, would you also keep the current model, which is 70, 30, but weighted towards, AITSL and upper primary, or are you looking at this being a replacement degree.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

We're looking at this eventually being a replacement, there would be a teach out period, you know, the students who were already in the program, but we actually think it's a better model, that it gives more focus on that very critical early period that is missing in our current program. And we think it would be a better program.

DR RAYMOND

And flexibility, flexibility for our students to work and qualify, you know, and develop their qualifications along the way.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yeah. And if I could just quickly address that point about being, you know, this is going to take several years to make it happen. If for instance, we had somebody coming in with a diploma and we give them a year's credit into the three years, and they took advantage of the special authority to teach provision, by their third year, that is their second year of study, they could be in a preschool. So this is a relatively fast way of adding to the workforce. And it's not our primary intention to make fast ways into the workforce. It's our intention to provide fit for purpose, very high quality degrees, but it has the advantage of being able to get more teachers into the preschool sector earlier.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We've had some discussions even before today's hearing by way of submissions, about difficulties with placements and accessing placements within the early years, as opposed to primary school. I wonder Professor Munguia or Professor West, whether there are any insights you'd like to share in how we might be able to address some of these issues, but also I understand that there's been consideration by Flinders more broadly on not just professional placements, but ongoing leadership programs and extending professional development.

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

Yes, so two parts to that. First, placement. So at the moment we need to ensure there's consistency in the demand and the supply of placements. And what I mean by that is that oftentimes it's really hard to find placements for individuals who are looking for a birth five, in a birth through eight program, but are looking for a birth to five placement. At the same time, you know, if and when they have had that experience, it's up to the department to, they want to engage with those individuals when they graduate. So my point is finding placements is hard. Once they find those placements it's ensuring that they're actually going to be, there's something at the end of that, you know, that individuals who are graduating have a job to go to, which is quite important. The second part to the question was leadership opportunities. So we do have professional development and leadership opportunities that individuals can uptake. And those can be done outside the accredited degree but are also in the periphery. So for

example, a graduate certificate on leadership or a masters of education that encompasses either inclusive or specialised education, specialised pedagogies, or any other elements, including leadership itself.

DR MORGAN

Can we comment on placements.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Yes I was going to ask for your insights.

DR MORGAN

So our placements for the birth to three context are not a challenge at all. And in actual fact there's greater flexibility because they're not bound by school terms, so we can actually use holidays and things like that. So there's a little bit more flexibility. Our preschool placements, we have about 180 students out at the moment in a preschool placement in both our undergraduate and postgraduate programs. And they were sourced well prior. So we actually are not finding those challenging at all. Probably our school placements are probably the most challenging.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

DR MORGAN

To have sites willing to take our students and supervising teachers willing to supervise because yeah, they're, it's hard work sometimes mentoring new teachers.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Is that the reason that you're given in, in terms of the difficulties in the primary sector?

DR MORGAN

Uh, no. I think it's just, it's just about teacher capacity at the moment, you know, about teachers being able to do more.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Presumably if it was to be explored, the possibility of the accreditation of a three year birth to five, then obviously we would need more available placements. So do you have any concern about the ability of quality placements to be found within South Australia in the current climate?

DR RAYMOND

I mean, we currently, at the moment, we, I mean, we have developed really good partnerships and I think that's probably the key is about developing really good partnerships with sites to be able to consistently place our students there. And we know our, our sites really well. And we also have developed initiatives where we have, you know, supervisor training sessions and we have site, you know, site sessions where we can support our sites in different ways and we have extra visits and all of those sorts of things. So it's been a considered effort over a number of years to ensure that we do have the placements when we need them. But at the moment, our prior to school context sites are not an issue for us to be able to source.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yeah. And these support services that Susie's talking about that we provide, supervising mentors from the university as well, to wrap around those students in that experience, working with whoever the supervising teacher is in the school. And often we are providing, we're always providing professional learning as well for teachers in schools and before school settings. So I think we are very experienced at how to support that process.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We had some evidence earlier today about a program run by the Front Project called the Upskilling Project, which I'm sure some, if not all of you have heard of, that being an external paid for program that will offer supports to assist in diploma or certificate trained staff moving and navigating through tertiary institutions. And one of the reflections that came out was the difficulties that people can navigate with, you know, simple things like being the first person in their family to go to university and there's different language use, the websites are complicated. I'm interested in your thoughts and reflections. If we are looking at upskilling being one way to make a difference in the short term, whether you think universities do enough in that space or whether more could be done in terms of assistance to navigate the tertiary pathways. Perhaps if we start at this end of the table and do you in Professor West.

PROFESSOR WEST

I could say so much about this. We do a lot, all of the universities do a lot. Do we do enough? Perhaps not. Or what we do perhaps isn't as useful or good as what it could be. So one of our, one of our experiences, and I've talked about the degree apprenticeships earlier, that we specifically put in additional support for those students, and we absolutely help navigate for them with them, how the whole processes of the university. So it becomes a really critical thing, particularly when upskilling and taking non-traditional cohorts and how we actually support them in that navigation. Because I would hazard a statement that would suggest that, you know, any university's site is pretty difficult to navigate. And I think that, I think that's just a given, and it's very foreign, you know, the language that we use and all of that. And although we do our absolute best to make it as student friendly as possible, we don't always hit that mark. So I think it's the wraparound pieces that go with it. And I think with each cohort, and

we're very cognisant as universities with different cohorts of what we need to do, and we do our best to do it. But if we were making a concerted effort in a particular group, as we have with other degree apprenticeship type models, you then think about the sub cohort of that, because they're not just the ones who are first in family, we would understand they would be a group of people who would be largely working in childcare, early childhood settings already. They would bring a certain, you know, demographic to that. We would actually need to help and position around that support. And that's completely doable, you know, and we've done it for other different groups. I think when we look at the more general though, we're trying to go for the general and that sometimes doesn't necessarily help for those sub cohorts.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

And it is critically important that we have a diverse workforce and that we recognise the multilingual and multicultural diversity of Australia and the need in early childhood settings to be providing for those children and communities, but also providing teachers with those skills. And we are highly cognisant of that and how to offer support around that is a critical part of that, that we actually have embedded in our own university act that we must be supporting that.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Two questions if I can invite comment on. One was a concern raised by the Board before lunch about the absence of LANTITE being part of an AITSL structured ITE. I'd be interested in your thoughts about that given we also heard it came in, I think in 2019, it wasn't retrospective, so we've got a large body of teachers who are currently teaching and they haven't passed it. Accepting that that proficiency is very important, but I'm just interested to have a counter view as to how much weight we need to place on LANTITE.

DR RAYMOND

Well, I'll have to, I'll make a confession that I don't have LANTITE and I am a registered teacher. So I guess for me the evidence is, there is no evidence at this point in time to suggest that LANTITE has lifted the quality of teachers at this stage. There isn't any evidence to say that. And I think that we need to think really carefully about what are those tests designed to test and measure, and what evidence are we trying to correlate that against? So at this point in time, I can say that there is no evidence at this point to suggest that LANTITE and quality go together.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

But there is evidence around certain cohorts and their performance in LANTITE, and particularly indigenous Australians are disadvantaged by LANTITE, it's a very culturally specific test. It does not teach English or language how to use language. It measures particular literacy skills and numeracy skills. So there are disadvantages for some cohorts. Interestingly enough, not for, generally for the language background other than English, outside the indigenous

community, they usually do extremely well in LANTITE. We don't have an issue with international students, for example passing LANTITE. So there are problems with LANTITE. There's not a university in Australia that won't tell you that.

PROFESSOR WEST

And I think the other thing, I would agree with all of that, but other thing to add to that is that, you know, universities, we actually have, all of us have quite clear learning outcomes around English language, numeracy, and as graduate outcomes of all of our programs and which are actually at a high standard. And so, you know, how LANTITE is operating and actually being another kind of hurdle with all of the limitations that have been described, being quite culturally biased is a clear one, and the fact that it doesn't teach, whereas we're actually trying to teach literacy, numeracy and we're assessing that within the context of the broader degrees that people are doing, the courses that they're completing, and we're doing it in a more, I would argue more authentic way because it's not an exam situation. It's actually within the context of what's happening in a placement or what's happening in another type of assessment. So it becomes more authentic. So yeah, I don't necessarily think we need to keep it.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And just picking up on the concept of assessment. You've reminded me that another part of the dialogue before lunch was a concern or a focus of the Board's submission that there was rigour in an AITSL course, because it has this final practicum now, which I think was brought in a few years ago was the evidence we heard before lunch. But I'd be interested to know, given what we know about development between birth to five and the different styles of teaching and pedagogical practises, whether you think that working towards final assessment practises is necessary in order to train quality teachers in the early years.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Can I say first of all, we do have teachers in the early years, preschool, doing the TPA. So it does happen. Its not our preferred model because it's a very intensive assessment that requires a lot of work by the student, by the school or the centre that they're in, and the university to administer, prepare for, moderate, et cetera. It's a very onerous imposition, if you like, as a graduating requirement. There's a lot of useful activity in it that we think was already in our final placement. We've had to move some things out to fit it because it is absolutely the focus of that last placement. And the extent of it is so big that it requires a huge effort to include that when we don't have, for example, things like I used to have principals come in and talk, and Susie's got a lot more examples of the kinds of things that we've had to move out, of that final experience of transitioning to school.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

That's I suppose a good living example of what you have to lose to meet the current more primary curriculum based standards, I suppose. Any comment that either of you would like to make on that.

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

The one element that's key, I think in a birth - five structure or construct is the transition pedagogy. So how do we transition individuals, our children, from year three to year four, to year five, to year six, you know, use pedagogies of listening, use a pedagogy that actually enables and supports creativity, as opposed to me to, you know, get ready for an exam. So if we can actually uplift that and actually transfer that, as individuals, going year on year, we focus on that transition and transitions are everywhere, transition from, you know, living from your parents' house to elsewhere, transitioning to university, transitioning out of university to a new workforce, et cetera. So it's empowering individuals from an early age to understand that space, you know, understand their environment, appreciate their environments, understand how to connect, you know, which is quite important. And why we focus on birth five.

PROFESSOR WEST

The other thing about the TPA, I think, is that when that was brought in, there was a, I think a regulatory piece there that was a bit of an assumption that we didn't actually already do something like that because we all did that. We all did capstone, and it all had, you know, basically it's about the course level learning outcomes and mapping to the course level learning outcomes and the requirements to graduate as a teacher. And we all already kind of did that, but we have this overlay of the TPA, which has brought in some additional pieces, which actually do make it a huge task and burden can I say, on top of the final year consolidation placement for students about that learning piece. So it is quite challenging in that sense. But I think one of the more concerning pieces is the fact that there, there seemed to be a bit of an assumption that we didn't already do that. And in fact, we did, and as universities who are empowered to graduate students under courses, and with our own regulations, we actually were all pretty rigorous about it to start with.

DR RAYMOND

Absolutely. And, you know, like Anne said that our TPA in our Master of Teaching Early Childhood Program already takes place in a preschool context. However, that does take considerable translation of the AITSL standards to be able to successfully do that TPA. And that's been a significant work for our university lecturers. And then to be able to translate that to the field who are suddenly given AITSL standards, to be able to talk to their pre-service teachers about in context, to be able to complete that assessment piece has been enormously challenging. But, you know, going to your point, Deborah, that there are universities interstate like Deacon who already do a TPA within their early childhood birth to five courses, but we already did anyway. We didn't call it a teaching performance assessment, we called it the

assessment for our final professional experience. And it was, for Uni SA, it was a professional inquiry project where essentially we were assessing exactly the same thing. Can these students connect theory and practise and discuss what that means for children's learning which is essentially what the TPA seeks to assess. So it already exists and then it existed pre AITSL standards. So if the question is about, will ACEQUA be able to assess an ITE program and do that rigour rigorously? Yes. The answer is yes. The framework and the standards are already there within ACEQUA to be able to do that.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Just before I allow the Commissioner the remainder of the session, I'm just curious to know, I know the submission from Flinders University pointed out that I think less than 50% of students come via high school, I think we call ATAR now, it definitely wasn't called that when I was at high school, but I'm interested to know whether you find the same thing. And we had before lunch when we were discussing the upscale program, an interesting exchange about some research they commissioned on the views of people in year nine and 10 about potential early years careers. And whether you have any insights as to whether we are, you know, maximising interest at that stage, even though that's going to fill the pipeline further down the track.

DR RAYMOND

I mean, a significant proportion of our students do come through alternative pathways that are not, they're not school leavers and those alternative pathways will look different, but a significant proportion of those come through the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care. And so that's why a birth to five degree would be significant because it recognises the skills and knowledge that those students bring and experience that those students bring that we cannot currently do within our birth to eight degree. We can do that in a birth to five degree, but yes, it, and we have our college program, which is very similar for students who are coming through without an ATAR, perhaps mature age, perhaps didn't finish school, that sort of thing as well, but a significant proportion come through the diploma pathway.

PROFESSOR MORAN

It's a very mixed role. And at the master's level, it's increasingly mature age.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Right. That's helpful. Anything else you'd like to share about the kind of make up at the moment of courses.

PROFESSOR WEST

Yeah. The ATAR piece, like generally they're not school leavers and they come through the variety of pathways for us, and it is, you know, all part of that mix of our diversity, which is

actually really important. And I think one of the reasons we raise that is that a lot of the various programs that are coming through, which are scholarships, which we welcome for our students, but one of the emphasis of those scholarships are high achieving ATAR scores. And what we were trying to make the point is, well, (a), a lot of people don't come through an ATAR pathway, they actually go off and do other things, a diploma or whatever, and then they come back and want to study. And secondly, a high ATAR doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be a good teacher and, you know, it tells you, you can study and it tells you you can do certain things. It doesn't necessarily equate to being a good teacher. So that was one of the reasons we were kind of making that point is the diversity and thinking about when we're trying to increase the number of people coming through. The other point I would make though, around the number of people coming through and, and your question around the year nine year 10, one of the things we're certainly finding is that we have a declining number in terms of undergraduates interested in any kind of education, ITE teacher programs. And we are theorising that off the back of COVID and the experiences that they've had, what they're seeing in the schools right now with high levels of stress and teachers being very stretched, that it doesn't look like a very attractive place to be. So that we, we are confident that's going to bounce back in due course, but it is a difficult environment and it kind of goes to the challenges of placement in schools as well, because the teachers are very stretched. And so that creates that kind of challenge, but also the young people are seeing that. So they've seen the challenges over the last few years. So I think, you know, will that turn around? Yes. Timeframe, not sure, but hopefully sooner rather than later. We are, you know, we are still getting good numbers coming through more in the changing of careers, so into the masters but not the undergrad. And so it's, you know, the different cohorts and perceptions. The other thing of course that plays in there is the economy. When there's a lot of jobs, less people come to university, that's just kind of how it works over time. So that is another kind of piece of it as to why we might see numbers going down. But yeah, food for thought.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you. I just want to go over some of the ground we've been talking about and ask some additional questions along the way, but I'd really like to just make sure, you know, sort of piece by piece I've got it straight in my head about where we are now and where we could be. So, starting with the most simple case of a school leaver. A school leaver could choose to go to either of your universities and study the zero to eight and emerge with a teaching qualification, which would then mean that they would be on the teacher's registration board list. And I've heard what you've said that technically that could mean that they could be teaching year 12 physics, in the real world that doesn't happen because a school principal trying to staff that job is obviously looking for someone who can present with the requisite skills in physics. And your estimate, I think it was your estimate was that studying that zero to eight over four years, skew would be about 70% on the teaching side and 30% on the early childhood development side.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

That's what it is at the moment.

COMMISSIONER

At the moment. Yes. I just wanted to, one of the things that was put to us in the session before lunch in the discussion with the Teachers Registration Board, and it was put by way of a question, the Teachers Registration Board representative said they didn't know the percentages, but they assumed that there are some things that are needed in common and then some things that are more specialised to the teaching side or the early childhood side can, do you think that's right? So just breaking down, I presume you've got to learn what is pedagogy, and then you know, pedagogy in a school sense, in an early childhood sense, is that right? Some of it is a sort of spine across both.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yeah. And that's why we don't want to be really strictly saying it's 30/70, because there are skills and processes and learning that that is applicable to all of it. But I still think it's a fairly accurate representation of the distribution currently. And if the degree we are proposing was used, and then the extra year to get the masters, it would reverse that, really, there would be more emphasis on the early development and less on the primary.

COMMISSIONER

So while there are concepts in common the 70/30 you think is an estimate, not a mathematical precision.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yeah. And it's really difficult to do, to actually look at what are the pedagogies that are in common, you know, across the whole thing, because teaching children from birth to eight year old's you're still using a lot of play based, creative work with them. So the pedagogies can be similar. But the very specific details are still within that kind of range. And remember there is also a lot of curriculum that's in the Australian curriculum in the F to 2 part.

COMMISSIONER

Right. And then emerging with that qualification and potentially being able to access jobs in government preschools as a teacher in a long daycare centre or an early learning centre, or in a primary school, even with pay equalised. Obviously we've received a lot of evidence that there are greater holidays in some settings than others, particularly compared with being a teacher in long daycare and there's, depending on the nature of the centre people work for, there can be a sense of more professional inclusion in a school than perhaps working in a long daycare centre where there aren't a large number of other teachers. Now, obviously that depends a bit on the size and scale of the long daycare provider. And then currently, if you already had a diploma, you would get a six months recognised prior learning, which would turn that zero to eight qualification into a three, three and a half year qualification. And then there was reference made to currently too, you can present with an undergraduate qualification and

do two years, and emerge with a masters which would enable you to teach. I mean, how, I mean, people would then say If you're going to weigh this in number of years learning teaching, which I'm actually not predisposed to do, but the discussion we had before lunch suggested that, you know, the number of years learning teaching did very much matter, I mean, what is lost, if you do the two year masters, as opposed to doing the four year study, how does that square out?

DR RAYMOND

So a two year Masters of Teaching is a very compacted degree because the requirements around placement remain the same. So they must do a minimum of 60 days placement, and then the birth to two placement sits on top. So they are doing 80 days placement in a Master of Teaching degree. In an undergraduate early childhood program you are still, the minimum amount is 80 days placement, birth to two sits on top. And a majority of those days must be taken in a school context. And that's the same for undergrad or the Master of Teaching, majority of days must be taken in a school context. So in a two year degree, it's exceptionally challenging for students to get to know and understand working in three different contexts and getting to know the full range of zero to eight in a two year period. And they are basically, all of our study periods are utilised to be able to manage, to get through the program in that period of time and at the same time meet the AITSL requirements. So for example, they must have four English courses within that two year period. They must have two maths courses, one science course. So it's quite prescriptive as to what needs to be included within a two year degree. Four year degree is obviously is equally as prescriptive from the AITSL requirements, but you've got more time to be able to accommodate those requirements.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

PROFESSOR WEST

Good summary. I think the other thing I'd add is that there's an assumption about, or there's some requirements around what degree you can come in with. So there's a background piece to that in terms of, there's only certain prescribed areas that you can come in with your bachelor level degree. So there's an assumption that you've learnt some baseline things in your bachelor's and now we're going to teach you the teaching part, the teaching and curriculum piece. So in that context, it is dependant on that undergraduate piece as well. So you're not necessarily losing anything because you're, the Masters of Teaching is teaching you how to teach in the curriculum, as opposed to you have, theoretically, as opposed to your coming in with your content, as opposed to I'm coming in as an undergrad and I need to learn my area as well as how to teach it.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

In secondary that's much clearer because, you know, you come in with a maths degree and you've got the maths content ready to go. But for early childhood, less clear.

COMMISSIONER

And so would you still give the 70/30 percentage for the masters between teaching and early childhood?

DR RAYMOND

I would say that more of it. So I'm just trying to do a quick count in my head. I would say that more of, yes, probably about 70/30, within a two year degree. So if you think about that, I mean, our first year of our degree is all F to 2 focused, so junior primary focused and part of our second year is also junior primary focused before we get into the core early childhood courses, which consists of 1, 2, 3, 4 courses.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. And then if the zero to five qualification that you've spoken about was registered, if we just imagine it was registered, for the three years with the articulation that you've spoken of, so you can come in and do the three years, or you might present with a diploma and do the two years. And then you could at some point, if you wanted to, do an additional year and then be registered to teach in schools. That would necessitate wouldn't it, the Teachers Registration Board dividing the current registration role?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

I don't think so because if the role of, as the TRB describes it at the moment, is to register teachers to just say at whatever level, I think it's actually at the point of employment that the difference is made.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

So I think it would be very unlikely that a secondary school would employ someone with a birth to five degree, for example. But it's not impossible if you've got just a single register. Victoria divides the register but I actually don't think it's necessary within the way it's framed in the TRB legislation at the moment.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

PROFESSOR WEST

I think just to add to that, I mean, the TRB are quite clear that they will register birth to five as long as it's a four year degree.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

And meets all the AITSL standards.

PROFESSOR WEST

And meets all the AITSL standards. So that part is not the problem. The problem is 'a' not actually acknowledging ACEQUA requirements and all of that, but secondly is the employment piece. And I think if the employer's piece, I mean, the Department for Education in South Australia is quite clear about, you know, what they will hire, and that needs to be qualified in terms of primary as well as early childhood. And so that piece of it also kind of flows through that, the point being it's the employer as well that we also need to factor into this.

COMMISSIONER

Just breaking that down. So the time is obvious - three years versus four years. If you were to create a four year zero to five that met all the AITSL requirements, how would that differ apart from the three to four years? How would that differ from what you have in mind? What I understand you to be saying, and certainly correct me if I'm going wrong is that those AITSL requirements aren't as probative as you would want of the skills and capacities needed to teach in zero to five?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

So from the employer perspective, at the moment they don't employ, because it's not a recognised, registered degree to register teachers. I think that's the impediment for the Department for Education, for example, that if it were recognised and a registered degree, and they were teachers, I think the Department would be, would change and move to say, well, we can employ them in schools where we've got a preschool, a three year old or a four year old preschool, they're suitable for that.

DR RAYMOND

I was just going to say that the TRB's argument is solely based on that they're only recognising the AITSL standards as the only way to accredit a birth to 5 degree, instead of recognising ACEQUA has its own framework and accreditation. Okay. So if the TRB said, no, we will

register a four year birth to five degree, but it must be aligned AITSL program standards then those standards would need to be rewritten. And in the TRB submission, they've stated that there is no enthusiasm, recent national discussions show a lack of enthusiasm for rewriting the teacher standards to make them more specific for early childhood education. So then that leaves us nowhere in the sense that we can't accredit against the AITSL standards because they're school based even to the prescription of which curriculum documents can and cannot be used. And the TRB won't recognise ACEQUA's accreditation frameworks. So where are we? So they won't register a three year degree and they won't accredit against anything but the AITSL standards, but we cannot rewrite the AITSL standards.

COMMISSIONER

It's very helpful to get that on the record as clearly as that. Thank you for that. And then the third issue, the employer issue, it's, in your view it's a chicken and egg argument. If there was presenting a zero to five registered teacher, then the Department of Education could appoint them into schools that are running early childhood with preschool, and certainly long day care centres could appoint them to run four and three year old preschool.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Yes

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Then I'm just interested in, there's been reference to this, to the potential and just before I get there, if we imagine a world where there is a, three year registered zero to five degree here in South Australia, but in that world, I'm assuming that you would continue to offer your zero to eight qualification at Flinders. Is that right?

PROFESSOR WEST

Well, the answer to that really depends on if it's a registered teacher. If we could do a registered teacher for early childhood for three years, and that's what industry and everybody wanted, then we would obviously do that.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

PROFESSOR WEST

You know, like that's where, how, you know, that's how we operate. Yeah. I just, I guess I just worry about some of that, because I feel like saying that you could become a teacher for early childhood in three years, whereas actually you have to be four years for primary or secondary somehow implies, it's an easier thing to be this than it is to be that. And I, that's part of the, and

that goes to the pay equity piece and it, you know, so it kind of flows through. That's my concern with the three year. But if we could, if those people could actually register as a teacher with a three year degree, and it was no problem, and they were going to get employment. Absolutely. We would do it.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Because where I was going to go with that question is we've had contradictory, I mean, it's just people's different experiences, evidence this morning about how popular zero to five degrees are. We had, the first witness this morning, who'd had some experience in Tasmania, said when they were offered in Tasmania, but the zero to eight qualification was still being offered, the zero to eight qualification was more popular and ultimately the zero to five qualification was no longer offered. So presumably, I'm pretty sure that was in the context where they were both four year qualifications, and so people presumably thought to themselves might as well get the one that would enable me to register in schools. So I was really asking whether we were heading for, or potentially heading for a similar issue. And then

PROFESSOR MORGAN

And that could well have been a pay issue as well.

COMMISSIONER

It could. Right. Okay.

DR RAYMOND

And it hinges on registration.

COMMISSIONER

Yes.

PROFESSOR WEST

Everything hinges on registration.

COMMISSIONER

And then we heard quite the reverse from the Chief Executive Officer of the Front Project. So they're mentoring and supporting people to up skill and so they're right around Australia doing their qualifications at different universities. Her evidence was that the people there helping sort of inherently are people who are very deeply committed to early childhood education and care, already working in the sector, want to become a teacher. And actually they prefer the qualifications, which are very focused on early childhood and very focused on their skills

development rather than more at large and more theoretical. So it was quite in a different direction.

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

May I add to that one. I think it's also a difference between upskilling the current individuals in the profession versus increasing the workforce. So it sounds to me that, you know, that has to be taken into account. Those individuals are already in the workforce that are just looking for an upskilling, are a subset of the problem we are trying to solve.

COMMISSIONER

Yes, that's true.

PROFESSOR MUNGUIA

And so we're trying to do both, I think. And that's the challenge.

COMMISSIONER

Yeah. Yeah. That's true. Okay. So then there's been reference to the potential to develop an apprenticeship style model. Can you just talk me through a bit more, I mean, I'm aware, you know, from the UK and the US that in all sorts of areas now, engineering, law, all sorts of things, there's sort of mixed modalities that are being packaged as apprenticeship style models. But how would that work for early childhood education or early childhood teaching I should more properly say.

PROFESSOR WEST

Yeah. Yeah. So basically it's about somebody being either they're currently employed or they, their employment comes as part of that apprenticeship. One of the key things is having it on the traineeship register and that's doable within South Australia because the legislation's there. To be able to then, people being able to get a traineeship, so that they are having some pay and it, you know, kind of helps defer against the employer so that it supports the training. So what does it look like within that context? They can be employed in that model depending on how the curriculum looks over the period of say, if we were talking about the three years, that increasingly they're taking on more and more of the responsibility as they go through, they're doing theoretical pieces, either coming into the environment or you know, partially online, but being able to be supported and assessed within the context of the organisation, obviously with oversight from the university context. And I think these models are ones that have a lot of appeal, particularly in more regional areas, because there's a lot of people already working in these fields and how that might upskill. It tends to be more of a competency based type of assessment so looking at that and progressively taking that theory and applying it, but then competency based assessment on how that looks within the context. So it kind of like goes in different kind of ways if you like, depending on the field. So obviously in early childhood,

somebody might be in an early childhood centre or a school, they might be notionally being an SSO type of arrangement or a support worker in that context, but they have actually the key learning outcomes and they're working through the theory as it goes, and then applying it in context. So it can be quite a mixed model as well, where they're, they're learning, they're studying, they're working. And so they're getting the practical and rather than the separate placement, it's a continual arrangement of placement.

COMMISSIONER

And so is it true to say that that kind of apprenticeship model could be rolled out as a zero to eight or a zero to five?

PROFESSOR WEST

Yeah. It doesn't matter.

COMMISSIONER

Yeah. But it would elongate the period wouldn't it, to qualify because you are working

PROFESSOR WEST

Not necessarily.

COMMISSIONER

Not necessarily?

PROFESSOR WEST

No. So certainly with other programs we've done, you can take a, you know, you can still do a diploma within a year. You can still do an associate degree within the two years. So it's not necessarily that it elongates, it's just a different way of doing it because we can pull out, we can also pull out blocks of the theoretical training that might happen, so where people are coming in. So again, we're using different study periods and it's a return so rather than keeping the placements as you do the 20 days, 40 days, yeah, we're actually doing it throughout so that you get a better integration. So it doesn't elongate the actual degree.

COMMISSIONER

Right. Okay. And is there anywhere, any jurisdiction in Australia, that's offering a model like that in either in childhood?

PROFESSOR WEST

Not in early childhood that I'm aware of.

COMMISSIONER

In teaching at any level?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Absolutely, in teaching there's and within degrees as well, in, Teach for Australia and those kinds of programs do exactly that. The whole period is

COMMISSIONER

Working

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Working yeah, while studying. There's also an internship kind of model, you know, where the final year can be in workplaces with a like 40% of it is actually like paid employment and the rest is study wrapped around it and mentoring and so on, but it's, but you're in the school the, the whole year.

COMMISSIONER

So, but so the last year of a four year qualification?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

The last year of a four year qualification.

COMMISSIONER

Yeah. And Teach for Australia

PROFESSOR MORGAN

Teach for Australia is usually a two year, usually at master's level.

COMMISSIONER

But its taking high performing graduates in.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

And there's half a dozen universities that do either Teach for Australia or a model like it. University of Melbourne has a model like it, Queensland Education Department has a number of universities working in a model like that. NESA in New South Wales also has that.

COMMISSIONER

Okay, thank you. And then the last thing for me is, I may be getting confused because we've heard a lot of evidence today. Council assisting will help if I have got confused, but I'm pretty sure we've heard diametrically opposed evidence on the comparative difficulties of getting placements in early childhood and in schools. I think the evidence we had before lunch was if you are studying a zero to eight, that it's easier to get a placement in a school because there's lots of teachers and you'll find one that that wants to do the supervision, you may find a number, but you'll find at least one, whereas in a preschool or you know, long day setting, not that many teachers, therefore more difficult for them to take student placements. But I understood you I think it was [indicates Dr Raymond] to be saying the reverse of that.

DR RAYMOND

Yeah. I mean, long day is much more flexible so we can use the holidays and things like that because they're open 51 weeks out of the year. So the placements our childcare centres are never an issue. And preschool at the moment, all of our preschool students were fairly easily placed and their placements were released I think like three weeks prior to the course beginning. And we have about 180 going out at the moment. But your experience is different [indicates Professor West]. So yeah.

PROFESSOR WEST

I think it depends on the cohorts as well, but certainly placements in schools are difficult to get at the moment.

COMMISSIONER

And is that post COVID rather than pre COVID or is that a continuum?

PROFESSOR WEST

It's post COVID mostly I would say. But it's also for different cohorts of students. So with, particularly international students, it's more difficult to have the placements in the master's programs. But I think the other thing is where there are challenges in particularly early childhood settings or long day care, we as universities have a number of ways that we deal with that anyway. So vis a vis, you know, similar to what we do in other disciplines, but you know, we can actually pay somebody to be in those areas to do the supervision, which, you know, then agencies are generally quite happy to have somebody in place. "Preceptor" model

that comes out of nursing, those kinds of things. We have other abilities to do that. I think that the one thing I would say on that though, is that we're finding it increasingly challenging, in some ways, financially in some areas, because we increasingly have to put in somebody that we're paying for or we're, you know, paying for an amount of money. So that, that does become a bit of a challenge, but it's all solvable.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

PROFESSOR WEST

You know, it's quite solvable in those spaces. That's more difficult in the school setting. And I think because the schools are again so stretched it's, and if they think it's potentially going to be a harder student, ie there might be some assumptions that are built into that, that they don't necessarily want to sign up to having a student on placement.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Thank you. And then, sorry, I said that was the last question. This is the last, last question. In thinking about the zero to five, have you done any demand assessment? I mean, if it all fell out of the sky and you could start enrolling students next year, do you think you would get demand?

PROFESSOR MORGAN

We haven't surveyed students yet or potential students, but we have, well, some potential students in that we have been talking with childcare centres and there definitely is an interest amongst staff working there. Is that right?

DR RAYMOND

Yes. We've done quite a lot of external consultation to get feedback on what basically would the field think of a birth to five degree essentially and that consists of representatives from the GOWRIE, Catholic Ed, Lutheran Ed, the Department for Education, whole range of people. Essentially very supportive of a birth first of five degree, but not without teacher registration. So it all hinges on teacher registration, unfortunately. So yeah, no appetite, unless it attracts teacher registration and there's a maintenance of pay and work conditions for teachers.

COMMISSIONER

Yep. And have you seen any cycles up or down in demand for your current zero to eight qualifications.

DR RAYMOND

Been fairly consistent, but a slight drop after COVID.

COMMISSIONER

Right. But that's consistent with drops in other areas, is it, or is it

DR RAYMOND

Across primary and secondary there's been a drop in overall ITE enrolment. So early childhood is no different to that. But since COVID, it has been, you know, a slight drop and 2020, we probably lost a few more students, but then they've popped back up in the program at different times. So, because they've gone part-time and are trying to balance lives and study.

PROFESSOR MORGAN

So our share has remained pretty steady.

COMMISSIONER

Right. Okay. And that's your experience? [indicates Professor West]

PROFESSOR WEST

Our experience is in the undergrad the demand is certainly down in the last few years, again, across all of our initial teacher education, not just early childhood. In the masters, in our postgrad space, it's dropped a little bit, but not a lot, but we certainly have more demand in terms of international students in the post grad space as that's bounced back after COVID. But yeah, it's not specific to early childhood.

COMMISSIONER

Yep. Okay. Thank you. That's been very helpful. Great discussion. Thank you very much.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

The panel can be released and our final witness, I believe is here.
I call the final witness of today. Professor Sue Irvine.

< PROFESSOR IRVINE AFFIRMED

You are currently a Professor and Head of the School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education within the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice at Queensland University of Technology is that correct?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

That's correct.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And you hold a PhD from the Centre of Learning Innovation at that institution awarded in 2005 I believe?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

That's correct.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You also hold a Master of Educational Studies from the University of Queensland in 1991.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And prior to that, various bachelor and diploma qualifications within teaching.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I understand you've taught over a long time through a range of early education settings, including preschool and long daycare in Australia and England, I believe.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

And in schools as well, so on both sides of the fence.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

From 2007 to 2010, you were the CEO of Lady Gowrie in Queensland, is that right?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And you currently hold several leadership roles within the sector, including as a member of the Queensland College of Teachers and the Professional Standards Committee and other similar bodies.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes. I was just going to note also my background in policy as well. You probably are going to get to that.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Yes, thank you. You you've had a wide range of experience in policy implementation and also you've researched widely in areas such as education, policy and quality standards, educational leadership, curriculum, and pedagogy, and effective approaches to ongoing professional learning. Is that a fair summary of your varied background?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes, I'm a self-confessed policy nerd I'm afraid.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Welcome to the club. There's a few of us here. And you've also been involved in several large mixed method, collaborative research projects within policy within the field of early education. I believe.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Correct.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We've heard today and I think you may have joined in at least virtually for some of the evidence we've heard, while the Commission's been gathering different views across models for tertiary qualifications for teaching staff. And you are aware that we've had a representative from our Teachers Registration Board in South Australia. And I think you were watching virtually for the panel we've just had from our South Australian university providers. We're interested to, explore the views of some others who are involved within the sector in Australia. And can I ask you to first of all outline what your university offers in terms of bachelor and masters within early childhood?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes, certainly. QUT has been offering courses in early childhood teacher education for about 110 years. We started with one of the oldest kindergarten teachers colleges, and we consistently have offered birth to eight qualifications, which is also linked to our teacher registration context as well. But that was, that was also a historical focus. And we currently offer a Bachelor of Education Early Childhood, which is birth to eight and a Master of Teaching Early Childhood, birth to eight. We also offer a range of other primary and secondary qualifications as well of course.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And correct me if I misunderstood this, but I understand that one of the ways that you are looking at dealing with shortages within the sector is a pathway that allows up to 18 months advanced standing into the Bachelor of Education. Can you explain to us how that works?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Sure. Now this is the Queensland context, but that's not a new pathway for us. We've been offering that for goodness, I would say at least two accreditation cycles, so around six to eight years, I would think. And we are, we are actually going through the reaccreditation of all of our bachelor of education programs at the moment. So we've recently mapped this again. So that pathway recognises and values the prior learning that educators have undertaken in the Diploma of Early childhood Education and Care. And we credit or we give advanced standing for 12 months for that particular qualification. And as I said, we've actually mapped the national training package, which that qualification is based on wherever it's delivered. And we've mapped that to our Bachelor of Education, Early Childhood Program. On top of that, we also recognise the experience that educators actually bring. And we are giving six months additional advanced standing, so a total of 18 months for educators who have had at least two years professional experience working with a group of children. So the focus of that is very much about their work with a group of children.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And so assuming that a candidate is eligible for the total amount of standing, just remind me the total time it would take them to complete the qualifications.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Well, it's a four year degree. And so they come in and they have 18 months of advanced standing and then they can complete that in terms of full-time with another two and a half years of full-time study or the equivalent part-time and, the majority choose the part part-time route while they're working.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And do you have a sense anecdotally as to the numbers of students that you're having enrolled by way of that pathway and completion figures?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I don't have current figures, but I know that it's been as high as 40% and particularly in certain communities where we've been offering the program. So in some communities particularly, a little while ago now, but certainly we were working in a particular community where there were a lot of alternate pathways into the university, that was part of the mission of the university being in that particular community and the pathway through vocational education and training, particularly TAFE because we were co-located with a TAFE college at that point and we had up to 40% of students entering that way.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And in terms of the additional recognition that's given for the experience within the sector, is that combination of the 12 and an extra six months relatively unique to your program, or is it something that's seen elsewhere in Australia?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I believe that that's happening elsewhere in Australia. There's probably state nuances and regulatory context that may come to play there, but certainly I'm aware of other universities that are offering up to two years advanced standing for a diploma into a four year degree.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And as you've said, Queensland, akin to South Australia has maintained a focus on ITL degrees from birth to eight. Do you see a birth to eight, four year degree is having a particular strength as opposed to a zero to five degree? And if so how have you formed that view?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Well, I probably should declare that I'm birth to eight trained myself so there's a, that's like a conflict of interest there and QUT, it is embedded with birth to eight. So my view is that the birth to eight provides, it's a coherent focus on what I consider to be early childhood education and care. So over recent years we've really started to segment and think that early childhood education happens prior to school and that then school happens, but that's not how QUT's courses were founded and that's not how we operate. We actually think about having a specialist early childhood qualification that equips teachers to teach young children birth to eight across a range of settings. And that's really been our promotion for probably the best part of a hundred years or, or so and I think that the strength comes in that you really think about how children develop and grow and learn. You think about specialist early childhood

pedagogies, and think about how that works across age spans and in different settings. And I think that there's a lot of interrelationship between that, that we want to see across settings. And that's, you know, equally important in a prior to school setting, it's equally important in a school setting. So we think of it much more coherently as a specialist, early childhood pedagogical degree that equips our students to work across all of those settings to teach across all of those settings.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Do you divide up curriculum in any percentage weighted versus sort of early primary compared to the birth to five years? The evidence we had just earlier was a rough breakdown of 70% primary curriculum in our AITSL degree and roughly 30.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

We look at it slightly differently again, because you know, all of our students do birth to eight and most of our units would actually, if there were two assessment tasks, which there are in the vast majority of our units, there would be one situated in the prior to school setting and one situated in the early years of school. So it's much more coherent in that respect. What we usually do though, is we think about standalone early childhood units, so those, an again its birth to eight, but standalone ones that we only do and work with our early childhood teachers. Then we have our shared units with primary, and then we have foundation units, which are your sociology and your cultural studies and all of the things that teachers need to know regardless as to where they are going to teach. And the breakdown that we would have in that regard would be roughly 40% standalone early childhood, we're speaking specifically to early childhood teachers about early childhood curriculum and practise, but that includes the Early years learning framework, the Queensland Kindergarten Learning guideline, that's our prescribed preschool program, and the Australian curriculum, because our teachers go into the early years of school. And then we've got around 40% shared with primary and again, in those courses, our students are still learning about all of the different curriculum that they are shared units with primary and then roughly 20% of our foundational units around sociology, cultural awareness, inclusive education.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

One of the concerns that the Commission has heard, and it came out in the panel just after lunch, before you arrived, was whether or not the AITSL requirements and that the need to comply with those, depending on what jurisdiction you are in, leave sufficient space to properly address the knowledge base that's crucial when it comes to brain development and early childhood development. Do you build that in, within that 40%, that's just geared towards early childhood learning, or is it something that you see as being one of the topics that needs to transfer across the continuum of the degree and therefore birth to 8?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

There's a lot in that question. And I need to say again that we are in the middle of all of this at the moment, so I'll try and be positive because sometimes it's a very elongated task. The AITSL standards certainly privilege school, teaching in school context. However, there's no reason why they can't be applied in the early childhood setting. So I'm going to take a slightly different view I think to some of my colleagues. When I look at the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, I think that they apply equally in terms of teachers working in a prior to school setting with any age and teachers working in a school setting. So, I mean, the standards are things like, know your students. Well, you want to know the learners. I mean, if we call them know your learners, then they would be much more relevant and accessible for teachers working across all of those areas. You know, know your content, which is your curriculum, so make sure that you understand, you know, what you're actually working from. You know, what particular pedagogies you are going to be using. Assessment, which is equally important in prior to school as it is in schools, but looks different. So I think that these standards are relevant. I do think that AITSL puts far too much weight on them being demonstrated in a school context, but you can actually manage that. And we have managed that. I think that our course is very balanced. I think, I complain that there continues to be a push down, you know, every moment we seem to turn around, there's another thing from the school sector where, you know, we are needing to respond to something because the school sector is wanting to see this. I think we need to push back. I don't think that the choice here is to move away from that because I am very strongly committed to the idea of one teaching profession. I think that that's very important. But I do think that we need to get on with contextualising the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, so that they're relevant for teachers across the board, regardless as to where they're working. And there was a commitment to that in 2018, and it hasn't yet been enacted. And I think they need to get on with it.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

That was, I think, discussions that were looking at whether or not there should be amendments to perhaps bring in some more specific references to matters relevant to teaching in birth to five within the AITSL standards, I believe is that, was it broader?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

It was predominantly language. It's about terminology. It's about making sure that the language of the professional standards is relevant and inclusive to teachers. And my personal preference is that it's inclusive of teachers across the board. Not that we have Australian Professional Standards for early childhood teachers and Australian Professional Standards for teachers working in schools, it's, it's one teaching profession. Let's just make sure that the standards are inclusive and respectful of both settings.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And I take it from that, that you are comfortable that they can be implemented within the early years teaching profession without significant amendment.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I believe so. I think, it may be an, there may be an educative piece, so certainly it looks different. I'm certainly not suggesting that teaching and assessment looks the same in both of those contexts, but the work of teachers, the professional thinking and ability to bring together curricular and their knowledge of students and local contexts, sorry, learners and contexts is the same. And that needs to be visible and possibly more visible in the prior to school, early childhood space, it's there. We just need to make it more publicly visible.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

In terms of making it more visible, we've heard evidence about the AITSL standards applying to the early primary, then we've got these dual requirements of ACEQUA when it comes to accrediting the component birth to five. Are there tensions between them that you see and are there ways that we could resolve some of that in terms of delivering effective teacher education programs?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Sure. I, and again, I'm going to say, this is my understanding, but I do a lot of work with ACEQUA and I have great respect for ACEQUA and colleagues there. I perceive that from a university perspective, I perceive that they have slightly different functions. So I, we engage with both ACEQUA and with AITSL for our early childhood teacher education programs. The AITSL piece is very much about, you know, demonstrating that our graduates are being prepared and eventually meet upon graduation, the graduate level Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The ACEQUA piece is about the specialist nature of the early childhood focus that we've got. So I look at that much more about the content of what we are offering and making sure that we've got significant attention to things like child development, you know, working in partnership with families, you know, all of the things that you would want and expect of a teaching degree that is preparing teachers to work with birth to five, which is ACEQUA's remit, they're only focused on birth to five. I would say though, that those things that ACEQUA is asking for have given us the power and strength to make sure that's happening for our early childhood teachers who may choose to work in schools, because it's really important that they have those, that content as well. So I think they work together. The actual process is very clunky and this may be a Queensland thing, but I suspect not. But the process for accreditation is that we need to work firstly with AITSL, and then it goes to ACEQUA as a second element. When ACEQUA first brought in these requirements quite, many years ago, with the National Quality Framework, there was a hope and QUT piloted with ACEQUA an integrated approach. Now that got stale mated somewhere along the line, but we need that. We need an integrated approach. We need them working together because again, I,

I want one teaching profession and I think we need one teacher registration authority, but ACEQUA has a very important role to play in informing that in terms of early childhood teacher recognition.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

In the session we've just had, and we've touched upon it throughout today, we've been exploring whether a three year degree has a place to play in training qualified teachers in the early years space, and University of South Australia are strongly supportive of a three year degree. I'm interested in your thoughts for, from your many years in a profession, as to whether you see that as a proposal with merit to address some of the shortages within the workforce, or whether you would rather see concentration on the traditional framework.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

That's a very challenging question. I'm going to start with the blue sky and the deeper response, that I believe that if our current requirement for teaching is four years in education settings, I have grave concern about teachers in prior to school settings completing less than that. And I think I'm very, my area of research is in professionalism and looking at the professionalisation movement internationally and in Australia. And one of the key levers in that work has been increasing qualification requirements and looking at, you know, valuing and promoting the professional work of teachers and often using teachers in schools as the comparative points. It's similar work, it's professional work. So I am very concerned about the messaging at a time when we are looking at promoting professional recognition in the community, the link between professional recognition and professional remuneration and conditions, I worry about what I think can really only be perceived as lowering standards for teachers working in that part of the education continuum.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

If we can assume for a moment that there were mechanisms that were utilised to address the pay issue, would you have any particular concerns about what is potentially lost content wise? I know it's not as easy as just to say we lose a year, but can you help us understand or elucidate what you fear might be lost quality wise?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

That's, it's very difficult. You know, that's a difficult thing to sort of think about in a sort of esoteric way, but I think it's more about if the teaching profession is saying that a four year qualification is needed to address the professional and very complex work of teachers, recognising that we're asking more and more of them across the board prior to school, and in the school context, if that's the standard across the board, then clearly something's going to be lost. So, and I, I did hear some of the arguments that, you know, that would, that would be perhaps the, the school focused work, but I don't think that that's the case in all degrees. If you've got a much more coherent and integrated approach, there would have to be decisions

made about particularly pedagogical or content or foundation units, you know, you would lose something, you would have to. And I can't say to you that I'm aware of any studies that have actually looked at, you know, three year versus four year qualifications and across the world, there are examples of three year and four year qualifications. I think that one of the most recent large scale studies in Europe, the C pro study looked at at teacher qualifications, early childhood teacher qualifications across Europe, and found a trend towards increasing the duration of those courses. And I think most of them are sitting around the three and a half to four years now. I just think it feels to me like we are taking a backward step and I, and I realise the immediate need that we have, but I actually wonder whether a more scaffolded approach where we are still maintaining a requirement for a four year degree, maintaining parity with teachers in the school sector, but allowing pre-service early childhood teachers some of the opportunities that are happening in the school sector in terms of internship models, in terms of the advanced standing based on prior study and work, thinking about those sorts of models, but maintaining the standard.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We heard some evidence earlier today, I think, are you one of the universities that The Front Project have worked with?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

We have done work with the Front Project in the past.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And do you have any insights as to, you know, you must have observed people who were being given the program in terms of helping them up skill any insights you'd like to share about why that's been as successful as it seems to have been?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I think that it's offering really hands on valuable support and that, you know, I, think it's a mentoring approach to, you know, building student's confidence as well as their ability to engage in higher education study. That's one of the things that we notice the most for students who travel that pathway, you know, that they come with extraordinary knowledge and skills. They often suffer from fraud syndrome coming in and QUT's actually made the decision we're not talking about alternate pathways anymore because that implies traditional pathways and different pathways. And that just aids the notion of alternative pathways. So we have multiple pathways. And one of the things that we really found was that building, really focusing on making their knowledge and skills visible through conversational learning while also supporting and scaffolding them in terms of their academic literacies was the way to go. And The Front Project is supporting that, they're doing wraparound support with these particular students.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Whilst we've been canvassing different options that might be available, some of the submissions we've received have touched on concerns with accelerating degrees. Obviously that's a very different model to the one that Q U T offers with the generous or perhaps appropriate in your view recognition for prior qualifications and experience. Are there any particular concerns you would have with accelerating degrees that you would like to share with the Commission?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

No. I actually think that they need to be in the mix at the moment for the current workforce challenges that we are facing. And I'm going to say across the board, because, as you know, I am an early childhood teacher, so I have a particular focus on early childhood teacher education. But I also, in my position at QUT I oversee primary and secondary teacher education as well. And QUT is working on one of those accelerated models with the Queensland Department of Education at the moment. So we are involved in the Turn to Teach internship model, so that's some master's program. At the moment we have that in secondary education and we are currently, we've just been advised that we are going to be supported to offer it in our primary program and early childhood is next.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Can you just flesh out how that works in terms of the internship program, even though I know it's a secondary program at the moment.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Yes, certainly. At the moment it's a master level program, so teachers, sorry students coming into that program need to meet the entry requirements for a Master of Teaching Program. But the way that the program actually works is that we condense 18 months of teaching into 12 months, so we'll be using summer semesters. So the students will be completing an additional six months in their first year of study. The Department provides a \$20,000 scholarship, which goes to students to support them while they're studying and there's also a guaranteed employment outcome by the Department as well. At the end of the first year, bearing in mind that they've now completed 18 months of their two year degree, they're then put by the Department into a school with particular identified staffing needs, hard to hard to staff needs at the moment. And they are put into a paid internship and they work 0.5 and they finish their degree 0.5. They're completing everything that they need to in the masters, they'll be studying online certainly in their second year, the first year we're anticipating a large number will be studying online as well, which we have a large number of students studying online, but there is face to face options as well. So students can choose that. Yeah, I think that's probably about it.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And did I hear you say that the government was targeting, hard to reach areas in terms of offering scholarships?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

They're looking at, at the moment they're looking at in secondary schools subject areas where it's very difficult to find teachers in particular areas. STEM is an example of that. They're also looking at rural and remote. Queensland probably has a very similar issue to South Australia with geography. So, you know, it is more difficult to place teachers in rural and remote areas and also in some of the more challenging urban context where we are struggling to meet our teacher needs.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And there's I think you said consideration being given to rolling out into primary, and then your hope is that that might be trialled within early learning?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I want to look at a similar model in early childhood settings prior to school. I'm probably more interested at the moment though in thinking about how that might work in a bachelor level program than a master of teaching program, because I actually think, certainly in Queensland, I think that there is greater demand for that level of qualification. Our Master of Teaching Early Childhood is certainly doing well, but I'm not sure that that's going to be the greatest source of increased workforce capacity. And, and also it doesn't take into account people who have undertaken the diploma as well. So I'm wanting to look at other ways of taking that into account.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And are you advanced enough in that thinking to perhaps paint us a picture of what you'd like to see in terms of its operation in early childhood education? If it's a focus more on bachelor rather than masters, but trying to push people through?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Sure. We have, we've actually in our reaccreditation process, we've worked through a model of our current Bachelor of Education, Early Childhood that would be three and a half years. And I would be looking at some form of internship within that particular program. We're also really conscious that increasingly in Queensland, and I think across Australia, that to meet demand, and this is primarily in the school sector, there is conditional approval being given by teacher regulation authorities. So in Queensland, that's called Permission to Teach and we have an increasing number of graduates in both our Bachelor of Education programs and our Master of

Teaching programs who are being employed on Permission to Teach to work predominantly in the school sector because our teacher registration authority focuses on that. And so I guess that that's not a lever that we can use, but knowing that it is being used, we are thinking about ways that our programs could support that as needed, as a short term workforce measure. And I guess that that's where I'll come back to as well, that when I'm thinking about accelerated programs, they definitely don't work for all. So we need to be really mindful that accelerated doesn't mean you're not doing all of the work. This is still going to equate to four years at a bachelor level or two years at a master's level. You're just doing it faster. And that works for some, but it doesn't work for others. So we are maintaining lots of different options. And the other thing that I would note is that I think that we don't want to be planning this as the best way forward at a time of workforce challenge and shortage. I think that we need to be looking at how do we prepare resilient, well qualified, autonomous, professional teachers, and then what do we need to do at the moment to manage the demands that we've actually got at the moment?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I'll just check my notes quickly, but I don't think I have any further questions Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Can, can I just, pick you up on that last point when you say manage the demands at the moment, what in your view is making it a particular set of demands? Is that a COVID after hang in terms of workforce shortages?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

No, I mean, I would have to say that the number one issue has to be about professional recognition and professional remunerations. I know that's not the focus of today, but that's certainly where my research lies.

COMMISSIONER

In early childhood or in teaching generally or both.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

In prior to school, early childhood context. So, and the parity issue for early childhood teachers. So I think that's across the board for teachers and for educators and it urgently needs to be addressed for teachers and educators, but my focus is on the teaching context at the moment. And the lack of parity is, has reached a pivotal point, I think so, you know, and, and that's not new, I was involved in a study over the period 2014 to 2017, and that emerged as the number one issue. So we have a National Workforce Strategy, which I know that you'll be aware of, that was identified as the number one priority. I know that we've work happening in that space. I know that multi employer bargaining is, looking at that. I know that we are,

we've got a productivity commission, that's looking at that. But we urgently need attention to that and we need a more equitable, professional playing field.

COMMISSIONER

Understood. I was interested in the 18 month recognition of prior learning. So if you've got a diploma and if you've been working with a group of children, I think you said for two years, you get 18 months credit on a four year degree. The evidence that we took immediately before is that currently in South Australia the recognition of prior learning for a diploma is limited to six months on a four year degree. Can you talk about what you think might explain the difference? One of the things that was said to us before is that because the zero to eight qualification curriculum is very balanced towards the teaching end that it's not really possible to give a greater credit for a diploma in the early childhood end.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I did hear that. And I do know that across Australia, there's very different advanced standing being given at the moment, in terms of a diploma. I know that many years ago, vice chancellors agreed that it would be 12 months advanced standing for a diploma level qualification into any degree that it married up with. I can only assume that it's about the mapping exercise and the way that courses are actually being developed, or alternatively that there's some additional local South Australian regulatory requirement, which I'm not aware of. But certainly we've mapped and we are going through, you know, we've had this provision, as I said for quite some time, which has been acknowledged by our teacher registration authority and has been mapped and meets the requirements for both AITSL and for ACEQUA.

COMMISSIONER

And between giving the extra six months for people who have worked with children for two years and have the diploma, it seems between that and what you've talked about with the internship arrangements and the evidence that we heard before you, it seems to me like everybody, they're answering the question in different ways, but everybody's trying to find a way of integrating working in the profession with the education. So whether it's the internship at the end and that gets you six months, or whether it's the recognition of your prior work at the start, and that gets you six months, can you, you talk more broadly about what is driving that? Is that a new understanding about how valuable the, you know, at the coal face work is, or is it a new set of demands from students about how they want to learn? What's driving that?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I think it's probably a little bit of A and a little bit of B. There's certainly a really strong focus in all of the inquiries, and there's been many of them in teacher education of recent times. And I will have a grumble to note that a lot of those inquiries don't actually include consideration of teachers working in prior to school settings. They only focus on the school education system, which is very problematic because the issues are very similar across the board. But I think that

there's been a really strong focus on ensuring and strengthening links between theory and research and study and practise. And so certainly there's that impetus for it, but it's also about, you know, cost of living. It's about the fact that our students work, they all work and they work, you know, many more hours than perhaps we would like them to, but that's the reality. And we also have work force shortages so that people who are actually working in the profession, you know, if they have to come out to do their study, that just adds extra pressure to everything. So trying to navigate that space while maintaining quality and integrity of the teacher education programs, and that's a very fine dance. So there are certain things that I would hold onto tightly and other things that we are looking for different ways of working to strengthen that flexibility.

COMMISSIONER

And of the things to hold onto tightly, obviously different jurisdictions are making different decisions as to whether to hold onto the birth to eight tightly or whether to look at birth to five and I understand your perspective on that and respect that perspective. But I suppose from the evidence that the Commission has heard, you know, where we know that we are short of teaching workforce now in early childhood, where waivers have been given in many places, so people aren't accessing, children aren't accessing a teacher, and with the aspiration to introduce three year old preschool, there obviously are the issues of competition for labour force and the potential that people with birth to eight qualifications would prefer to go teaching in a traditional school setting. If, given you want to hold tightly to the zero to eight, can you think of, I mean, are there other things you would recommend to change the equation in a qualified teacher's mind about whether they used their birth to eight qualification in junior primary or they went into early childhood? What are other attraction factors?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Can I, I'll just begin by noting that I actually support birth to five as a four year degree. So in Queensland at the moment, we are not, in Queensland, the teacher registration authority, doesn't recognise that. I'm part of an alliance of teacher educators, which are all of the universities in Queensland who offer approved early childhood courses. And we are unanimous in supporting the four year birth to five degree being recognised for teacher registration and that work is being undertaken in Queensland at the moment.

COMMISSIONER

Can I just stop you there, are you supporting that as, and I'm sorry I misunderstood you, but are you supporting that as a substitute for zero to eight or an extra offering?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

As an extra off the offering, and certainly at this point in time, QUT has no intent of moving from birth to eight. We see that as being a really valuable course. But we also think that there's opportunity to offer choice and we see merit in a birth to five course that has the rigour that is required of teacher education and meets the four year requirement.

COMMISSIONER

So, if that was, sorry to interrupt you again, but if that were to happen and to be a registerable qualification, then other universities in Queensland would get about offering that, but QUT wouldn't.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

I wouldn't say we we've made a decision but at the moment we have no expectation or no plan to move into that direction. We may choose to go down that path at some stage, but at this point in time, we believe that birth to eight offers the wisest choice of employment for our students. I think, you know, it comes back to making sure that there is clear and visible pathways and equitable recognition and remuneration on both sides of the school fence. So at the moment, you know, it's, I haven't got the most recent figures, but in the past it's tended to be roughly 60% of our students will head into a school context and 40% will head into the prior to school context. I suspect that if we were able to gather the statistics and it's not easy to do that in the university at the moment but if we were to do that, we would probably find an increase towards the school context, particularly after COVID because of all of the stress and challenge that has come over that period and particularly for colleagues working in prior to school settings. But we also just need to make more visible some of the strengths of working in both of those areas. So wages and conditions is very much a part of that, but I've worked with students and on studies in terms of what keeps teachers and educators working in prior to school settings in preschools and long day care services. And you know, there's lots of things that do the, the job security perspective has been a big issue. So for early childhood services that are offering job security, as opposed to the Department of Education that can actually transfer you anywhere in the state at any particular time, you know, that's an appealing part of employment in the prior to school sector. The ability to work with early years curriculum and the perception, probably the correct perception, that there's more opportunity to work with play based and intentional pedagogies is also a very appealing thing for some of our early childhood teachers who choose to teach in the prior to school setting. And then leadership opportunities, pedagogical leadership opportunities, you know, being able to make a difference, not only with children, but also with families and with educators and colleagues in that context. So there are certain things that we could be making more of in that context, but none of those are going to make up for 20, \$30,000 difference in pay. And none of those are going to assist us to profile the professional nature of the work equal to that that's happening in the school sector. We need to be thinking about strategies to address those areas too.

COMMISSIONER

And just as a matter of interest, your zero birth to eight course at QUT, how feminised is that as a course?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Oh, very feminised, reflective of the sector at the moment. I could count the number of men properly on one hand at the moment. So yes, very typical.

COMMISSIONER

And in the Queensland context, we had discussions with the panel before, about how easy or difficult it is to get the placement opportunities for students during their courses. And presumably with you moving potentially, or thinking about this internship model, that's another dimension on that. How, is your experience in Queensland reflective of what was told to us prior to the break that, you know, it can be quite hard in the school setting to get placements, that there are potentials for placements in long daycare and preschools, is that right? Or is the mix a bit different?

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Well, my experience is in Queensland and at one university, and I would say, I would say that it's probably a little more difficult in both contexts at the moment, that there's pressure happening both in the prior to school sector and in the school sector that is causing some of our usual partners to not take students. We are working with major employers in the private school sector, as well as with the Department of Education and other school sectors to address that, because it doesn't make sense when we've got a workforce shortage that we're not all working together to try and support students to complete the professional experience. But I also think it comes down to the partnerships. QUT has been in teacher education for a very long time. We've got very strong partnerships in the prior to school sector and the school sector. Probably the greater issue for us at the moment is just ensuring quality of placement. So we want our mentor teachers to be well trained and supported and we want assistance from the employers on either side of the fence to make sure that when we are placing a student that that student's going to be placed with someone who wants to have them and who knows what they need to do in terms, and you know has the training and the support to be able to provide a really good experience and who can also make the judgements, you know, supervise and then assess the student's performance so that we've got a rigorous assessment process happening as well. So it's supporting that, recognising how busy our colleagues in those sectors are at the moment. So this is one more thing that we're adding to their work.

COMMISSIONER

And just cycling back to the discussions that are happening in Queensland on the birth to five qualification. I think you heard the evidence before about how Uni SA is imagining a three year birth to five qualification. And I hear what you're saying, that your view is that it should be a four year qualification. But can you talk to us about any insights you've got about how a Queensland birth to five qualification might negotiate this alphabet soup of national standards or national approaches.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Oh my goodness.

COMMISSIONER

You seemed to make a difference before standards and content. I'm not sure whether -

PROFESSOR IRVINE

So I need to think about this. I think, I certainly can't speak for the regulatory authority and I think I have some insights, but, you know, who knows if those are correct. But if I was thinking about it from my perspective, what would I like to see? Could I answer it that way?

COMMISSIONER

Yes, that'd be great. Thank you.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

What I would like to see is a much more integrated approach between AITSL and ACEQUA where we actually, where we're using the strengths that ACEQUA brings to this, but actually sticking with one teacher registration authority which obviously has state branches, I'm not suggesting we're going into a national system. I think that that has been lost, but that we actually have that coming together and it's a much more respectful and reciprocal process. I want to see four year qualified teachers working across all areas. I think we have some three year qualified teachers in other states and I think that they do, they should be considered to be eligible for teacher registration as a short term measure, it would make no sense not to recognise those teachers. But I think that, as we've done in the past, that it should be recognition with a plan to move towards making sure that we are upgrading to four years, that we are maintaining that four year qualification over a period of time. But I think that ultimately what I want to see is, you know, teachers working across the board, being able to be registered and being able to ultimately achieve full registration and then have a career pathway that allows them to move on to more senior levels within the teacher registration framework, which isn't available to a lot of teachers in prior school settings at the moment.

COMMISSIONER

Mm-hmm okay. And obviously another dimension of how we can, it's beyond training, but it's really about the deployment of workforce. There are obviously all of the national standards about ratios and numbers, in early childhood education, numbers of trained teachers and those sorts of things. Can you, I mean, from your expertise in these areas, can you imagine some different models where you know, a trained teacher is perhaps supervising more diploma educated workers to try and spread workforce. I mean, one of the things that obviously is concerning us from the evidence we've heard is that there are, you know, many waivers given.

So, you know, if you're dealing with a situation like that, then there is a real potential unevenness to children's experiences and whether we could do better with some structural changes.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

So can I just make sure that I understand, the idea of an early childhood teacher who would oversee, perhaps almost as the educational leader or pedagogical leader, who would oversee curriculum and pedagogical decision making, but the actual preschool program would be delivered by a diploma qualified educator. I, that's not an equitable situation for children, but if it's a short term workforce development strategy that sees us moving towards more four year degree qualified teachers, I think that that would be something that we should explore. But I do need to be clear that the research would say that it's about a four year qualified early childhood teacher working directly with children, not supervising diploma qualified staff. So, but we've got to be pragmatic don't we? But I also want to be thinking about what's our medium to longer term vision, and how do we realise all of the things that we want to realise from this investment, great investment, in expanding universal access to preschool provision? How do we realise that? And then how do we stage our way to get there?

COMMISSIONER

Yes. And we've certainly heard evidence, this was more in a round table context, that we haven't been good at the, and this is an Australia wide observation, not particularly good at the workforce planning piece. So, you know, that you might be able to war game, you've got a workforce with the following age profile, so you're going to hit this problem at this time. And how do you start planning now for making up workforce in the future? So, some things to learn. But I haven't got any further questions. That's been very interesting. Have you got any?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

No, thank you Commissioner, the witness can be released.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you so much.

PROFESSOR IRVINE

Thank you.

COUNSEL ASSSITING

That's the end of our hearing today.

COMMISSIONER

Now we should formally say the witness is released. So thank you very much. And thank you to everybody for assisting us with these two days of hearings. This brings to an end our public hearings, full stop, as well as our public hearings here in the north. So big thank you to the team who's worked with us and supported us and to the Royal Commission secretariat, and we will get about the work to conclude the final report for the Royal commission. Thank you all.

< HEARING ADJOURNED