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*Introducing the ...*

# Institute of Special Educators

## Background

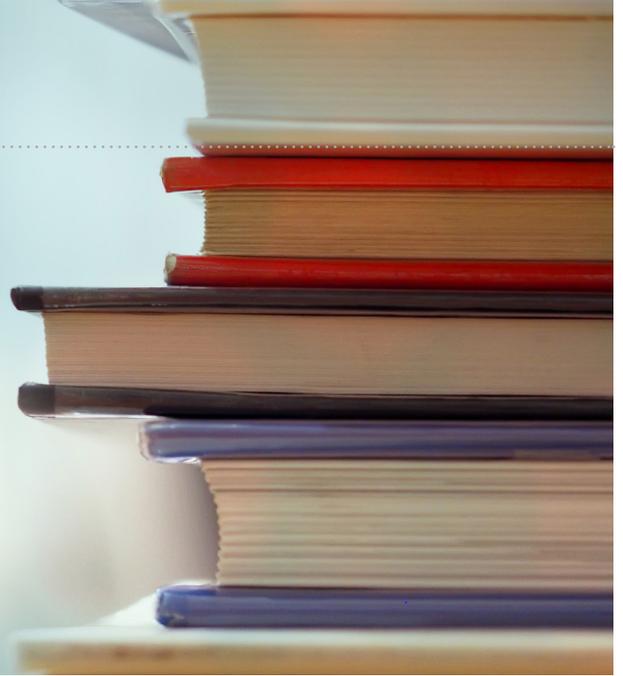
When qualifications in special education were first promoted and supported by Departments of Education in Australia from the mid-1970s, the future for individuals with special education needs looked to be much brighter than had been the case in the first half of the 20th century. Research had demonstrated that individuals with significant disabilities could learn despite low-level skills and a poor prognosis.

Initially not all special education positions were filled by qualified Special Educators. This was to be expected, given that this was a newly emerging profession. However, despite years of research into effective interventions for individuals with a range of disabilities and learning difficulties, the introduction of university courses to prepare personnel working with individuals with disabilities, innovative transition to work and job support programs, and government department support for cadetships in special education, the percentage of qualified Special Educators working in special schools and classes, in support roles in schools and in early intervention and post-school programs is unacceptably low. This is particularly disturbing when there is evidence to suggest that qualified Special Educators are more likely to achieve better outcomes for their clients than those without these qualifications.

The plight of special education in Australia is well illustrated by the fact that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) does not recognise special education as a profession separate from the teaching profession, thereby potentially denying effective quality of life programs, particularly for those individuals with disabilities outside the school system. The lack of expertise in special education among many of those holding special education positions in schools, and also those supervising such positions, has potentially devastating consequences for students with additional needs in special settings, and more particularly in inclusive settings. For these students, evidence-based interventions are in danger of being the exception rather than the rule.

The Institute of Special Educators, or InSpEd, has been established to enhance the status of Special Educators. It is clear from an examination of many advertisements for a range of professional positions, both within and outside the education sector, that registration/accreditation is a requirement for the demonstration of professional credibility. Lack of accreditation for Special Educators is likely to be a major reason why special education is not recognised by the NDIA despite the fact that special education research has been primary in the establishment of the evidence base for effective interventions in the area of disability. By contrast, psychologists and therapists, who are registered, are recognised by the NDIA. This lack of recognition of the value of special education may well have influenced a decline in the quality of special education courses at the tertiary level. For that reason, the Institute of Special Educators seeks also to address the quality of the university courses offered by establishing minimum requirements for both course content and practicum/internships.





### Definition of terms

A Special Educator is, as a result of advanced study, well-versed and competent in the models, methods and technologies underpinning effective research-based instruction for children and adults who struggle to make regular developmental, academic and/or social progress for a variety of environmental and biological reasons including those with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, sensory impairments, autism spectrum disorders, behaviour/conduct disorders and learning difficulties. They may work in early intervention, preschool and long day care settings, regular and special schools and classes, adult day programs and job-support services.

### Aim of the Institute of Special Educators

InSpEd aims to improve the quality of special education provision in Australia, including special education for (1) infants and young children in early intervention services, (2) children and young adults in school programs and (3) adults in tertiary education, job support programs, post school activity programs and other services designed to improve quality of life.

In the first instance, the Institute will provide all suitably qualified Special Educators with peer-based recognition through a 'Certification' process that will confirm their status as true professionals in their chosen field. The Certification standards established by the Institute will be recognised Australia-wide and internationally, and will also provide employers with a sense of professional confidence in employing 'certified' staff.

### InSpEd objectives

- Provide a mechanism for certifying Special Educators
- Establish/maintain a highly qualified

panel of experts to:

- determine criteria/standards for certifying teachers and other professionals who have a graduate/postgraduate qualification in special education
- assess applications for 'Certification' of Special Educators
- determine hours and type of professional learning required to maintain Certification as a generalist or specialist Special Educator
- assess the quality of courses offering a qualification in special education with the purpose of offering student accreditation to those enrolled in approved courses
- Offer professional development for New Graduate and Certified Special Educators and accredit appropriate professional learning offered by others
- Disseminate information in the form of research summaries, newsletters and magazines to assist Special Educators to keep up to date with developments in their field
- Advocate on behalf of Special Educators with State and Federal governments
- Facilitate employment opportunities for Certified Special Educators
- Assist employers to select appropriately qualified and Certified Special Education staff

### Progress to date

The Institute of Special Educators is now a registered not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, with a constitution that embodies the principles outlined above. It has established an expert panel and has its own InSpEd website at [www.insped.org.au](http://www.insped.org.au).

For further information about joining InSpEd, please contact [info@insped.org.au](mailto:info@insped.org.au).

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