



Jobs & Skills Commission ECEC Capacity Study Submission

January 2024

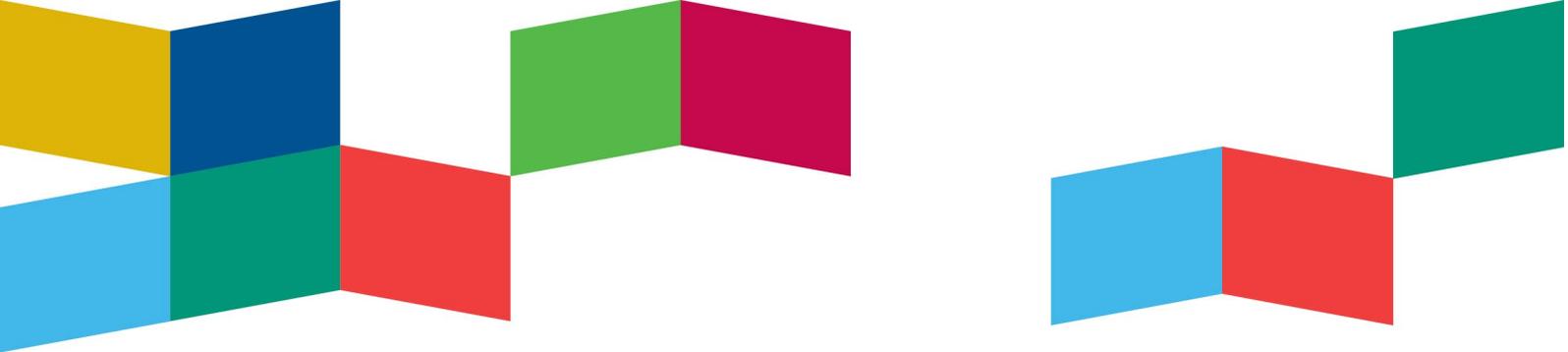


#BestStartInLife



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Foreword

As the national peak body for the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents over **2,500 members (owner/operators)** and **over 4,500 ECEC services**, which employ more than **75,000 educators** and care for more than **360,000 families** throughout Australia.

We would like to thank the study team at Jobs and Skills Australia for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Capacity Study.

We appreciate the importance of this study, which aims to provide a set of critical evidence and insights to support current and future workforce planning. This includes a detailed understanding of the current state and future needs of the workforce to support the Australian Government's Early Years Strategy.

Australia's early learning sector is facing its greatest challenge in history, culminated by a set of key factors – a critical peak in nationwide workforce shortages, a government funding program that does not adequately reflect the increased costs of ECEC service delivery (therefore impacting affordability for families) and rapidly growing levels of demand from Australian families.

We know that improved working conditions (including wages) and a greater demand for places have both been growing issues in the sector, now at **crisis levels with a workforce shortage of over 10,000 educators**. These workforce issues were recognised in 2014 by the Productivity Commission Inquiry recommendations.

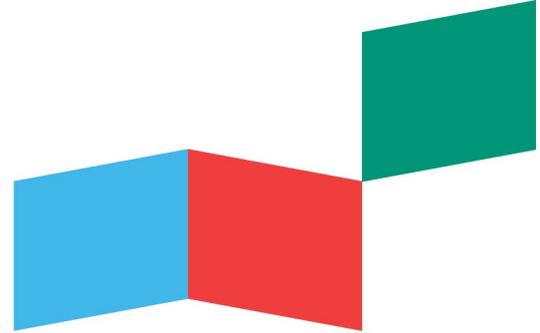
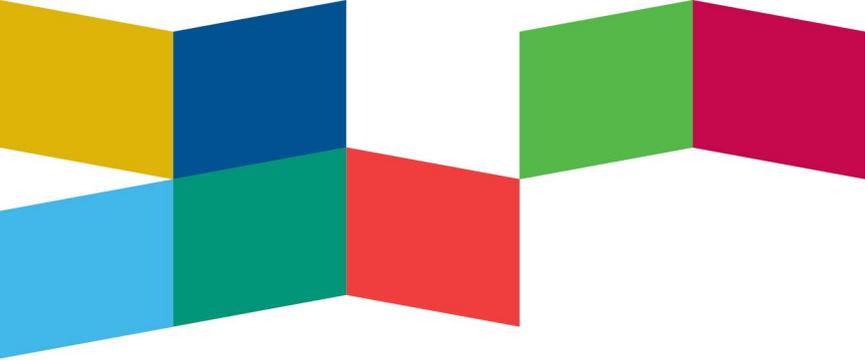
Nearly ten years on, this issue needs to be urgently addressed, with wage increases identified as a critical factor in **improving outcomes for educators**. Improved outcomes for educators create better outcomes for children, and for families to access high quality care and education services.

Whilst wage increases are an imperative, families cannot bear the cost. Government funding is critical to ensure that ECEC services remain affordable for all families.

Australia urgently needs immediate and long-lasting solutions to the workforce shortages to ensure that we maintain high quality, affordable early childhood education across the nation.

We need an urgent response to the ECEC workforce crisis, to retain the existing workforce and build a pipeline for new entrants.

Firstly we need to ensure that the **mental and wellbeing needs** of our early childhood educators are adequately met and supported to avoid burn out. Secondly, we need to **build the capacity and number of new entrants to the ECEC sector** by removing barriers for those seeking to undertake ECEC qualifications, creating streamlined employment pathways and investing in a national recruitment campaign to generate awareness among jobseekers of the rewarding career opportunities in the early learning sector.

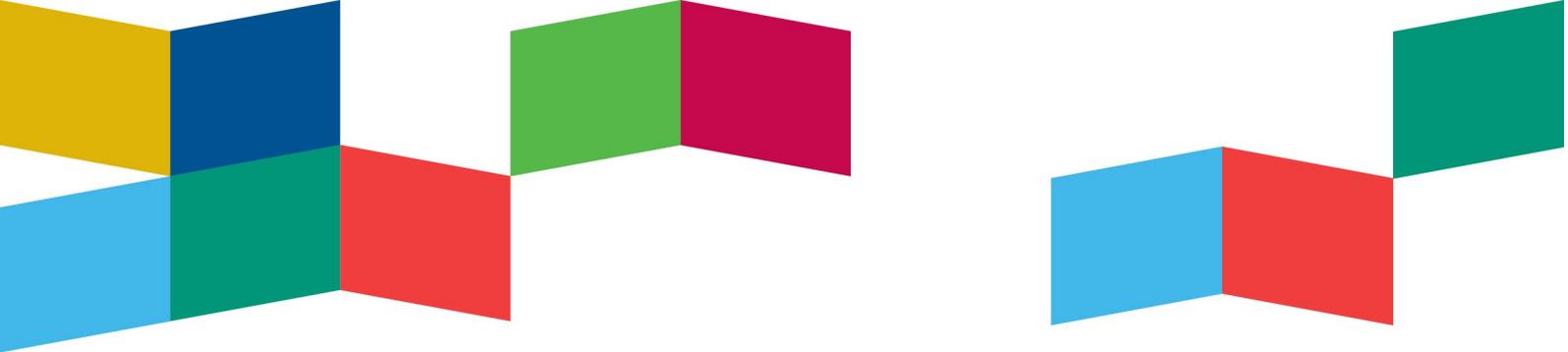


ACA commits this Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study Submission for your consideration.

With the adoption of our recommendations by the Australian Government, we can all ensure that every child in Australia has access to high-quality, affordable and sustainable early learning services, and therefore, every child will have the **best start in life**.

Paul Mondo
President





Overview and Current State

Demographic and geographic composition, occupation, skill level, job mobility, numbers of employers and employees, job vacancies, sector pay and working conditions, traineeship numbers and labour cost.

1. What are the challenges and opportunities facing the ECEC workforce?

How do different ECEC service delivery types (e.g. centre based care, family day care, preschool) impact workforce challenges and opportunities?

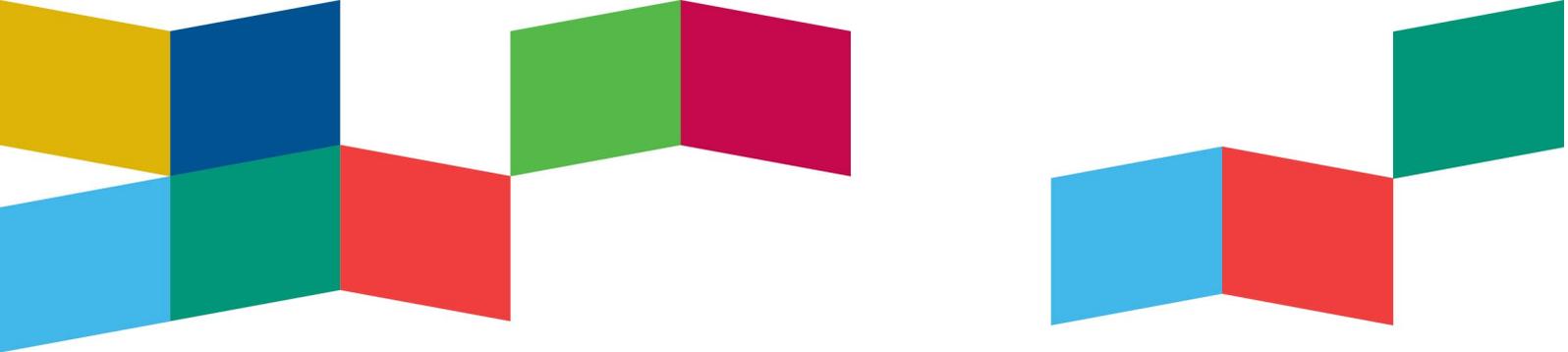
The ECEC workforce is experiencing the following challenges:

- **Lower wages:** Currently, educators and ECTs receive lower wages (up to 20% lower) than Primary School Teachers.¹ This creates an enormous challenge for service providers and policy makers, in terms of how to attract, retain and support new entrants to the sector, without losing educators to upskilling and ECTs to schools due to the higher wages.
- **Creating incentives to work in remote services:** Attracting and retaining qualified educators in rural and remote areas may require higher wages as an incentive to relocate and commit to significant lifestyle changes. As remote locations experience significant housing shortages, finding accommodation is another barrier for educators when seeking to relocate.²
- **Staffing ratios:** ECEC services find it difficult to meet mandatory educator-to-child staffing requirements, given the shortages of experienced and qualified early childhood educators and teachers.
- **Professional development:** The workforce shortages make it difficult for ECEC staff to undertake professional development during service operating hours – services are already struggling to operate at their usual capacity levels without enough educators to meet mandatory requirements. Consequently, services often hold out-of-hours training for staff, which creates very long days and increases overtime costs to the service provider.³
- **Upholding high quality:** Beyond the NQF, there are a range of additional factors that contribute to creating high quality in ECEC settings. A **critical** factor is the ECEC workforce, which delivers the essential components of operating an early learning service. These include curriculum design, programs with pedagogical practices, reporting practices, positive interactions and relationships with families, monitoring and observation of children, developing a personal understanding of each child

¹ 23 Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2023), *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission

² 9 Regional Australia Institute (2023) *Regional Jobs 2022: The Big Challenge report*, Regional Australia

³ Further detail in page 81 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).



and identifying when additional support may be required. Each of these aspects are implemented by the early childhood educators and teachers, whilst overseen by their service leaders to ensure a high quality within the ECEC service. Without a strong, high-quality ECEC workforce, there is no foundation for delivering a high-quality early learning service.

- **Workforce wellbeing:** The ECEC workforce is experiencing burn out - post pandemic exhaustion has been compounded by the workforce shortages.⁴ The impact of the past few stressful years has been evidenced by the ACECQA 2021 Workforce Strategy Consultation Findings Report, which indicated that at the time of the consultation, 73% of the 3,800 educators surveyed across Australia planned to leave their job with three years due to feeling overworked, stressed, and burnt out.⁵ The situation is further compounded by the ongoing challenge for services to allow staff to take leave, while trying to find sufficiently-qualified replacement educators to meet the educator-to-child ratios.
- **Jurisdictional differences:** The regulations and operations of each state/territory regulatory body vary from state to state, making it difficult for educators and ECTs to relocate interstate and have their qualifications recognised.⁶
- **Rapid growth of the ECEC sector:** There has been a significant increase in the number of new ECEC services opening to (ideally) match the demand from parents across Australia. Between 2013 to 2023, the number of ECEC services grew by approximately 25%, and the number approved places offered to children grew of by nearly 50%.⁷
- The Australian Government has introduced new policies such as the *Cheaper Child Care Bill* in order to create more affordable ECEC for families. These reforms are contributing to higher demands on ECEC services and in turn the ECEC workforce. The Treasury estimated that the Cheaper Child Care Bill reforms would facilitate 185,000 additional days of work, given that most families using ECEC (childcare) services have at least one parent (usually the mother) who works part-time and could work more.⁸
- However, to accommodate these 185,000 additional days of work, the ECEC sector would have to accommodate 1.9 million additional hours of care. This would require 42,000 additional days of educator time, which is the equivalent of 9,000 additional full time educators needed.⁹

⁴ Further detail in page 38 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).

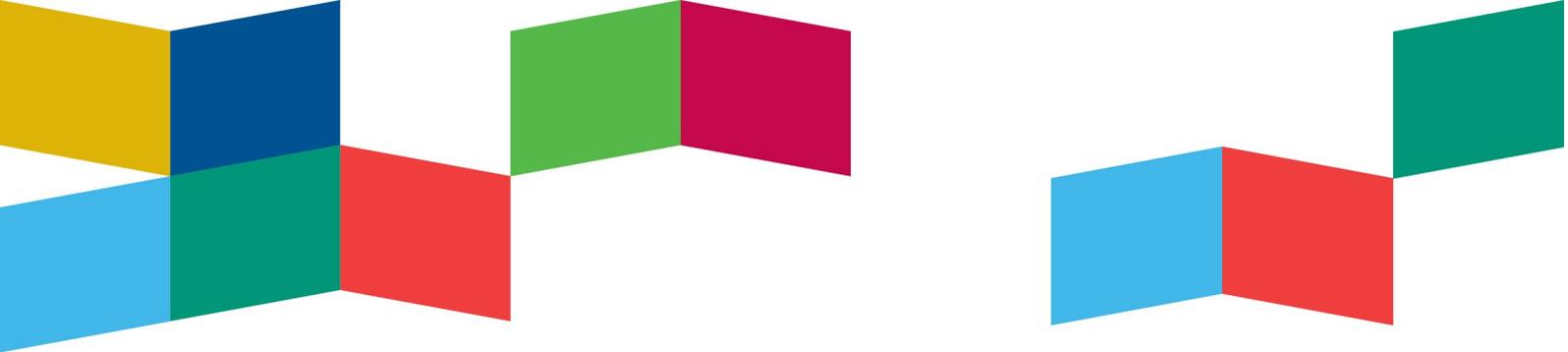
⁵ ACECQA (2021) *National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, Public Consultation Findings May 2021*, ACECQA <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/Nationalworkforcestrategy-publicconsultationfindings-May%202021.pdf>
Ng, J., Rogers, M. & McNamara, C. (2023) *Early childhood educator's burnout: A systematic review of the determinants and effectiveness of interventions*. *Issues in Educational Research*, 33(1), 173-206. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier33/ng.pdf>

⁶ Further detail in page 89 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).

⁷ Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission Inquiry

⁸ The Treasury (2023) *Intergenerational Report: Australia's future to 2063*, The Treasury, Australian Government <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

⁹ *ibid*



Without these immediate workforce needs fulfilled, the government's best intentions to develop strong policy to support affordable ECEC for families will fail, as the increased demand on services cannot be delivered without **adequate staffing levels**.

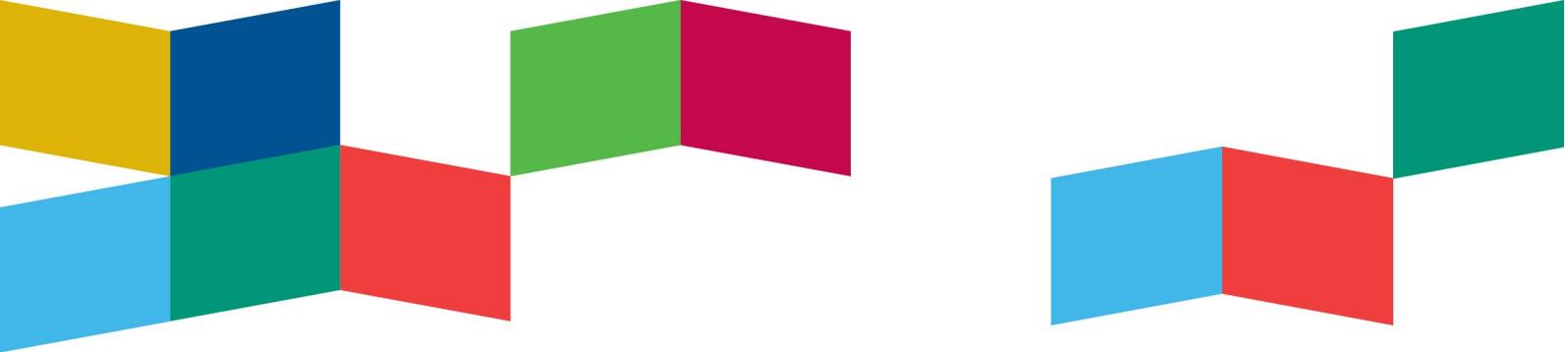
Staff losses due to the impacts of the COVID pandemic: Factors during the pandemic which contributed to staff losses included the vaccine mandates (which resulted in a proportion of sector staff losing their jobs involuntarily), along with the ever-changing regulatory and safety processes, additional layers of administration, increases in staff taking sick leave and remaining staff feeling over-worked (which resulted in a proportion of sector staff resigning).¹⁰

Opportunities for the Australian Government to support the ECEC Workforce

ACA recommends greater incentives for staff retention within the existing ECEC workforce via the following recommended policy reforms:

- Introduce a government-funded wage increase to all early childhood educators and early childhood teachers.
- Fund a one-off \$3,000 'reward payment' to existing early childhood educators and teachers, similar to the one-off Healthcare Worker Winter Retention and Surge Payment in Victoria.
- Introduce a fringe benefits tax exemption for service providers in the context of providing fringe benefits to employees such as salary sacrifice in relation to payment of early learning (childcare) of their own children, cars, electronic devices, etc. This initiative could help attract jobseekers to the sector by lowering their income tax threshold and therefore boosting their income.
- Create and fund a national recruitment campaign to promote ECEC career and training pathways and attract new entrants from school leavers and people seeking career changing opportunities, similar to the Australian Government's recently announced funding for a national recruitment campaign for school teachers.
- Provide funding for 10 hours of backfill per educator per year, to allow for their ongoing professional development.
- Fund a national communications campaign targeted at all ECEC approved providers, to generate awareness of the ACA/TELUS Health Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - a high-quality, low-cost service which supports the mental health and emotional wellbeing of ECEC staff. This initiative - introduced by ACA in partnership with TELUS Health - has been developed to remove the cost barrier and ensure that all approved providers, regardless of size or service type, have access to a low-cost

¹⁰ 191 Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2023) *Supplementary paper 3: The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission



EAP¹¹. The EAP also supports Focus Area 4.1 of the National Workforce Strategy, as one of the first focus areas to be delivered.

- Ensure that ACECQA and all jurisdictions recognise the transfer of aligned qualifications to work in the ECEC (childcare) sector. E.g. Diploma in Outside School Hours Care, Diploma of School Age Education.
- Work with all jurisdictions and Teacher Registration Boards to ensure national consistency in recognising the Birth-to-Five Early Childhood Teaching Degree via mutual recognition.
- Support the recognition and celebration of the important role that early childhood educators play in the lives of young children before they commence school, via stakeholder support of the national community event - Early Childhood Educators' Day. This annual event, created by ACA, is celebrated nationally to help change public perceptions and generate awareness and understanding of the work undertaken daily in the roles of the ECEC workforce. The event is now a well-loved tradition in the sector, with a strong online presence. In 2023 the event website received over 93,000 page views and the Facebook campaign reached over 55,000 people.

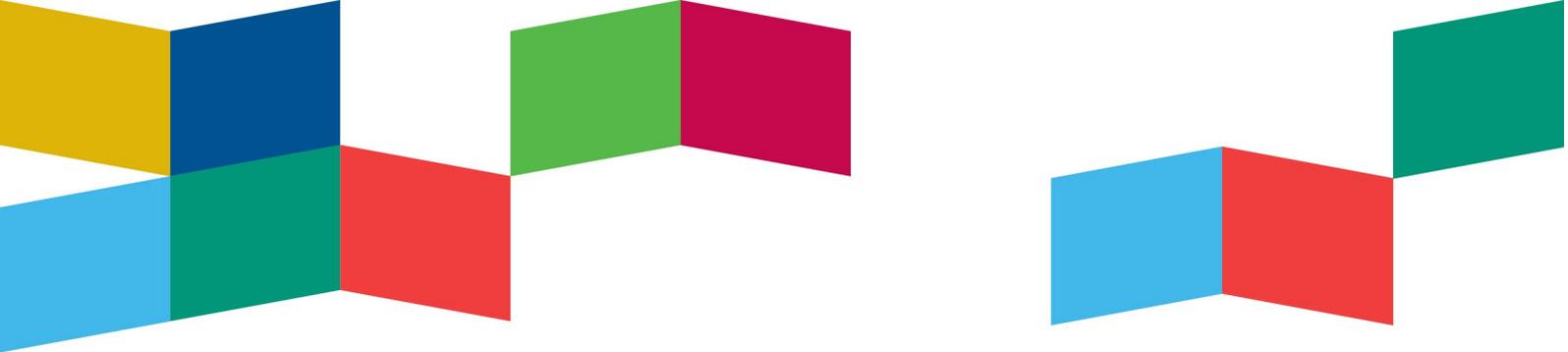
The impact of different ECEC service delivery models

- Australia currently has over 216,619 early childhood educators working across the five key ECEC settings – long day care (LDC), family day care (FDC), outside school hours care (OSHC), in home care and vacation care – with a 70% rise since 2013.¹²
- The Long Day Care (LDC) segment of the sector has seen rapid growth since the last census, with an increase in LDC educators by 68%, which demonstrates on one the highest areas of ECEC workforce demands.
- Educators within LDC settings create high-quality, culturally-safe ECEC environments for children from birth to five years, across 12 hours a day for 52 weeks each year. These ECEC staff do not get the school holiday time away from services that teachers enjoy, are doing longer hours and often don't receive the same level of professional recognition or value, when compared to school teachers.
- As previously outlined above, there are greater limitations on professional development opportunities for educators working within LDC services due to the longer operating hours. As part of ECEC professional development, there are mandatory requirements around training which LDC services regularly undertake outside of regular working hours. In contrast, as there are less hours of operation in other ECEC service models, this creates greater flexibility for staff to undertake training during a 9-5 timetable.

¹¹ Australian Childcare Alliance (2023) *Support the Mental Health and Wellbeing of your Staff*, Australian Childcare Alliance <https://childcarealliance.org.au/partners/telushealth>

¹² National Workforce Census Report 2021

<https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-nationalworkforce-census-report>



2. Are there differences between workforce requirements or demand (E.g. employer needs) and supply (E.g. jobseeker availability and skills)?

Due to the regulation of the sector and given the nature of the important role of early childhood educators, ECEC service operators have very specific workforce requirements and must ensure that all staff have the relevant qualifications, experience and skillsets. It is in this context that the current unmet demands of the ECEC workforce shortage are difficult to immediately resolve, with over 4,500 job vacancies (minimum) advertised in the ECEC sector in the first six months of 2021 and nearly half of all vacancies remained unfilled during that period.¹³

While service providers struggle to fill their staff vacancies, this is felt at the operations level in trying to maintain the mandatory staffing ratios, with an increasing number of services now operating with a staff waiver.

ACECQA's quarterly reports have provided the following insights:

- On 30 September 2015, there were 3% of services operating with a staff waiver).¹⁴
- On 1 October 2023, there were 10% of services who were operating with a staff waiver.¹⁵ ACECQA reported the **highest levels of staff waivers** across all of Australia with 17.4% of all Long Day Care services across Australia having at least one staff waiver in place. This is an increase of 0.4% since 1 July 2023 and reflects the acceleration of ECEC staffing challenges in service delivery.¹⁶

The staff waivers are evidence of the increasing pressures ECEC services are feeling to meet the growing needs and demands of families, while balancing the mandatory staffing ratio requirements with the current ECEC workforce crisis.

3. How well is the current system responding to workforce challenges?

Treasury's White Paper *Working Future: The White Paper on Jobs & Opportunities 2023* (The 2023 White Paper)¹⁷ and the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022- 2031) have both responded to the workforce challenges with committed action through the investment in workforce skills and training measures.

However, the current system is failing to respond with the following implications:

- **Services forced to cap enrolments:** The whole sector is under significant pressure due to the workforce shortages, with many ECEC services capping enrolments as they are no longer able to operate at full capacity and deliver their service to every family in need.

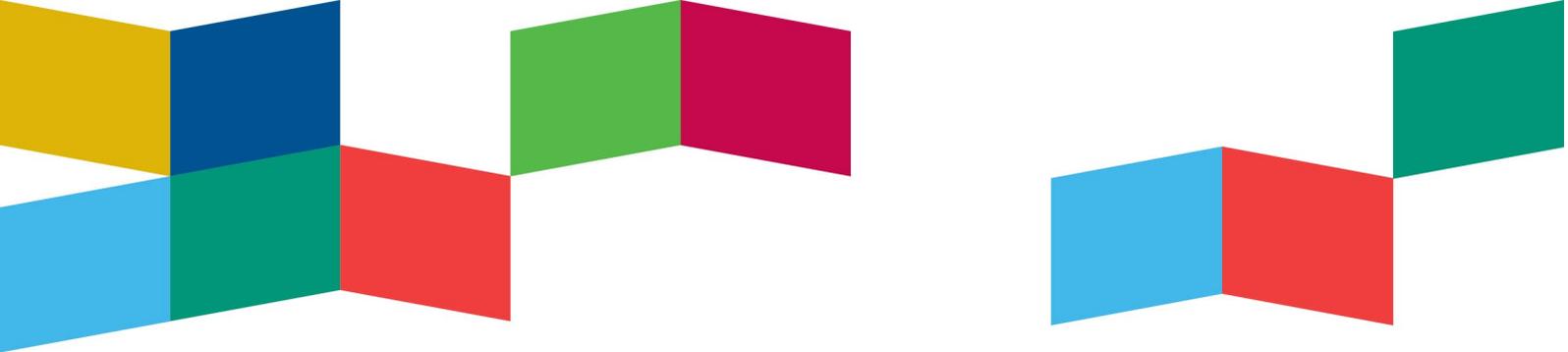
¹³ 3 CELA (Community Early Learning Australia), ELAA (Early Learning Association Australia) and CCC (Community Child Care Association), (2021) *Investing in our future: Growing the education and care workforce – Nov 2021*, CELA, ELAA & CCC, <https://bit.ly/CELAWorkforceReportNov2021>

¹⁴ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2015) *NQF Q3*, ACECQA

¹⁵ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023) *NQF Q3*, ACECQA

¹⁶ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023) *NQF Snapshot Q3 2023, November 2023*, ACECQA

¹⁷ 203 The Treasury (2023) *Working Future: The White Paper on Jobs & Opportunities 2023*, The Treasury



ACA surveyed member services across Australia in February, May and October 2023. The most recent October survey reflected that **half of participants** had been forced to cap enrolment numbers, withholding a total of 11,123 places from families within the week of 9-13 October.

- **Impact felt by families:** There is growing demand from families for greater flexible models of care, particularly to support seasonal industries such as grain growers, in areas that are hard to attract educators (remote locations may require higher wages to incentivize relocation). The impact of workforce shortages on families is immediate, with greatly reduced options or simply **no access** to ECEC service to care for their child, leaving them unable to undertake essential work.¹⁸
- **Rapidly evolving sector:** The significant expansion of programs to provide children and families with 3 year old Preschool and Kinder programs has significantly increased the demand for places in early learning services. Whilst these programs offer greater affordability for families, with **increased** hours at ECEC services, they require a more qualified ECEC workforce to be able to fully implement the program, with additional time and resources needed for program design and planning. An example of workforce recruitment unable to keep up with expansion of ECEC programs was highlighted in the SA Royal Commission Final Report findings which identified an additional 660 ECTs and 880 educators were needed to roll out 3 year old preschool across the state.¹⁹ This reflects an increase of 33% of ECTs to the existing ECEC workforce in SA.²⁰

4. What factors are driving or deterring workforce attraction, retention, and career progression in the ECEC sector? What factors are driving attrition?

Deterring or causing attrition and career progression in the ECEC sector:

- **Lower wages**²¹: In Australia, the percentage of job turnover amongst ECEC employees each year has been estimated to be more than 30% for over a decade.²²
“For many early childhood educators, alternatives of better paid and less challenging sources of employment are available in other employment sectors, a fact that explains turnover rates as high as 30%.”²³

¹⁸ See case study on page 40 of [ACA’s Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).

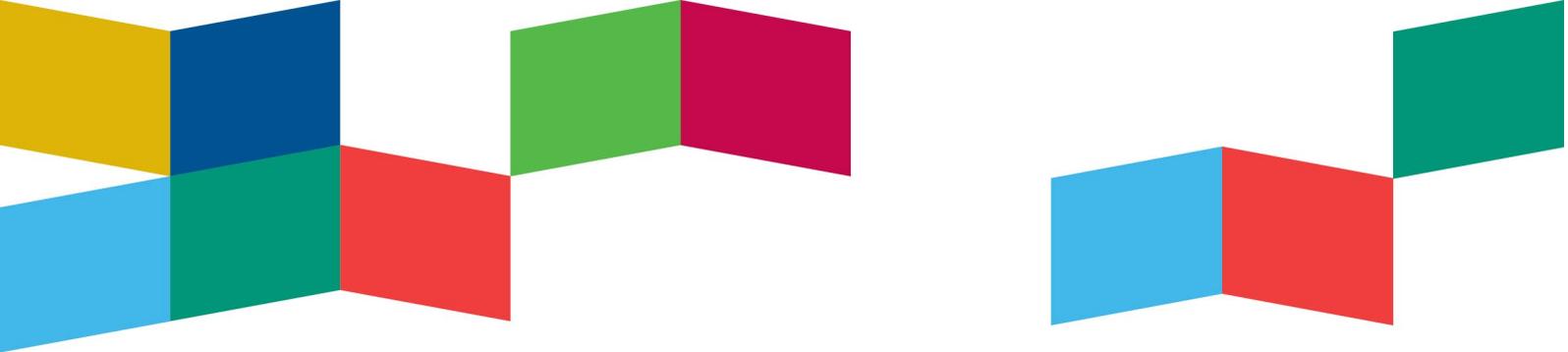
¹⁹ 136 Royal Commission (2023) Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, Royal Commission, Government of SA https://www.royalcommissionecec.sa.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/937332/RCECEC-Final-Report.pdf

²⁰ 136 Royal Commission (2023) Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, Royal Commission, Government of SA https://www.royalcommissionecec.sa.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/937332/RCECEC-Final-Report.pdf

²¹ See answer to question 1 for more detail about lower wages discussion.

²² 1 Community Services Ministers’ Advisory Council, 2006; United Voice, 2011a, 2014

²³ 2 University of QLD (2018), *Low pay but still we stay: Retention in early childhood education & care*, University of Queensland https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328376512_Low_pay_but_still_we_stay_Retention_in_early_childhood_education_and_care

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- **Challenging work conditions:** The ECEC sector is one of the most regulated sectors, which means there is a substantial amount of administration for ECEC staff to carry out. Working with children is rewarding but can be exhausting, particularly working with children with special needs or behavioural difficulties. The ECEC workforce is faced with high demands and expectations in creating high-quality, culturally-safe learning and care environments for children from birth to five years across 12 hours a day for 52 weeks each year without school holidays.
 - **The rapid growth of the sector:** Over the last decade has seen significant growth across the sector with new centre builds. This growth simply has not been matched by the number of people being trained up to enter the sector.²⁴
 - **A perceived lack of professional recognition,** particularly when ECEC staff are held in comparison with school teachers.²⁵
 - **A perceived lack of career progression opportunities,** which creates a limited view of the actual diverse roles and leadership opportunities available within ECEC services for educators and ECTs. See our response to question 6 in relation to expanding ANZSCO Occupancy List Categories and [ACA's ANZSCO Review recommendations](#) for different ECEC roles to be separately identified.
 - **The qualification requirements,** including the length and cost of studies which may contribute to the decline in the completion rates for early childhood teaching degrees. In 2006, 67% of domestic students who commenced an early childhood teaching degree had completed it in within 6 years, but in 2016, this was down to just 48%.²⁶
 - **The impact of the COVID- 19 pandemic:** During the height of the pandemic in 2020 the ECEC sector lost many educators. Staff mental and physical wellbeing declined, with higher levels of stress, increased workload due to staff absences and shortages, uncertainties while being exposed to the virus, and vaccine mandates all contributed to staff leaving the sector.²⁷

5. How do current governance and regulatory settings impact the ECEC workforce?

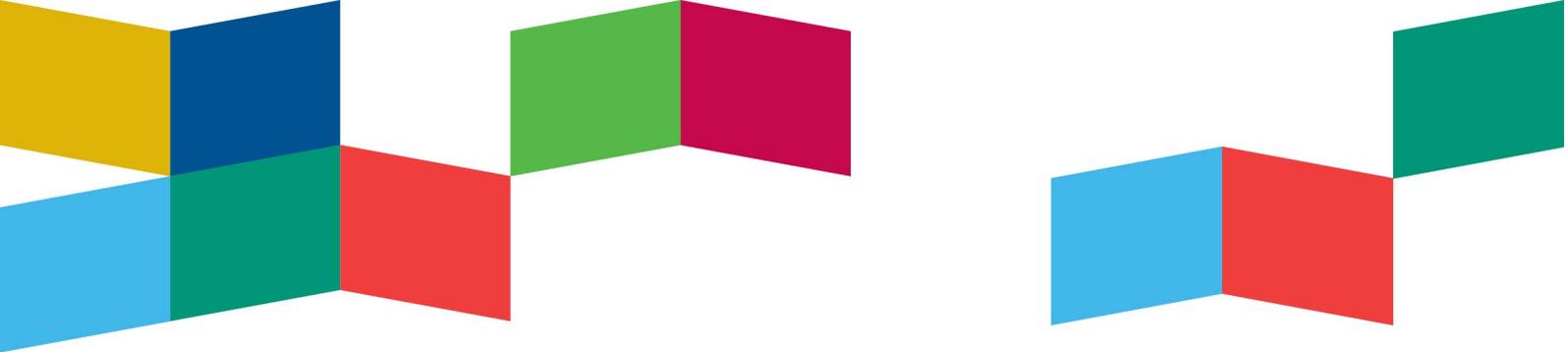
From 2009 onwards, there has been a series of major government policies and funding decisions that have had significant impact on the ECEC sector in relation to operations, staffing, regulations, family subsidies, assessment and ratings and range of other aspects. ACA has created a timeline of the NQF regulatory impacts

²⁴ See answer to question 1 for more details

²⁵ *University of England study into professionalism in early childhood education settings.* <https://theconversation.com/covid-chaos-has-shedlight-on-many-issues-in-the-australian-childcare-sector-here-are-4-of-them-174404>

²⁶ 22, Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

²⁷ Rogers, M., Boyd, W. & Sims, M. (2023). "Burnout central": Australian early childhood educational leaders' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Issues in Educational Research*, 33(1), 284-306. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier33/rogers.pdf>



on the ECEC sector across Australia in [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).²⁸

Additional governance and regulatory settings that have impacted the ECEC workforce:

- **Jurisdictional differences with registration recognition:** There are differences across the states and territories in terms of how each state regulatory body and teacher registrations operate. This can make it difficult for educators and ECTs to relocate interstate and have their qualifications recognised.²⁹
- **Jurisdictional differences with mandatory pre-employment checks:** Currently, the Working with Children Check process is not standardised across Australia. These checks are a slow process and have serious implications in terms of the risk for children, and in turn the service providers. As the majority of ECEC staff are women and they may change their name upon marriage, this can create delays in checks and clearances when commencing work at a new ECEC workplace. It is reported that some of these delays (i.e. post name changes after a marriage) can take on average up to seven weeks, with some states indicating the processing time can range from three to 12 weeks³⁰ which can have a significant impact on operations during a time of already critical workforce shortages.
- **Administrative delays for skilled migrants:** Under the current system if a migrant is seeking to work in ECEC, he or she must go through three different regulatory bodies to get approval and professional recognition prior to being approved to work in an ECEC service.

The Productivity Commission in their 2023 Report³¹ draft recommendation 3.3 acknowledged the same challenges outlined above and made recommendations to improve registration requirements for ECTs. Draft recommendation 3.3 states that State and territory governments should amend their teacher registration arrangements so that:

- early childhood teachers (ECTs) working in National Quality Framework-approved ECEC settings can be registered with the teacher registration body in their jurisdiction.
- any ECT-level qualification that has been approved by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) for recognition under the National Quality Framework should be automatically recognised as meeting qualification requirements associated with teacher registration.³²

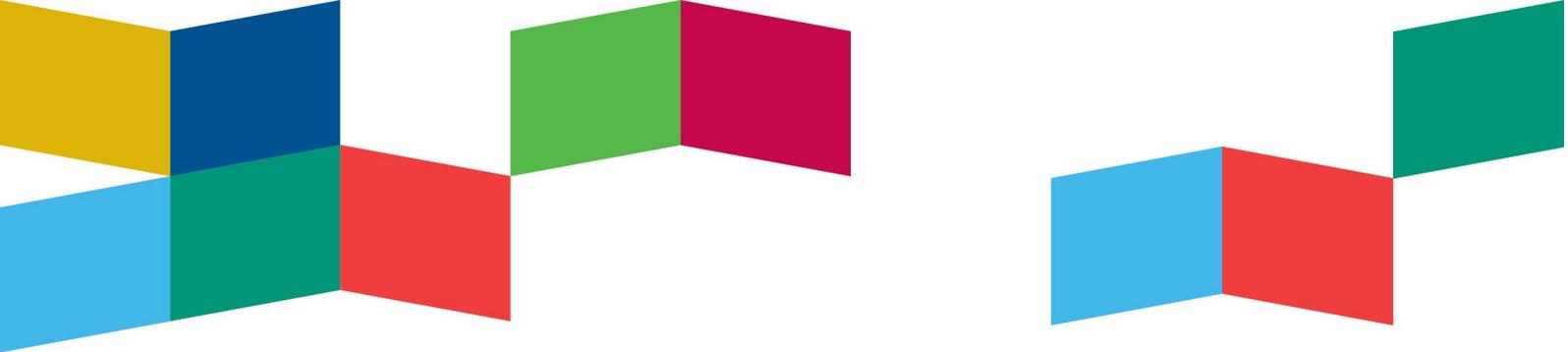
²⁸ see pages 93 - 98 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).

²⁹ Further detail in page 89 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).

³⁰ 160 Victorian Government, <https://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/individuals/applicants/what-happens-next>

³¹ Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft.pdf>

³² 67, Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft.pdf>



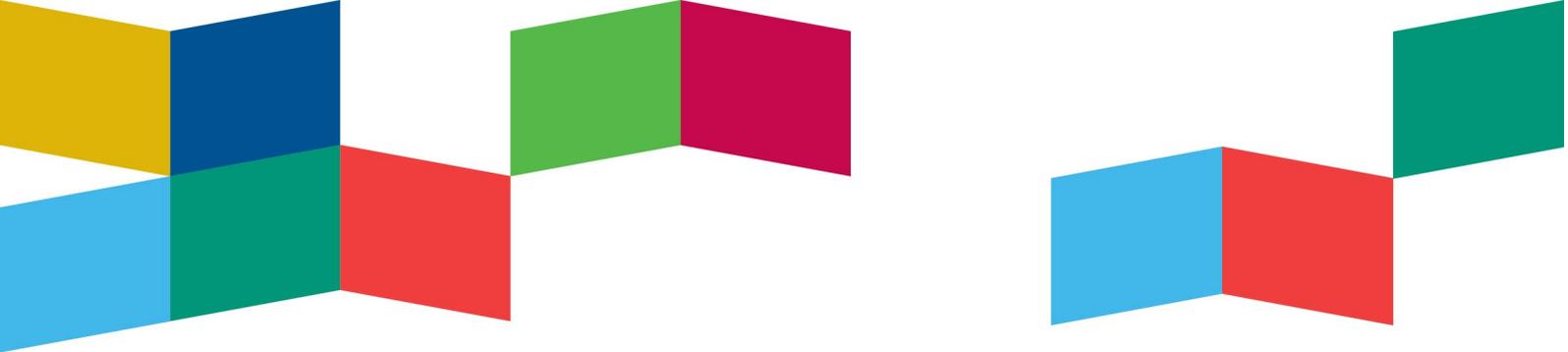
6. Have we missed any occupations from the proposed list (Appendix B), or should any occupations be omitted from the scope of the capacity study and why?

ACA recommends that the following occupations should be included within the scope of Appendix B:

- Early Childhood Education Assistant Manager/ Assistant Director
- Early Childhood Educational Leader
- Early Childhood Education Room Leader
- Early Childhood Education Diploma Educator

These recommendations follow [ACA's ANZSCO Review recommendations](#) for occupations to be separately identified.

Currently, the Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study Terms of Reference - Appendix B only includes Child Care Centre Manager, Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teacher, Child Care Worker, Family Day Care Worker, Nanny, Out of School Hours Care Worker, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker and Preschool Aide.



Future of the Workforce

ECEC roles over 10 years based on different systemic and population scenarios, alongside the impact on demand for employment in intersecting sectors that the ECEC workforce may come from, or leave to work in.

7. What are the emerging developments and trends in the ECEC sector and how will these impact the future workforce?

Change in Sector Terminology:

There is a shift in the terminology to move away from ‘child care’ to instead use language which also recognises the “education” component of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This language shift helps to improve the community perception, understanding and professional recognition of educators and teachers across the ECEC sector. See for further details.

Changes in preschool delivery across the country:

- Through the Preschool Reform Agreement (2022- 2025) there are significant changes in how preschool programs will be delivered across the country. These changes are likely to result in a substantial higher demand from families accessing services, which requires qualified ECTs to deliver the programs.
- The Productivity Commission Inquiry 2023 acknowledged there is a mismatch between the demand for and supply of ECEC staff, and this will only increase. For a more detailed overview of preschool reforms, see Appendix E of the Productivity Commission draft report.³³

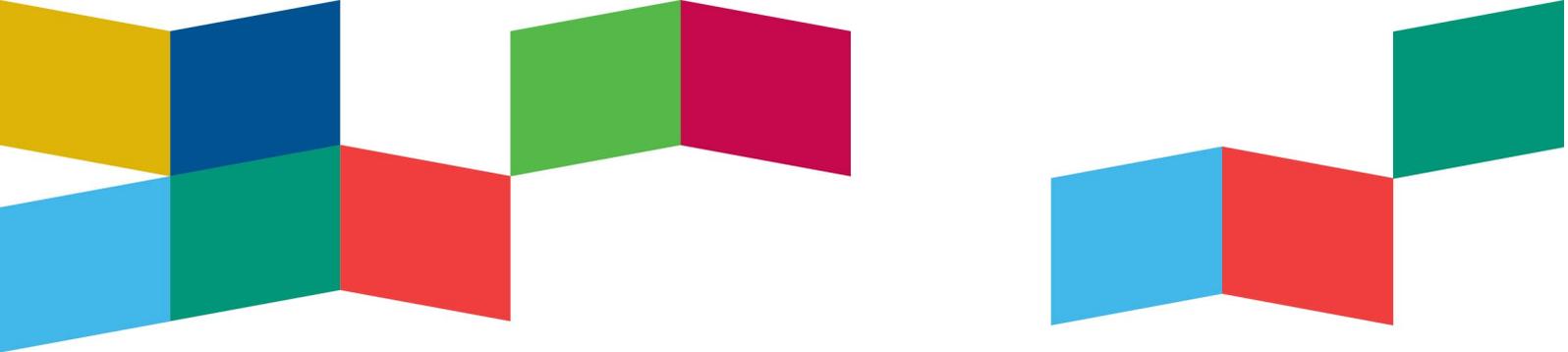
Undertaking further studies and upskilling degree qualifications:

- There is a decline in the completion rate for Bachelor of Early Childhood Education studies with only 48% of domestic students who started an early childhood teaching degree in 2016 having graduated by the end of 2022.³⁴
- There is a slow increase of numbers enrolling into a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education studies. However, these enrolments are not enough to keep up with the growing demands on the ECEC workforce and services.
ACECQA has tracked the commencement numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees, which was 3,187 in 2009 and has gradually increased to 4,288 in 2020, which is the highest number since 2015.³⁵

³³ 603 Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care – including supplementary papers*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

³⁴ 65 Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care – including supplementary papers*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

³⁵ 39, Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (2022) *NQF Annual Performance Report December 2022*, National Quality Framework, ACECQA

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- This very slow uptake of people undertaking their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education can be attributed to the increase of full fees, which acts as a disincentive to attract new teachers and upskill educators to build the workforce capacity. Further discussions around the trends training educators and teachers identify when trying to become fully qualified will be explored in ACA's response to the *Pathways and qualifications* section of this submission.

Demographic of the ECEC Workforce:

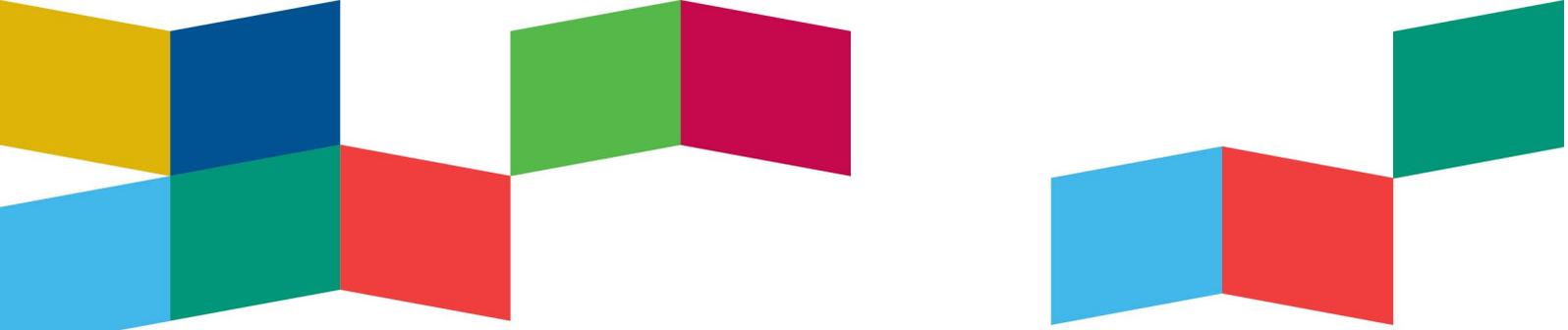
- The ECEC workforce is comprised largely of women with 93% of the 224,000 staff in the ECEC workforce identifying as female with an average age of 37 years.³⁶ Deeper exploration of this data indicates this predominantly female workforce may be balancing their work with significant family responsibilities - some may be starting a family or already have children and require time away from the workplace as maternity leave and then return with a need for greater flexibility, often reduced hours per day or to work part-time (reduced days) to support their family commitments.
- The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) highlighted this further:
‘The prime child-rearing years coincide with what is known as the ‘Golden Decade’ for career development, from age 30 to 40^{37, 38}’
- This scenario is also highlighted by the following feedback from an ACA member and service provider:
“I've had six of my staff on maternity leave at the same time. It's really, really hard to find high quality, qualified staff currently.”
- The ECEC sector is struggling to balance the need to support staff with more flexible hours due to their family responsibilities with the operational needs of running an ECEC service in the context of workforce shortages. This includes complying with mandatory staffing ratios, upholding high quality and maintaining consistent practices within the service.

8. What are the future needs for the ECEC sector and workforce, and what might influence these requirements?

- The growing Australian population creates more demand on ECEC services, which in turn requires a pipeline of adequately qualified ECEC workforce for the immediate and long term. This, coupled with early learning **program** expansion (such as 3 year old preschool and universal access), creates an even greater need for a larger workforce.

³⁶ 179 Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2023) *Supplementary paper 3: The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission

³⁸ Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2014, Submission to the Productivity Commission of Australia 'Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning', Workplace Gender Equality Agency



The 2023 White Paper anticipated that “employment in the care and support sector is projected to double over the next four decades, as demand for quality services continues to grow.”³⁹

- In order to address the workforce shortages problem, the sector needs the Australian Government’s strong commitment and investment into attracting, retaining, and building the ECEC workforce through a government-funded wage increase. With growing demand, the sector needs to have enough qualified educators and ECTs to deliver high-quality early learning for **every child**. This can **only happen** when early childhood educators are adequately remunerated, without families wearing the cost.
- There are opportunities to review and adapt other systems with ECEC to become more responsive. This includes the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) assessment process, which needs to be more efficient and streamlined to ensure it provides adequate support for children with additional needs faster (i.e. when they need it). The impact would be a more balanced workload for the existing educators, with the support of an additional support educator brought in to work directly with that child’s needs.

9. Are there any specific novel skills and capability requirements emerging in the ECEC sector? How have workforce requirements in ECEC changed over time?

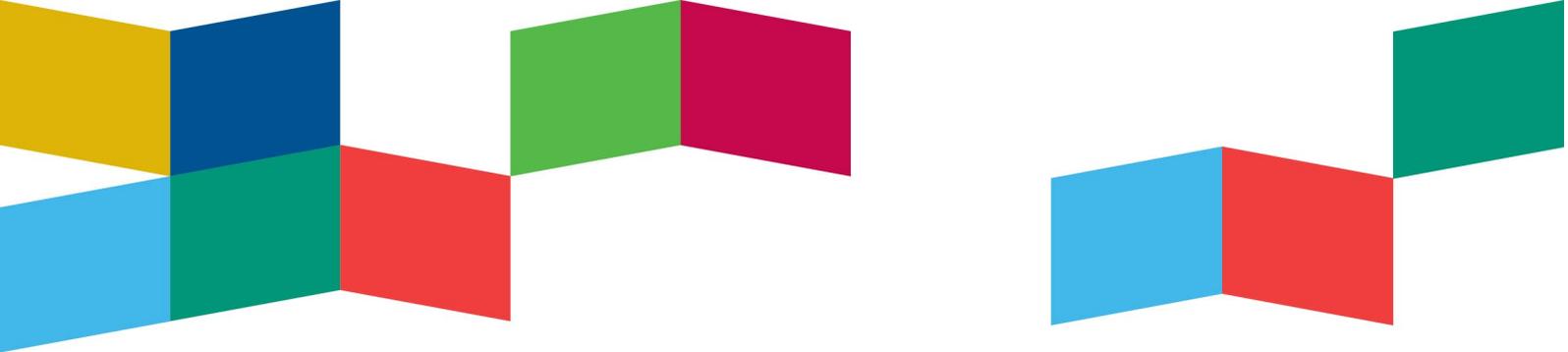
As the ECEC sector is undergoing rapid expansion in the context of a national workforce crisis, along with major systemic reforms being implemented, there is greater pressure on leadership capacity needed to evolve to respond to increasing complexities and demands of the sector.

We have seen the workforce requirements in ECEC change significantly over the years with the introduction of the National Quality Framework, the introduction of 3 year old preschool and expansion of the 4 year old preschool programs across the country.

For an overview of a timeline of the NQF regulatory changes with the impacts on the ECEC sector across Australia, see [ACA’s Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).⁴⁰

³⁹ 2 The Treasury (2023) *Working Future: The White Paper on Jobs & Opportunities 2023*, The Treasury

⁴⁰ see pages 93 - 98 of [ACA’s Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).



Pathways & Qualifications

Potential supply (at the national, state, and regional level) of the ECEC workforce over the next 10 years. As part of this, the study will identify the enablers and barriers faced by universities, TAFEs and other education and training providers to attracting and supporting students in ECEC, including any differences between states and territories

10. How does the ECEC sector provide career progression?

Do qualification recognition arrangements support the development of the sector?

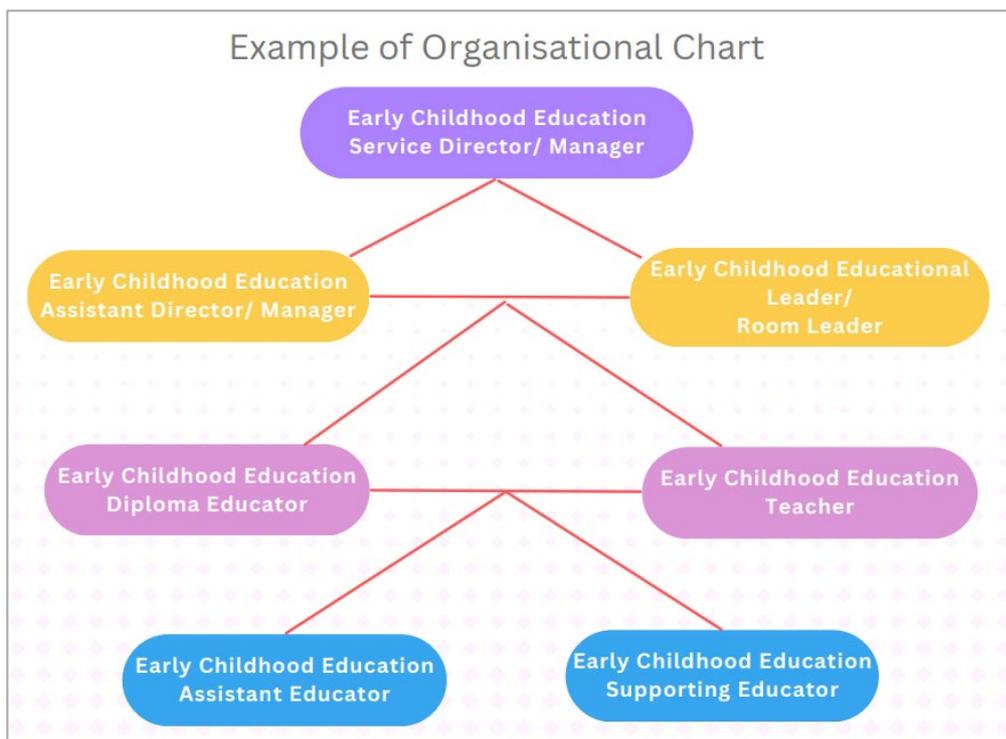
Career Progression

The ECEC sector offers a range of career progression opportunities through a range of different roles. These roles are not consistently available across all ECEC services, because the different operating models, structures and sizes of the services affect the roles required.

Those outside of the ECEC sector are often unaware of the range of roles, leadership opportunities and career progression pathways available in early learning services. This lack of awareness has contributed to incorrect public assumptions and perceptions that there are limited career progression opportunities within the ECEC sector.

For more detail and examples of the variety of roles within an ECEC service, please refer to [ACA's submission to the ANZSCO Review](#).

Below is an example of how an ECEC service may be structured with each role and level of leadership, to provide an overview of the opportunities for career progression in an individual centre.



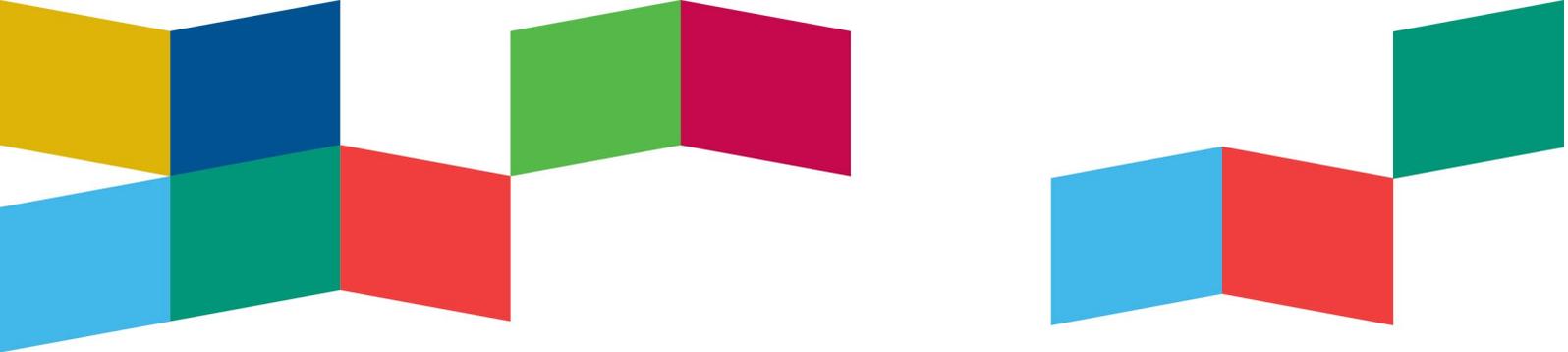
Recognition of ECEC Qualifications

There are a range of challenges in recognising the different ECEC qualifications across different states and territories, due to the differences in how each state regulatory body and their teacher registrations operate. This can make it difficult for educators and ECTs to relocate interstate and have their qualifications adequately recognised.⁴¹

ACA has previously raised concerns about the national inconsistency of ECEC qualifications in several submissions. This includes [ACA's 2023 submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry](#), which recommended that the Federal Government should:

- Ensure that ACECQA and all jurisdictions recognise the transfer of aligned qualifications to work in the early childhood/child care sector. E.g. Diploma in Outside School Hours Care, Diploma of School Age Education.
- Work with all jurisdictions and Teacher Registration Boards to ensure national consistency in recognising the Birth-to-Five Early Childhood Teaching Degree via mutual recognition.

⁴¹ Further detail in page 89 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).



We believe these changes would create a more streamlined, nationally consistent process that is less complicated and less likely to cause confusion, therefore removing the existing barriers to the ECEC workforce moving and working interstate.

11. Are the mechanisms for recognising prior learning and experience being used effectively to recognise workers' skills and knowledge?

The [ACA's 2022 response to the Employment White Paper](#) recommended a series of mechanisms to establish an efficient Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process:

- For holders of Certificate III in ECEC who were qualified prior to 2013 to enter into a Diploma qualification if they can demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge equivalent to the more recent Certificate III in ECEC. E.g. At least three years of experience at an Approved Service since 1 January 2012.
- For holders of non-recognised tertiary qualifications with transferable curriculum content E.g. Teachers, speech therapists, education support, etc) who may be interested in joining the sector without the need to undertake a full ECEC qualification.
- For students who have withdrawn from their teaching degree having completed at least 50% of study units, to be able to reframe their qualifications and be granted a Diploma-level equivalent.
- For qualified primary school teachers to be recognised as Early Childhood Teachers in an ECEC service to enable a micro-skills course to transition into the sector.

**12. How is the education and training system responding to the need for a skilled ECEC workforce?
Where are the opportunities and challenges?
Are there enablers and barriers in providing ECEC training (e.g. jurisdictional differences)?**

The National Workforce Strategy sets out goals for tertiary education providers to work collaboratively to build the capacity and skills of the ECEC workforce. This includes involvement from training providers, universities, TAFEs, and RTOs. The strategy is also seeking to understand the barriers people experience when undertaking and completing their training, in order to better help inform workforce solutions.

University Responses to ECEC Studies:

- Several universities have developed 18 months fast-tracked degrees in collaboration with the ECEC sector. The aim of these co-designed accelerated early childhood teaching degrees is to provide a fit for purpose course that addresses the barriers many experiences in their efforts to complete their studies. This includes the usual requirement to undertake their practicum in a different service from their employer's, which requires them to use their annual leave or leave without pay.⁴²

⁴² Further detail in page 85 of [ACA's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care](#).

- For example, the Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Teaching is a course that has been co-designed with Swinburne Online, Swinburne University of Technology and with ECEC sector experts - ACA and the College for Australian Early Childhood Education (CAECE). For further details, see the case study: Universities with accelerated Qualifications in Early Childhood Education in [ACA's 2023 Submission for the Productivity Commission Inquiry](#).
- Also see draft finding 3.2 of the Productivity Commission report which supported accelerated pathways that would allow diploma-qualified educators to obtain an early childhood teaching qualification in a reduced time frame.⁴³

Challenges in ECEC education and training

Early childhood educators and teachers identified a range of barriers to become fully qualified:

- The length of the course (Bachelor of Early Education degrees have a study length of three to four years)
- Accrued HECS HELP fees (i.e. accumulated debt)
- The required block periods of placement (which are not paid – i.e. voluntary work)

The Treasury's 2023 White Paper recognised that:

- "Many qualifications in the care workforce require workplace placements or practicums which are unpaid. Additional upfront costs such as transport, child care, and forgoing unpaid work during placements can result in students changing courses or withdrawing from study entirely."⁴⁴
- The requirement to do practicum placements at a different service, which places pressure on existing centre's staff, rostering and backfilling.

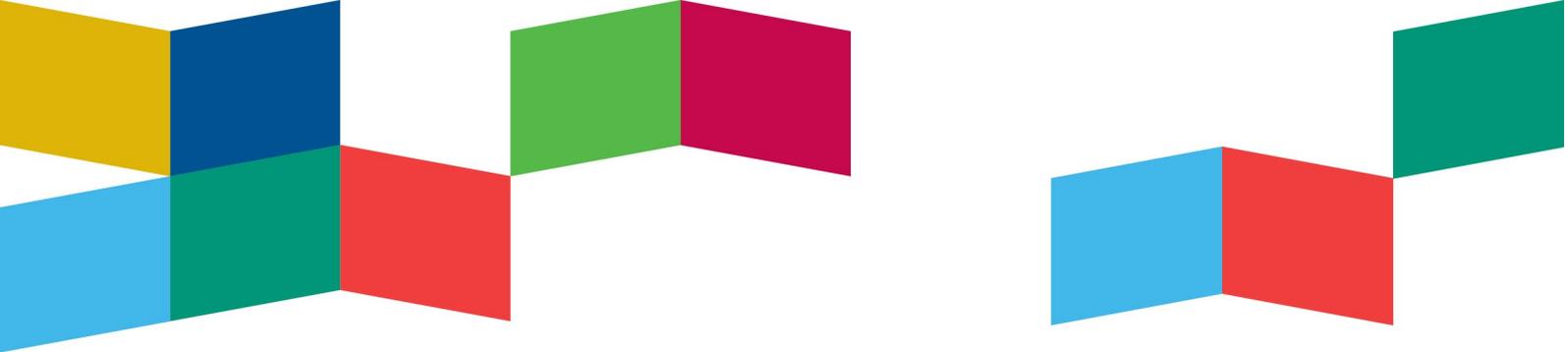
Opportunities in ECEC education and training

ACA recommends the following reforms to build the capacity of the ECEC workforce via the existing training and education systems:

- Establish an **efficient Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process** – *see answer to question 11 addressing mechanisms for recognising prior learning and experience.*
- Establish a **micro-credential** targeted at educators who already hold a recognised ECEC qualification but have not worked in the system for several years, to encourage a return to working in ECEC. This would be a formalised version of professional development via a small number of targeted course units to

⁴³ 226 Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care – including supplementary papers*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

⁴⁴ White Paper



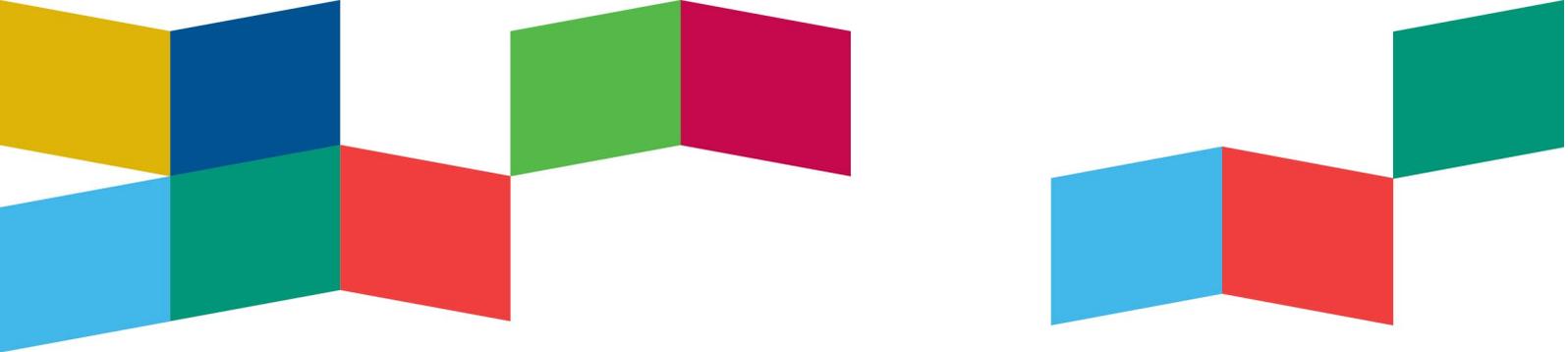
supplement their existing qualifications. The study content could include updates on legislative changes, pedagogical practice, best practice, safety & first aid requirements, etc.

- Ensure that **ACECQA and all jurisdictions recognise the transfer of aligned qualifications** to work in the early childhood/child care sector. *See answer to question 10 addressing qualification recognition arrangements.*
- **Modify the degree qualification requirements** for the second Early Childhood Teacher (and in NSW, for the second, third and fourth Early Childhood Teacher where applicable) to include other non-teaching degrees which align with the Early Childhood Teacher skillset. E.g. Degrees in Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Psychology, Musical Therapy and Fine Arts (Reggio Emilia approach).
- Engage with universities to structure their degree courses such that the student cohort on rotation can **work at approved early learning services at least 2 days per week**. These students would be paid commensurate to how much of their degree they have completed.
- Immediately provide the funding and resources to create a **nationally available skills-focused degree program** to rapidly upskill Early Childhood Educators to the degree qualification level of early childhood teacher in a period of 18 months, instead of the usual three years.
- **Incentivise educators** to undertake a Bachelor of Education (Birth to Five Years), by providing a conditional waiver on the payment of HECS-HELP Fees if graduates complete a minimum of two years of full-time in a long day care service upon graduating. This can be tested through a pilot project across key areas of need.

13. What attracts students to ECEC training courses and workers to ECEC roles? What influences job mobility across roles and sectors?

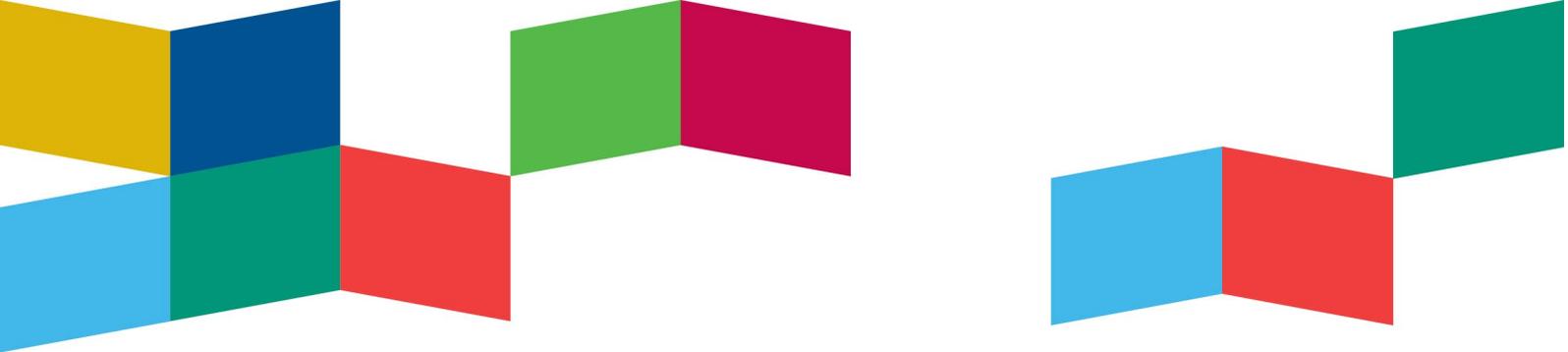
Feedback from ACA's members and external provider services indicates that there are a range of factors that attract people to ECEC roles and to undertake ECEC qualifications. Despite the previously identified challenges of working in the early learning sector, early childhood educators generally hold the view that the ECEC sector offers:

- a rewarding career to support children in their early learning, development and to engage with families.
- diverse role, with hands on involvement with children, program design and planning, and variety of skills and experiences of early learning based on different ages of children.
- creativity and play-based education informed by pedagogy practices that is evidence-based.
- career opportunities and progression.
- leadership development, mentoring and professional support.
- reliable job security with a current and future high demand for ECEC experience, skills and qualifications.

- 
- a socially-engaging role working with children and people.

ACA has some concerns around the interpretation of 'job mobility' in this question. If we interpret the question to mean ECEC staff moving roles within the ECEC sector, including upskilling, undertaking more responsibilities and moving into roles at different leadership levels (e.g. moving from Diploma Educator to Room Leader role) then ACA supports this interpretation.

If 'job mobility' refers to the ECEC workforce can move across to other 'care and support industries' as put forward in the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy, ACA does not support this. For more details, see [ACA's response to the draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy](#)



Participation & Engagement

Dynamics of participation and engagement in the ECEC workforce and how these might affect the workforce over the next 10 years. As part of this, it will explore opportunities for, and barriers to, full participation in the ECEC workforce for priority cohorts, including but not limited to First Nations people, people in rural, regional, and remote areas, people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

14. What influences patterns of work in the ECEC sector, e.g. performing multiple roles or working in different services?

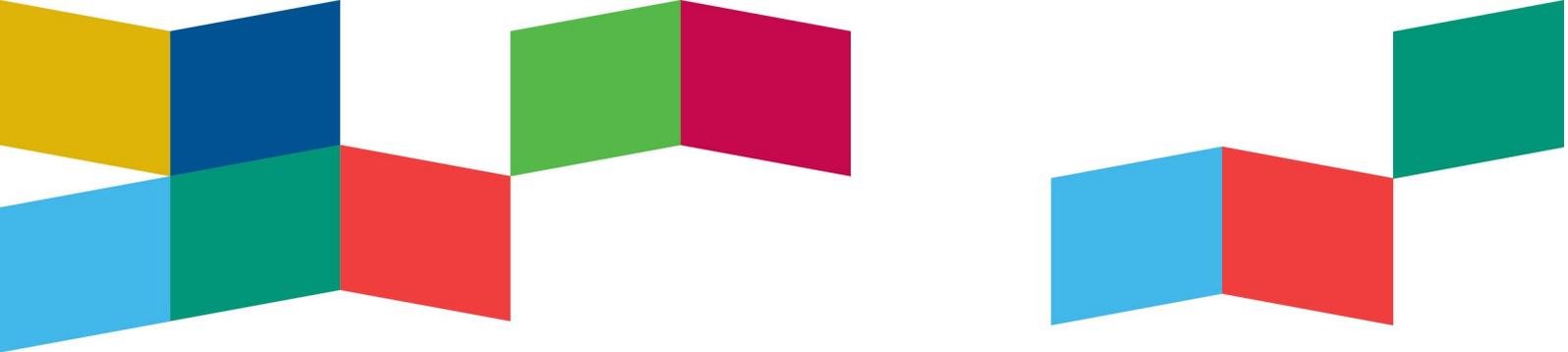
- **Patterns of work:** Across the ECEC sector, the ECEC workforce distribution of hours worked are:
 - short part-time (1 to 19 hours, 29.1 per cent),
 - long part-time hours (20 to 34 hours, 33.4 per cent) and
 - full-time hours (35 to 40 hours 33.4 per cent), with a small proportion of the workforce working long hours (41 or more hours 4.1 per cent).⁴⁵
- **Performing multiple roles:** ECEC roles require the ability to undertake multiple roles across the service, within their qualification levels. This creates variety of daily work, increases transferrable skills, and therefore helps develop staff flexibility in the service.
- **Educators as First Responders:** We are hearing more frequently from our members that educators and the ECEC workforce are often required to take on additional responsibilities when supporting families using the service. ECEC staff are often first responders to the children, and sometimes their parents, who may be experiencing family violence, financial vulnerability, housing insecurity, mental health issues, chronic health conditions, exposed substance abuse and neglect. There is insufficient data to support these insights in full detail, however, see ACA's submission seeking more support to better equip educators with First Responder training.⁴⁶

15. What factors influence workforce participation for priority cohorts including First Nations people? What are the enablers and barriers to support the development of a diverse workforce in the sector?

Factors influencing ECEC Workforce participation by First Nations people

⁴⁵ Department of Education (2021) Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census report - <https://www.education.gov.au/childcare-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>

⁴⁶ [ACA's joint submission into Mental Health: Detection & early intervention of family violence via engagement with early learning services.](#)



In relation to culturally-safe workplaces and ongoing commitment to culturally-safe practices embedded in the service for First Nations people, we recommend reviewing [SNAICC's range of policies](#) that advocate for First Nations educators, services, and families.

Barriers to create a culturally diverse ECEC workforce

There are range of challenges in creating a culturally diverse ECEC workforce, particularly for migrants to Australia who would like to work in the ECEC sector, or currently work in the sector but need visa extensions or their previous studies recognised in order to fulfil more senior roles. Currently, 28% of staff working in ECEC services across Australia are migrants.⁴⁷ This diverse part of the ECEC workforce experience barriers in:

- obtaining visas, with many ECEC roles not recognised under the Skilled Migration List.
- having their prior ECEC skills and qualification recognised equally and consistently across all states and territories.

Enablers to support a diverse ECEC workforce

ACA recommends widening the pipeline of qualified international candidates (skilled migration) by accelerating the application process for the Skilled Visa program to allow already-qualified candidates from overseas to enter the country and commence working.

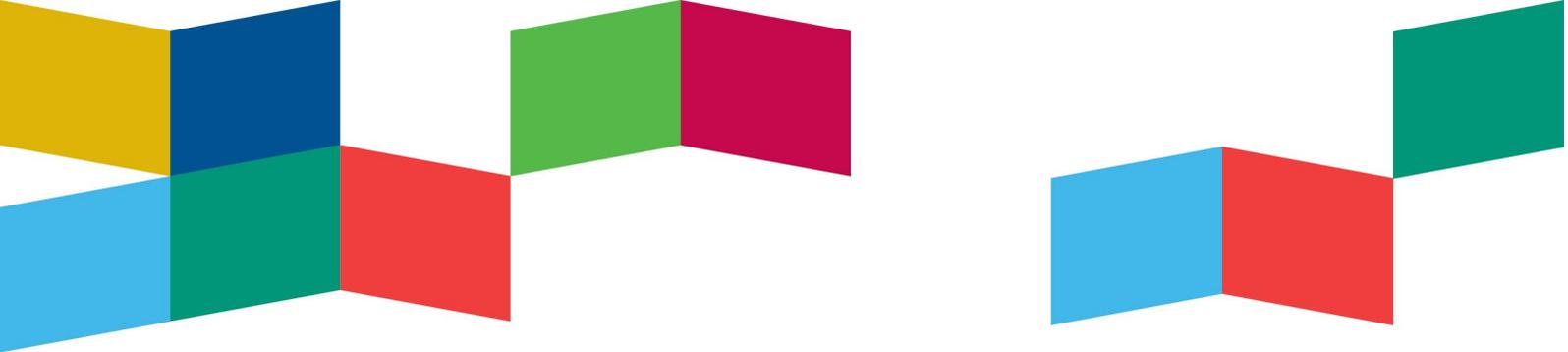
This includes:

- Engaging with the National Skills Commission to rank early childhood educators as a priority group on the Skills Priority List.
- Providing the required resources to the relevant Federal and State Government Departments to allow for skilled migration applications to be processed in a timely manner.
- Engaging with ACECQA to ensure a smooth qualification assessment (translation of international vocational and tertiary qualifications to recognised qualifications here), including reinstating the automatic public listing of overseas qualifications as accepted once such qualifications become approved for the first time, instead of having the same overseas qualifications reassessed for acceptance for each and every subsequent applicant with the same degree).

16. How do wages and working conditions (including location) interact with workforce participation? What factors could be considered?

Impact of wages and conditions with ECEC workforce participation:

⁴⁷ 179 Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2023) *Supplementary paper 3: The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission

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- See our response to *questions 1 challenges and opportunities facing the ECEC workforce* and *question 4 Deterring or causing attrition and career progression in the ECEC sector*.
 - Wages that attract and retain high quality, experienced and appropriately qualified staff are essential for high quality ECEC.
 - Current lower staff wages in comparison to other career options may deter candidates from entering the ECEC sector.
 - Without government funding to facilitate an adequate wage increase (thus without impacting the cost of ECEC for families), new entrants to the ECEC may be deterred or move to school teaching roles.
 - Community perceptions of professional recognition of ECEC roles compared to school teaching may discourage new entrants to the sector.

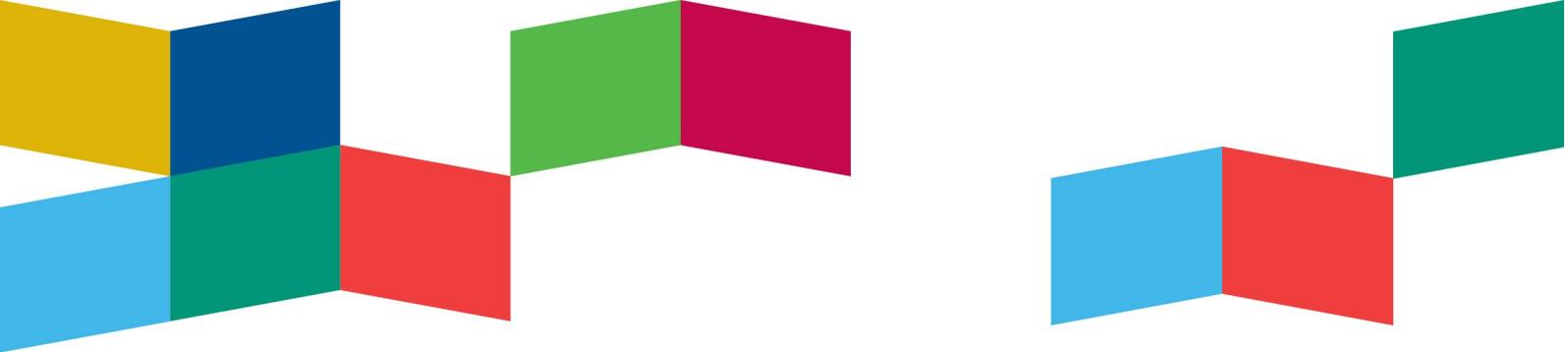
Additional factors to be considered:

- Paid backfill for professional development
- Housing and relocation allowance for remote locations
- Higher wages to attract and retain in remote locations

17. To what extent do employers/the sector invest in professional development to support workers' career progression, retain workers and improve services?

A large portion of ECEC services pay their staff above the Award rate to retain current staff and attract new staff to their service. The ACCC September 2023 report found that for-profit providers are paying 64.3% of their staff above award wages.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ 11 ACCC (2023) Childcare Inquiry: Interim Report September 2023, ACCC https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Childcare%20inquiry%20-%20Interim%20report%20-%20September%202023_0.pdf



Other Insights

The Capacity Study focuses on ECEC workforce and skills issues, particularly attraction and retention, including incentives. These guiding questions elicit further information relevant to the study's scope.

18. Are there experiences in other countries with comparable economies or other industry settings that could be considered?

Canada

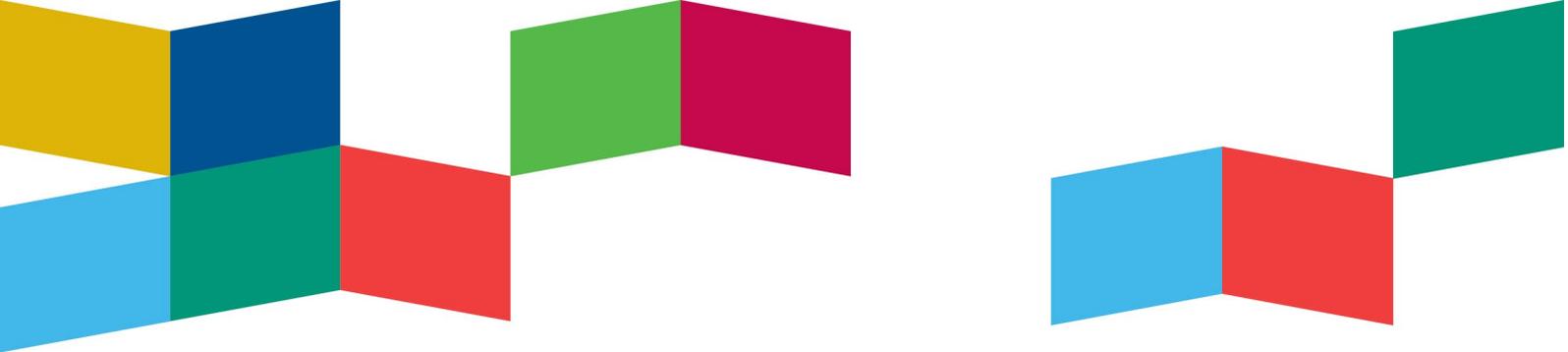
- Canada is an example of how the government's ECEC policy changes had unintended consequences - the quality of service delivery declined due to the lack of fully qualified educators, and services were therefore unable to successfully implement the well-intentioned reforms.
- The province of Quebec in Canada introduced \$5 a day fees for families from 1997 to 2008. This caused an increase in centre-based care participation from about 20% to almost 60%.⁴⁹
- These higher demands required a rapid expansion of the ECEC workforce to meet the increased needs of the sector. However, the pace of the ECEC demand outstripped the availability of adequately trained, experienced or qualified workforce.
- The Productivity Commission Inquiry in their 2024 report⁵⁰ has reviewed the Quebec model of delivering ECEC and found that the rapid take up of ECEC services through reduced fees, created an inadequate and unqualified ECEC workforce. This ECEC model's efficiency and effectiveness was evaluated against the impact of children attending these services compared to other provinces of Canada. The evaluations found that despite regulatory requirements being relaxed in Quebec, many providers failed to comply with the standards and the quality of the service delivery significantly declined.
- The evaluation found that in 2001, 42% of for-profit centres in Quebec had two of every three educators fully qualified and for 25% of these centres, not even one in three educators were qualified.⁵¹

19. Are there innovative practices or case studies of workforce participation that could be highlighted?

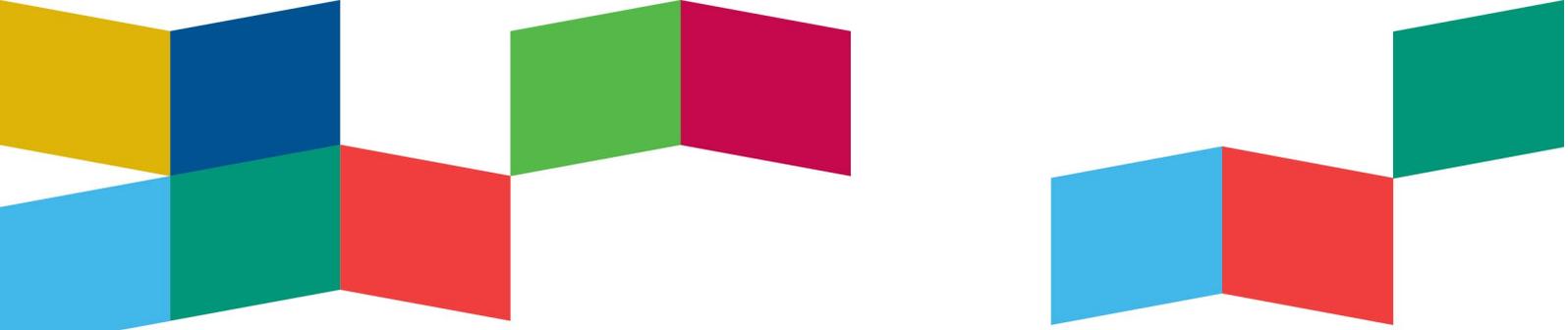
⁴⁹ 103 Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care – including supplementary papers*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

⁵⁰ 103 Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care – including supplementary papers*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

⁵¹ 103 Productivity Commission (2023) *The ECEC workforce - A path to universal early childhood education and care – including supplementary papers*, Productivity Commission <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft/childhood-draft-full.pdf>

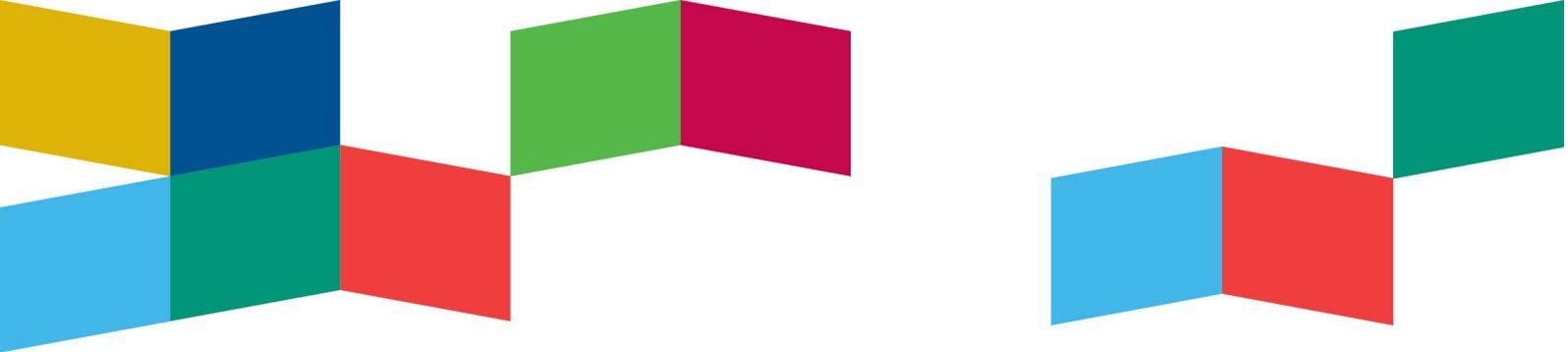


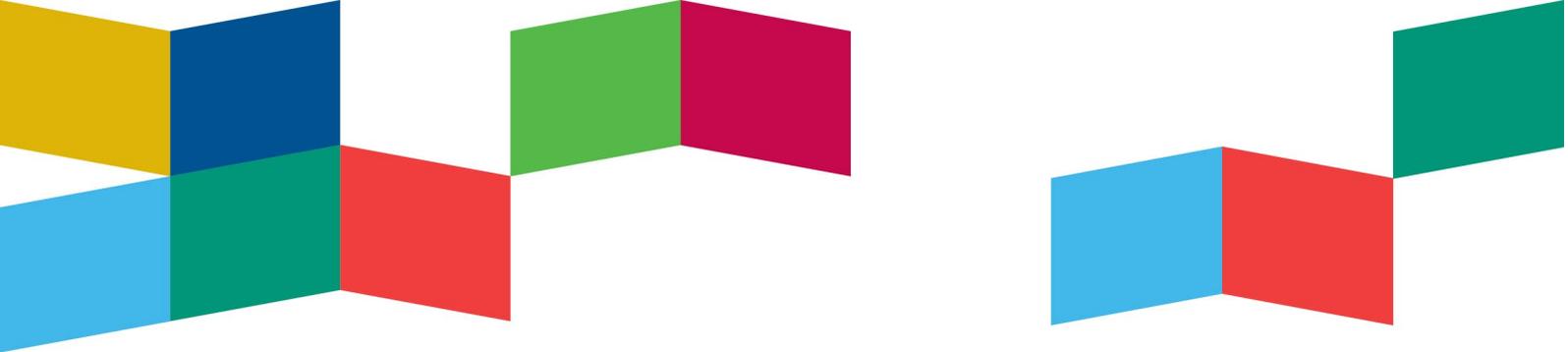
20. Are there any additional insights you would like to provide? Please provide details of any other information, relevant to the Terms of Reference of the ECEC Capacity Study, that could be considered?



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