Submission on the Teachers Registration Act Review

11 April 2025





Acknowledgement of Country

Laurel House acknowledges and pay respect to the palawa, who are the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of lutruwita. We pay respects to Elders past and present. We particularly acknowledge the resistance and resilience of those Aboriginal people who have experienced sexual violence.

Acknowledgement to Victim-Survivors

Laurel House also honour and acknowledge the victim-survivors of child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence. We recognise the immense strength it takes to confront and heal from these traumatic experiences. We commit to amplifying your voices, advocating for change, and standing side by side on the path to healing and recovery.

Disclaimer:

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This document was written by Dr Lucy Mercer-Mapstone (Policy, Advocacy, and Lived Experience Lead) with input from Laurel House staff.



About Laurel House

Laurel House is a not-for-profit, community-based sexual assault support service based in North and North-West Tasmania. Laurel House provides a range of trauma-informed, evidence based, therapeutic services to victim-survivors of sexual assault, their families and supporters. We also develop and deliver a broad range of programs to adults, young people and children including the provision of therapeutic face-to-face counselling at our centres located at Launceston, Devonport and Burnie and through outreach locations across the North and North-West Tasmania, and 24/7 telephone support and assistance with accessing police and forensic medical processes.

Laurel House partners with the Tasmanian Government in the delivery of the Arch Centres (multidisciplinary centres for victim-survivors of sexual harm) with the Northern Arch Centre opened in 2023 and the North-West Arch Centre currently under development.

Laurel House delivers the PAST (Prevention, Assessment, Support and Treatment) Program for children and young people (aged 17 years and under) who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours in North and North-West Tasmania.

Our team also provides community education and other capacity building programs focused on the prevention of sexual harm and on supporting parents, carers and service providers to better respond to disclosures of sexual violence.

Laurel House plays a key role in policy and advocacy work to improve the lives and safety of victim-survivors and the Tasmanian community. This includes our Laurel House Expert Advisory Panel for Youth (LEAPY) which is a program that provides victim-survivors aged 12 to 18 years with an opportunity to advocate and drive change.

Contact:

Kathryn Fordyce
Chief Executive Officer

Ph: 0427 739 397

Email: kathryn.fordyce@laurelhouse.org.au

Web: www.laurelhouse.org.au



To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the review of the Teachers Registration Act. Laurel House welcomes the commitment to strengthening consistency in teacher registration while maintaining a strong focus on child safety and wellbeing.

As a specialist sexual assault support service working with children, young people, and adults across northern Tasmania, Laurel House sees firsthand the long-term impacts of childhood sexual abuse—and the critical role that schools and educators play in both prevention, early intervention, response, and healing.

We urge that any changes to the Act does not compromise child safety and instead provide an opportunity to raise the bar in keeping children and young people safe from sexual abuse.

Our key issues relate to the need for consistent and transparent screening of all teachers in Tasmania, clear sharing of disciplinary information across jurisdictions, awareness raising of mandatory reporting obligations, and strong expectations for child safety training and trauma-informed practice. We also highlight the importance of professional learning that supports inclusive, consent-based, and culturally safe education environments—particularly for children who come from identities and backgrounds that put them at higher risk of abuse.

In the sections below we have added our responses in teal text to the questions posed in the discussion paper, noting that we do not have responses to all questions.

Laurel House supports Tasmania's continued advocacy for legislation that centres children's rights and strengthens our collective responsibility to protect children from harm.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute and would welcome any further discussion on how the teaching profession can support safe, empowered, and inclusive learning environments for all children and young people.

Kind regards,

Kathryn Fordyce

Chief Executive Officer



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Question 1: Information Sharing

The Tasmanian Government has committed to introducing legislation that allows the Board to compel relevant entities to share information relevant to child sexual abuse and notify the Board when they become aware of allegations. It also committed to allow the appointment of joint investigators when investigating matters involving child sexual abuse.

- I. What should the Steering Committee consider when making recommendations for the implementation of these commitments?
 - a. When entities share information about child sexual abuse, they should do so in a manner that supports the healing and dignity of victim-survivors. Clear guidance should be developed to ensure that victim-survivors are informed of any information sharing that may impact them. Their right to confidentiality should remain central. It is crucial to include provisions that protect the identity and consent of victim-survivors when possible.
 - b. What constitutes 'relevant entities' should be clearly defined and keep front of mind the privacy and confidentiality of and consent from victim-survivors.
 - c. Entities must have clear, trauma-informed protocols for when they become aware of allegations of child sexual abuse, ensuring that responses are timely and appropriate. Legislation should be aligned with protocols for supporting victim-survivors and offering them informed options about reporting and engaging with the investigation process.
 - d. The joint investigators and reporters within relevant entities who are responsible for child sexual abuse cases must undergo training on how to handle or investigate sensitive cases involving children. The training should emphasise the importance of being child-centred, empathetic, and sensitive to the emotional and psychological impact on victim-survivors. Investigators should also be trained to understand the complexities of sexual violence, including victim-blaming and how to avoid re-traumatisation.
 - e. Given the nature of child sexual abuse cases, the Steering

 Committee should recommend that the joint investigators operate
 as part of a collaborative, multidisciplinary team. This team should



- include professionals such as, where appropriate, Tasmania Police, Child Safety Services, Department for Education, Children and Young People, the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, specialist sexual assault services such as Laurel House, multidisciplinary child protection teams, and relevant legal representatives.
- f. While it is important to hold those responsible for child sexual abuse accountable, the Steering Committee must ensure that the rights of educators are balanced with the rights of victim–survivors. Teachers accused of abuse should be treated with fairness, but the protection and rights of survivors should always take precedence. There should be clear and transparent procedures in place for educators who may be investigated, ensuring that accusations are addressed swiftly and with integrity.
- II. Are there any opportunities to further improve child safety through the teacher registration process?
 - a. The teacher registration process should ensure that all applicants undergo thorough background checks, including criminal history, child protection register checks, and a review of any previous allegations of abuse whether they led to charges or not. In Tasmania this should include a mandatory Working with Vulnerable People registration. These checks should be updated regularly to identify any new concerns or allegations, especially if a teacher moves between jurisdictions.
 - b. The registration process could include assessments designed to identify potential risk factors associated with harmful behaviours, particularly concerning child sexual abuse. These assessments should be informed by trauma-informed principles to better understand any patterns or behaviours that could pose a risk to children.
 - c. Every teacher seeking registration or renewal should be required to complete mandatory child protection training including their mandatory reporting obligations specific to Tasmania. This training should go beyond the basics of legal compliance and focus on building a deeper understanding of the dynamics of child sexual abuse, the effects on victim-survivors, and how to identify early



warning signs of abuse. Training should include a trauma-informed approach, equipping teachers with the skills to engage with children in a way that is sensitive to their experiences, particularly those who may have experienced abuse. Teachers should understand how to recognise trauma and how to respond appropriately to children who may disclose abuse. This training should specifically highlight the additional risks faced by vulnerable groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ students. Teachers should be trained to recognise the unique challenges these children may face and how to respond appropriately to protect them from sexual violence.

- d. The intricacies of the teacher registration process should be shaped by the lived experiences of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. This could be achieved through consultations involving organisations like Laurel House, ensuring that their voices influence how teachers are trained and how policies are developed. The input from victim-survivors will help ensure that training, policies, and practices are informed by the realities of those who have experienced abuse.
- e. There should be systems in place for ongoing monitoring of teachers throughout their careers, not just during the initial registration phase and preferably more frequently than the five-year renewal cycle. These systems would allow for any concerns about a teacher's conduct to be flagged early and addressed promptly, ensuring that child safety is consistently prioritised.
- f. The teacher registration process should actively promote child safety as a core value within the profession. Teachers should be required to demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in safeguarding children, not only within the classroom but also in the broader school environment and in the community. The culture of child safety should be ingrained from the very beginning of a teacher's career, with continual reinforcement throughout their professional life. The registration process should emphasise that any breach of child protection policies or inappropriate behaviour towards children will lead to immediate review, with clear consequences for teachers found to have violated standards



- including the failure to act to protect children. These standards should be made explicit in the registration documents, and teachers should be held accountable for their actions (or inaction) at every stage of their career.
- g. The teacher registration process should include a clear explanation of a transparent system for reporting allegations of sexual abuse, misconduct or reportable conduct by teachers. Teachers should be educated on how to navigate these systems, ensuring that they are fully aware of their role in maintaining child safety including but not limited to mandatory reporting obligations and the steps to take if they encounter any concerns.

Question 2: Transparency and Accuracy

The Commission of Inquiry (rec 6.11) recommended that the Act be amended to require details of the prospective or current place of employment for a teacher be included on the Register of Teachers. The Commission also recommended that employers be required to update the Board through an electronic system whenever a teacher's place of employment changes.

- When implementing this recommendation what needs to be considered?
 (for example: timing, penalties, relation to other requirements)
- II. Should any other information be captured in this system?
- III. How can we ensure these requirements are not onerous on teachers, employers or the Board?
 - a. To reduce duplication and administrative burden, implementation should leverage existing systems. For example, schools and early childhood education and care (ECEC) services could report employment details as part of their annual census (aligned with the student census), or another regular reporting mechanism already in place.
 - b. Alternatively, employment changes could be logged through the Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) system, with automated information sharing to notify the Teachers Registration Board of updates. This would streamline the process, reduce manual reporting, and support a more integrated child safety framework



across agencies. Consistency and interoperability between existing regulatory systems will be key to ensuring this requirement is effective without being onerous.

Question 3: Enforcement Measures

The Commission of Inquiry (rec 6.13) recommended amending the Act to allow the Board to suspend a person's registration or a Limited Authority to Teach (LAT) where that person has been charged with a serious offence.

- When implementing this recommendation what needs to be considered?
 (for example, categories of 'serious offence')
 - a. The legislation should specify what constitutes a 'serious offence' in the context of suspension, particularly with respect to allegations of sexual violence or abuse. While criminal charges will naturally be a part of this, it's crucial that the definition includes allegations that suggest potential harm to children, such as accusations of sexual misconduct, child exploitation, grooming behaviours, or physical abuse. These allegations can be made by students, parents, colleagues, or other concerned parties and can include patterns of behaviour that raise significant concerns for child safety.
 - b. The Board's authority should incorporate non-conviction-based suspensions, meaning they are not limited to only those who have been convicted or formally charged with a serious offence. The Act should empower the Board to suspend registration based on allegations that, while still under investigation, present significant risk to children's safety. Waiting until criminal charges are filed before suspending a teacher's registration can delay protective action, potentially allowing further harm to occur. Victim-survivors may continue to be exposed to the accused educator, which not only jeopardises their safety but can also retraumatise them. By implementing provisions for suspension when allegations are first raised, the system can intervene earlier to prevent further exposure to risk. In many instances, the behaviour of individuals accused of sexual abuse or misconduct may escalate over time. Immediate suspension upon the raising of an allegation allows the system to respond before the situation potentially worsens, protecting not only the victim-survivor but also any other children at risk. Even where



- allegations may be found to be insubstantial, it is better to be proactive in mitigating this risk as a priority given the substantial impacts of any potential abuse on children's lives.
- c. In cases where allegations are made, schools and educational institutions should provide additional support for the victim-survivors and affected family, friends, and communities. This could involve a specialist sexual assault support service like Laurel House, and a clear communication strategy to ensure that the concerns of the victim-survivors are heard and addressed in a supportive environment. It is critical that a best practice framework and processes to responding to these kinds of concerns be developed and implemented so that there is an appropriate response regardless of the type or location of the school, or other factors related to the schools needs. Laurel House would be able to work with the Teacher's Registration Board and other stakeholders to develop an appropriate multi-agency response that meets the needs of victim-survivors and their families, while also managing contagion and vigilante behaviour within the school community.
- d. The ability to suspend teachers based on credible allegations of serious offences, rather than waiting for criminal charges, can help maintain public trust in the education system. It demonstrates a commitment to prioritising the safety and wellbeing of children over the reputation of individual educators. Transparency in the suspension process, as well as clear communication with the public, will be important in ensuring accountability and maintaining confidence in the system. To avoid any perception of bias in the suspension process, clear guidelines should be developed to help the Board decide when suspension is appropriate based on the nature of the allegations. These guidelines should ensure that all decisions are made with the best interests of children in mind while maintaining procedural fairness for the teacher involved. It is also critical that the investigation process occurs quickly in order to support the wellbeing of all involved. The legislation should clearly outline the conditions under which suspension can be triggered, including the role of allegations, the process for determining the credibility of those allegations, and the timeframe for review.



- e. While criminal charges are a key consideration, the Board should also have the authority to suspend teachers if the allegations of misconduct, even if not criminal in nature, are sufficiently serious to warrant concern for child safety. This could include inappropriate behaviour, breaches of professional conduct, or unethical relationships with students. Such misconduct may not always result in criminal charges but could still present a significant risk to children's welfare and safety.
- f. As a preventative measure to protect children and young people for potential child sexual abuse, anyone in a teaching or education and care role must have a current WWVP check and be required to show it / register it, upon entry to premises where there are children and young people. We hear frequent reports of this not being the case, putting children and young people at unnecessary risk.

Question 4: Automatic Mutual Recognition Scheme

The Tasmanian Government has agreed to implement Automatic Mutual Recognition Scheme (AMR) for teachers (allows a teacher registered in one state or territory to work in another, without needing to apply for separate registration). It has also agreed to continue advocating at a national level for an AMR scheme that accounts for risks to child safety and includes measures to address these risks.

- I. What matters should be considered when implementing the AMR Scheme for teacher registration in Tasmania?
 - a. The implementation of the AMR Scheme in Tasmania must include mandatory Tasmanian Working with Vulnerable People registration for all teachers, regardless of interstate registration, to ensure consistent screening and accountability for those working with children and young people. At the point where there is a national scheme for working with children checks, this would not be necessary, but we are aware that a national scheme is unlikely to be achieved soon.
 - b. There must be a national system for sharing teacher disciplinary histories, including past deregistration, misconduct findings, and any



- relevant criminal charges, to prevent individuals who pose a risk from moving between states undetected.
- c. Teachers entering Tasmania through AMR should be required to meet equivalent child safety and professional conduct standards to those required locally, ensuring the scheme does not lower protections or introduce inconsistent safeguarding practices.
- d. All teachers working under AMR should complete a Tasmanianspecific induction program covering child protection laws and mandatory reporting obligations along with the other content recommended in point Q1.c. above.
- e. Teachers operating under AMR must be subject to the same child-focused, trauma-informed complaints processes and professional conduct standards as locally registered teachers, with real-time national information sharing to prevent risk transfer.

Question 5: Transition from Provisional to Full Registration

National standards require teachers to progress from Graduate to Proficient and attain full registration within five years of receiving provisional registration. The Act currently does not mandate this requirement.

- I. Should the Act be amended to require teachers to obtain full registration within five years?
 - a. Yes so long as exemptions are allowed so as not to disproportionately negatively impact certain cohorts.
- II. If the Act is amended to include a specific time limit, what factors should be considered? Should there be provisions for exceptional circumstances that allow for an extended timeframe?
 - a. Extended timeframes should be allowed for certain life events or circumstances such as people in carers roles, parental leave times, health issues etc.
 - b. If such provisions are made and registration takes longer than five years in some cases, all training and screening requirements should be required so teachers taking longer than the standard amount of time stay up to date with relevant changes in practice standards and legislation etc.



III. What pathways would you recommend to efficiently support provisional teachers, mentors, and regulatory bodies in this transition process?

Question 6: Continuous Professional Learning

Best practice legislation in Australia requires teachers to complete 100 hours professional learning over five years for registration renewal. This often applies to most categories of registration.

- I. If the Act is amended to mandate the requirement for professional learning, including child safety training as recommended by the Commission of Inquiry, what matters should be considered?
 - a. Ensure that pathways to meeting those requirements are flexible and accessible so as not to disproportionately negatively impact certain cohorts such as women who have carer roles.
- II. What kinds of professional learning should qualify for registration purposes?
 - a. Trauma-informed practice: Equip teachers to recognise signs of trauma and respond with compassion, not control. Move away from punitive or behavioural management models that reinforce shame or fear.
 - b. Neurodiversity: Build understanding of how neurodivergent children may mask distress to stay safe. Challenge compliance-based models that silence bodily autonomy and expression.
 - c. Creating child voice and agency: Support teachers to foster environments where children are involved in decisions about their lives and are encouraged to speak up, be heard, and trust their own inner signals.
 - d. Consent and appropriate touch: Include training on bodily autonomy, consent, and physical care, especially for children with disabilities and in early years settings where physical contact is common. Normalise use of correct names for all body parts across early education to increase body autonomy and improve children's capacity to disclose abuse.
 - e. Cultural safety and intersectionality: Ensure training addresses how systemic disadvantage, sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and colonisation impact child safety.



- f. Prevalence of child maltreatment including gendered nature of child sexual abuse and other forms of violence: Provide information about the prevalence of child maltreatment including child sexual abuse, and how this disproportionately affects girls and gender diverse children.

 Teachers should also be provided with information about the increasing prevalence of child sexual abuse caused by children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour.
- g. Recognising grooming behaviours: Provide education on how grooming operates—by adults or peers—and how to respond to early warning signs, including in professional and institutional contexts.
- Responding to disclosures: Ensure teachers are equipped with skills for responding sensitively and appropriately to disclosures of abuse, including minimising re-traumatisation and following reporting obligations.
- i. Understanding the role of schools in prevention: Position schools as key sites of primary prevention by embedding respectful relationships education, consent education, and student agency into everyday practice. Ensure that teachers understand the important role that the play in modelling respectful relationships, bystander action, gender equality and in believing survivors.
- III. How can professional learning be recorded efficiently to minimise administrative workload for teachers, employers, and the TRB?
- IV. What role should the TRB play in accrediting and auditing professional development activities? What matters need to be considered?

Question 7: Registration categories

Other Australian Acts provide flexibility to establish registration categories and certifications as required.

- I. Are there issues within the existing teacher registration categories, registers, and certifications that need to be addressed?
- II. Should the Act be amended to provide more flexibility in this area?



Question 8: Mandatory Registration Requirements in the **ECEC Sector**

In most jurisdictions teacher registration is mandatory for ECTs in ECEC settings where it is required by law, however, some jurisdictions have introduced voluntary registration for ECTs working in ECEC services where an ECT is not required by law to register.

- I. What should be considered when implementing mandatory ECT registration?
 - a. Noting recent high profile cases of child sexual abuse in ECEC settings, registration should be mandatory for ECTs in all jurisdictions as a child safety measure and should require all of the same training and screening requirements as outlined in previous responses in this submission, being tailored to the ECEC context as relevant.
- Alongside mandatory registration for ECTs in ECEC settings where it is required by law, should Tasmania also offer voluntary ECT registration for ECEC services where an ECT is not legally mandated? For example, in Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) or services regulated under the Child Care Act rather than the NOF. What should be considered?
 - a. All teachers working in education and care centres including outside hours care and other childcare programs like occasional care or creches that are regulated under the Child Care Act rather than the NOF. If these teachers are not included children in these services are placed at a greater risk of harm, especially since in many instances these services are smaller and where there is less visibility regarding the conduct of these teachers. There is a risk that without requiring registration of these teachers, that these settings will become a relative haven for those whose conduct and behaviour towards children may be concerning.

Question 9: Registration Qualification Requirements for **ECTs in ECEC**

Despite differences across Australia, all jurisdictions accept completed ACECQAapproved qualifications as the minimum requirement for registration as a



teacher in ECEC settings. Most jurisdictions also require ECTs to meet the same criteria as school teachers for transitioning from provisional to full registration and for registration renewal.

- I. What qualification requirements should be adopted for registering ECTs in the Tasmanian ECEC context?
- II. Should ECTs meet the same criteria as school teachers for transitioning from provisional to full registration and for registration renewal, including mandatory professional development and compliance with the APSTs? What needs to be considered?

Question 10: Early Childhood Teacher Registration Modelling

- I. Should Tasmania align with the majority of Australian jurisdictions by integrating ECTs into the existing teacher register (rather than creating a new register)? What factors should be considered?
 - a. Registration for ECTs should be recorded on the existing teacher register to allow for the same standard of screening and training requirements across educational settings from a child safety perspective.
- II. If adopting a "one-register" model, should ECTs be classified in the same category as school teachers, or should a distinct category be created for ECTs working in ECEC? Why?
- III. If a distinct category is created, should conditions be applied to restrict ECTs with ACECQA-approved qualifications to working only in ECEC settings? What needs to be considered and why?
- IV. Are additional considerations needed for teachers with early childhood degrees approved by both AITSL and ACECQA to ensure equity and clarity in registration?

Question 11: Additional Considerations

I. How will the mandatory registration of ECTs affect ECEC services in Tasmania?



- II. What strategies might be required to facilitate a smooth transition to ECT registration in Tasmania?
- III. What mechanisms or support systems could facilitate the successful implementation of ECT registration in Tasmania?
- IV. What else should be considered when implementing ECT registration in Tasmania?

Question 12: Absence of an Objects Section

Objects sections can be used to resolve uncertainty and ambiguity in legislation.

- I. What objects could be included in the Act?
 - a. Reference to upholding child safety standards should be included in the Objects section, highlighting that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and their protection from harm in educational settings is central to the legislation. This should make reference to or align with other areas of legislation as relevant, such as legislation associated with the Commission of Inquiry recommendations.

Question 13: Principles

Principles can be used to set expectations as to how functions and powers under legislation will be exercised.

- I. What principles should be included in the Teachers Registration Act?
 - a. Children have the right to equitable treatment regardless of identity or background.

Question 14: Function Definitions for the Board

Should the function 'promotion of the teaching profession' be removed from the Tasmanian Act? Why? What should be considered?

a. The Royal Commission and Tasmanian Commission of Inquiry both found that prioritising institutional or professional reputation over



children's safety can lead to serious failures in responding to abuse. Given this, the function of promoting the teaching profession within the Teachers Registration Board Act should be reconsidered. There is a risk that this role could conflict with the Board's regulatory responsibilities. Rather than promoting the profession broadly, the Board's focus should be on promoting high-quality, safe teaching practice and ensuring public confidence through robust oversight. This reinforces the right priorities — putting children's safety and effective teaching at the centre.

Question 15: Development of Teaching Standards

Should Tasmania's Act include more specificity in relation to professional teaching standards? What else should be considered?

Question 16: Approval of Education Courses

Is the current role of the TRB in approving education courses under the Act fit for purpose? Are there any areas for improvement?

Question 17: Teacher Workload

- I. What measures could simplify the Act without compromising the quality and rigour required for teachers to achieve full registration?
- II. How can the teacher registration process be further simplified? What needs to be considered?
 - a. The professional learning required for registration as outlined in responses to previous sections of this submission could count toward mandatory professional learning requirements to reduce redundancy and streamline training.

Question 18: Other

Are there any other things the Review should consider?







