

Child Safety and Wellbeing POLICY

Purpose

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) has legislated functions which include approving, registering, certifying, investigating and disciplining teachers, promoting the profession, and enforcing compliance with the *Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005* (the Act). The welfare and best interests of children is the primary consideration in performing its functions (section 233 of the Act refers). This policy aims to ensure that the Board of the QCT, and all QCT staff, act and make decisions that are in consideration of, and compliance with, the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (the CSO Act), and specifically the Child Safe Standards (CSS), when carrying out their day-to-day activities and decision making.

Rationale

The CSO Act (section 11) requires all child safe entities to implement and comply with the CSS and Universal Principle (UP). As a regulator for the teaching profession and a prescribed Child Safe Organisation (CSO) regulator for education services, the QCT is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children in the conduct of its regulatory functions.

Scope

The scope of the policy applies to the Board of the QCT and all employees of the QCT involved in making decisions about, or carrying out, any of the QCT's functions as outlined in the Act. It does not apply to Board elections and/or Board member appointment processes.

Policy statement

All QCT staff and Board Members should have regard to the QCT's *Statement of Commitment to Child Safe Standards* and the *Statement of Commitment to Cultural Safety* when carrying out QCT functions. Further, the QCT prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and takes action to prevent harm through the following arrangements.

Leadership, governance and culture

Child safety and wellbeing is a shared responsibility that is embedded in organisational culture, leadership and governance across all levels of the organisation (CSS Standard 1).

Members of the QCT Board have a responsibility to make high-level decisions that align with the CSS and UP, including the approval of organisational policy.

The QCT leadership team are responsible for ensuring day-to-day decision-making and practice prioritises compliance with, and implementation of, the CSS and the UP. This includes recruitment and screening practices; staff training and support; and risk management strategies that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children and young people. The Integrity Unit (Integrity) has the responsibility for ensuring that matters are reported to the relevant authorities in accordance with Queensland's Reportable Conduct Scheme.

As QCT is a government entity, all staff are required to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service regarding expected behavioural standards, responsibilities, and obligations as public sector employees.

Child-friendly resources

The QCT will actively support the safety of all children and young people who directly engage with the QCT including the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (the UP) and children from diverse backgrounds and/or with diverse needs, in accordance with its *Statement of Commitment to Cultural Safety* and *Statement of Commitment to Child Safe Standards*.

Where appropriate, and in addition to its substantive policies and other supporting documents, the QCT will publish information in a child-friendly format to assist children to understand QCT processes and their respective rights. Feedback received in relation to the way that the QCT interacts with children and their families, will inform practice and help improve processes (CSS Standards 2 and 3).

Consent to use visual content for promotional use

The QCT must obtain parental/care-giver consent prior to making or using any audio and/or visual images containing children for promotional purposes. Wherever possible, the QCT should only obtain audio and/or visual images where children are unable to be identified. If a child is identifiable then the QCT must also obtain the child's permission to make or use the material.

It is the responsibility of the staff who produce and/or publish promotional materials to ensure that the appropriate consent has been obtained prior to making and/or using the content (CSS Standard 3).

Investigation processes involving children

The QCT is committed to taking responsive action in relation to notifications or complaints about teachers. Integrity staff have the responsibility for dealing with allegations of harm or likely harm to children. In responding to allegations about the conduct of a teacher, Integrity staff may interact with children directly through correspondence, informal discussions and/or structured (recorded) interviews. It is the responsibility of Integrity staff to ensure that they apply trauma-informed practices in their interactions with children during the investigation and/or discipline process.

Teacher registration eligibility

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)

The QCT will ensure that teacher registration eligibility considerations are transparent and reflect consideration to the CSS. This includes authentic application of the APST for each career stage. The QCT acknowledges that this may impact approved teachers, preservice teachers, employing authorities and providers of initial teacher education programs (CSS 5 and 7).

All approved teachers and applicants are expected to comply with the QCT's Code of Ethics and maintain appropriate professional boundaries with children.

Suitability to teach

Suitability to teach is an eligibility requirement for teacher registration. The QCT evaluates a person's suitability to teach by assessing the person's competence to perform the role of a teacher and the person's character and fitness to work in a child-related field. This assessment includes a consideration of the person's criminal history, previous and/or current disciplinary actions, and other screening tools or relevant information in accordance with nationally agreed standards. This is to ensure that people working with children are suitable to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice (CSS Standard 5).

Recruitment processes

When undertaking recruitment for employees, the QCT will conduct appropriate employment checks, including referee, criminal history and working with children authority/clearance checks (Blue Card) where appropriate, to ensure that the person is suitable for employment in a CSO (related to CSS Standard 5).

In addition, any employee that is required to engage directly with children or enter into a school or early childhood centre to carry out QCT activities is required to hold a valid Blue Card or equivalent.

It is the responsibility of all managers to ensure that staff undertake regular Code of Conduct and relevant CSS training.

Complaints management processes

The QCT operates various complaints management processes. A complaint about a teacher process is a legislated process supported by a suite of policy and related documents which are available on the QCT's public website and/or upon request (CSS Standard 6).

Any person can also make a complaint to the QCT about an entity or person breaching the offence provisions of the Act, a QCT process, decision or member of staff.

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing

Risk management strategies are in place to identify and mitigate risks when interacting with children in physical spaces, including when capturing visual content for promotional purposes or conducting investigations and disciplinary and/or enforcement actions (CSS Standard 8).

Knowledge and skills for a child safe organisation

Staff at all levels of the organisation are responsible for ensuring that they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe whilst carrying out their duties through the completion of ongoing education and training (CSS Standard 7). The QCT supports training on child safety and wellbeing (based on the NEST framework), cultural safety and trauma-informed care.

The QCT is transparent about the behaviour generally expected of teachers by publishing information about professional boundaries. It also publishes a variety of information regarding mandatory reporting requirements and relevant disciplinary and enforcement actions which detail acceptable and unacceptable interactions with children.

The QCT may provide professional development support to teachers, through workshops and webinars including Professional Boundaries workshops and/or webinars.

Definitions

- **Approved teacher** – A person who is a registered teacher or holds a permission to teach.
- **Child/Children** – Includes all people under the age of 18 years.
- **Harm to a child** – is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.
- **Relevant teacher** – An approved teacher or a former approved teacher who was an approved teacher at the relevant time.
- **NEST framework** – A child wellbeing framework developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).

Legislation

The following legislation are relevant to the policy:

Child Safe Organisations Act 2024

Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005

Supporting Documents

- The Queensland College of Teachers Code of Ethics
- Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers
- Statement of Commitment to Child Safe Standards
- Statement of Commitment to Cultural Safety