

ECEC Terminology - Discussion Questions

Feedback on the below discussion questions will inform the next stage of analysis and advice to the National Workforce Working group on Focus Area 1-5 of the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2031: *Agree and consistently use contemporary terminology to describe the children's education and care sector, and its workforce.*

Please provide feedback to eceworkforce@det.nsw.edu.au by **28 March 2023**.

Discussion Questions for ACA feedback

1. The NWS identifies specific terminology to be considered within the scope of this project, including 'teachers and educators' and deciding upon 'children's education and care', 'early learning and care' or 'early childhood education and care'. The Early Childhood Australia's ['How to talk about early childhood education and care'](#) also provides a framework for consistent and strengths-based terminology.

- **Is the terminology these documents exhaustive?**
- **Is there a preferred set of terminology and why?**
- **Where is there a need for greater consistency?**
- **Are there instances where consistency may not be possible or appropriate?**

ACA Feedback:

- The term 'childcare' is a simplification and fails to position the Early Education & Care sector as a phase within the education journey. The challenge lies in that 'childcare' is the term most used by families – the term "childcare" brings instant recognition whereas "early education & care, early learning" or "ECEC" are less recognised/understood outside of the service providers & their teams of staff. There are additional levels of complexity with the term "childcare" as this is in the name of the relevant subsidy – Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The formal name of this government funding tool, which is referred to in numerous ongoing communications with families, reinforces the use of this term among families.
- The preferred terminology should recognise both the education and care elements of the service. Both are equally important – the care is about a sense of belonging, keeping the child safe from harm, clean (nappies changed or toilet access & hygiene practices in place), hydrated, fed and nourished & social needs met – smiles, cuddles, comforted when they fall over, etc. The exclusion of the word "care" runs the risk of reducing the importance of the "care" component of the service, with the primary emphasis seems to be education (ie. "early learning").
- ACA would support strengths-based terminology that explains the nature of the work, with value for those working in the ECEC sector based on their qualifications, skills, experience, training, and knowledge.
- There is need for greater consistency across the ECEC sector (for consistency in all jurisdictions), in the wider community with families, in the media, and across all levels of government.

Discussion Questions for ACA feedback

- This need for greater consistency is demonstrated via lessons from the past – inconsistent and confusing terms across the ECEC sector have historically caused division in community and policy perceptions, understanding, funding and participation. This has created fragmentation in the ECEC sector, further worsened by separate funding agreements, and administrative processes across different levels of government causing greater complexities for families, Approved Providers (centre operators) and systems.
- There is scope to align ECEC terminology used in the National Quality Framework (NQF) across all levels of government, funding and legislative to support a consistent approach. This would benefit the administrative functions, support those working within the sector and families to understand and navigate systems based on contemporary and consistent ECEC terminology.
- However, attempts to move towards aligning the NQF terminology across all areas of government may not be possible. Attempts to change the names of government funding or programs, often has set terminology embedded in legislation. This becomes a difficult, lengthy legislative process to change the name or terminology that is existing within legislation.
- Consistency may not be possible where different levels of government have different definitions, services, program and funding based on different definitions of ‘early years’. There is still confusion and complexity associated with ‘early years’ – with different perceptions and understandings of what age children qualify for this (i.e. 0-5 years or 0-8 years).

2. What is the impact of inconsistent application of contemporary terminology and for whom?

How can these terms be defined in a way that makes sense for a variety of audiences (ECEC workforce, families, sector representatives, policymakers)?

ACA Feedback:

- In terms of data collection and measuring impact better, inconsistent language and naming across all states and jurisdictions creates confusion and complexities in gathering information around the ECEC sector, workforce and tracking the outcomes of children. There needs to be a move towards consistent and contemporary terminology to collect data across the whole of Australia and the sector.
- Clarification of these terms would help to reduce confusion, misconceptions, and assumptions – from current and future workforce, parents, training providers, other sectors, etc.
- Clarifying and creating consistency of terminology with wider education to support to shift and may help to break down silos in cross sector partnerships, programs and services, departments and policy makers, funding and training opportunities to create short and long term benefits for children, families and staff.
- The impact of changing terminology to reflect contemporary language would support wider perception of the ECEC sector in a positive lens. We anticipate such change would make ECEC more attractive to emerging and future workforce. Through the use of strengths based language that offers professional recognition for the skilled, qualified and experienced workforce.
- Consistency helps to keep quality standards, as demonstrated with the NQF and ACECQA Early Years Framework.
- Impact of inconsistent application of terminology could lead to great inequities in the system. Lack of understanding of the shared terminology would be a barrier to families to access supports they need which would benefit their child, like through the CCS activity test, childcare subsidy and ISP support. These barriers would also affect ECEC operators ability to navigate systems, advocate for their families’ and the child’s needs, create additional stress, time and

Discussion Questions for ACA feedback

take away from the work they are doing in the centre.

Part of this would be a wider education piece to help all those engaged in the system to be able to understand it, to better support families to navigate it. An example is feedback from families who reported finding the system complex and confusing, and when seeking further help from Services Australia the phone operators were also unsure of the system complexities they are meant to advise on.

- ACA would like to see a commitment across all levels of government and sector stakeholders to using the same terminology across all touch points including the name of the CCS, the name of all services, references to the sector in media articles etc. This would require a proactive initiative from government to do this including an education & media campaign.

Eg. Education Services Australia is a not-for-profit company established by Australian, State and Territory government education ministers. It manages domainname.edu.au, which is the only domain space exclusively for the Australian education sector, and allows early learning (childcare) services to have “edu” in their URL. This puts an emphasis on the education component of the service. They have to pay \$20 a year for it & have to show documentation that they are indeed an ECEC service. This is a positive example of government collaboration to change the perception of “childcare” services to “Early Childhood Education & Care” services, with domain names being a part of the puzzle.

3. How are families currently engaging with terminology (e.g. through NQF ratings, understanding of benefits of early childhood education for children’s development, through a ‘care’ lens to enable workforce participation)?

Do you have any documentation you could share which provides insights into broader public, family and/or child perspectives on terminology?

ACA Feedback:

Families are engaging with terminology based on a range of ways, these include:

- As previously stated, the name of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) would be galvanising the use of this terminology among families. It raises the question – how can we expect service providers and families **not** to call it ‘childcare’ when the government funding platform to make it more affordable refers to it as such? It’s a good place to start in terms of changing the language and the culture.
- Generationally, older generation’s (grandparents and older carers) that may who have a perception of the ECEC sector as ‘childminding’ or “daycare” services.
- Personal perceptions and bias, perceive sector as a care service vs early education – based on need of parents for the engagement with service. This may mean care service to allow parents to return to the workforce.
- Growing awareness of early intervention through education to achieve great outcomes for a child’s development.
- Media and wider sources of influence
- It is worth mentioning the impact of different terminology in the transition from ECEC into preschool and foundational schooling different States and Territories. The diverse terminology with school and preschool transitions includes Pre-School, Kindergarten, Prep, Pre-Primary and Reception. Beyond the points previously outlined, the inconsistent terminology creates

Discussion Questions for ACA feedback

confusion, assumptions, and barriers for families (particularly in border state communities or relocating across states).

In addition to different terminology used, there is different starting ages across the jurisdictions.

State	Name of preschool year	Minimum age of enrolment at 1 Jan	Name of first year of school	Minimum age of enrolment at 1 Jan	Compulsory School start age
VIC	Kindergarten	3 years and 8 months (4 years on or before April 30)	Prep	4 years 8 months (5 on or before 30 April).	The year a child turns 6.
NSW	Preschool	3 years and 5 months (4 years on or before July 31 st)	Kindergarten	4 years and 5 months (5 by 31 July in enrolment year)	The year a child turns 6.
QLD	Kindergarten	3 years and 6 months (4 years on or before 30 June)	Prep	4 years 6 months (5 on or before June 30)	'At least 6 years and 6 months'
SA	Kindergarten/Preschool	3 years 8 months (4 years old by 1 May).	Reception	4 years and 8 months (5-years-old by 1 May)	By 6 years of age.
WA	Kindergarten	3 years and 6 months (4 years old by June 30)	Pre-Primary	4 years and 6 months (5 years old by June 30)	The year a child reaches the age of 4 years and 6 months.
NT	Preschool	3 years and 6 months (4 years old by June 30)	Transition	4 years and 6 months (5 years old by June 30)	By 6 years of age.
ACT	Preschool	3 years 8 months (4 years old by 30 April).	Kindergarten	4 years and 8 months (5-years-old by April 30)	By 6 years of age.
TAS	Kindergarten	4 years	Prep	5 Years	Years at 1 Jan

Evidence that provides insights into broader public, family and/or child perspectives on terminology:

- The language or terminology shapes the narrative. In order to change the narrative, it has to start with the terminology used:

“There must be a shift away from the ‘childcare’ terminology so frequently used to ‘early childhood education’, in order to position the sector as a phase within the education journey rather than only a means of enabling parents to work”.¹
- Policy makers and the public often have the perception that Preschool/Kindergarten is for

¹ Page 5, UK Early Years Workforce Commission 2021, *A Workforce in Crisis: Saving Our Early Years*
[https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/Non-PACEY%20documents%20\(PDFs\)/a-workforce-in-crisis-saving-our-early-years.pdf](https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/Non-PACEY%20documents%20(PDFs)/a-workforce-in-crisis-saving-our-early-years.pdf)

Discussion Questions for ACA feedback

education and all other ECEC services are for 'care'. This is based on historical evolution of the ECEC in Australia

"Australian early childhood services have traditionally been divided according to whether they are primarily providing "education" or "care"...

...This bifurcation between the provision of what is seen as "education" for three to five year old children, and "care" for infants and toddlers and older children whose mothers are in paid employment, remains strong in many parts of the country, and is manifested in separate funding arrangements and differing government portfolio responsibilities for different services. Preschools and Kindergartens frequently come under the auspices of state Education portfolios, while childcare most often sits within Social Services or welfare portfolios."²

- There has been a gradual shift in recent years, which has been backed by evidence-based research about children's development and neuroscience. This has helped to shift the social and political awareness about the importance of the early years learning for children.³ It is now accepted that children begin learning from birth and that the nature and quality of early experiences are fundamental to later outcomes.⁴
- In terms of documentation examples, most mainstream media articles use the term "childcare".

4. Is there any additional previous work undertaken around terminology in the ECEC sector that we should consider?

ACA Feedback:

"...the term childcare is a simplification, and one which fails to position the sector as a phase within the education journey."

UK Early Years Workforce Commission 'A Workforce in Crisis: Saving Our Early Years' 2021

"...concerns raised in the report, recommendations from authors include a call for the government to launch a public awareness campaign to highlight the crucial role early years staff play in a child's development and their life chances, and to emphasise that this is a skilled role, equivalent to teaching in other phases of education."

ACECQA Early Years Workforce Survey

"Defining the early years is not always consistent, across Australia or internationally. This may depend on who is deciding on the definition. In considering the constructs of child development and subsequent policies, consistency, and continuity of experiences for young children..."

² Ibid

³ Ibid (referenced to Goswami, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2001).

⁴ Ibid

Discussion Questions for ACA feedback

...the varied administrative arrangements for institutions that have created an artificial disjuncture, distinctly different views about children and learning, and historic patterns of division between education and care, as well as between early childhood education and care and the first years of school.”

*Gerry Mulhearn, 2018, Recognising and Acknowledging Complexity- Informing the Inclusion Of Early Years Educators’ Work in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Teachers Registration Board of South Australia*⁵

Press, F., Harrison, L., Wong, S., Gibson, M., Cumming, T., & Ryan, S. (2020). The hidden complexity of early childhood educators’ work: The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work study. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*⁶

5. How can we ensure continuous review to ensure terminology remains contemporary and reflects best practice and common parlance?

ACA Feedback:

- Schedule period of review and mapping these issues out against the community and ECEC contemporary terminology, which may mean a review every 5- 10 years with review schedule committed and invested in by government.
- Review should include the terminology used by governments at all levels, which includes the name of the CCS (Federal Government).
- Ensuring that terminology is updated and consistent across different domains (including in training providers, with older workforce, community’s perceptions, on social media and news outlets, etc.)
- Developing best practice guidance document that can be the source of truth, referenced to for those within and external to the sector to stay informed. This document can be reviewed or requests for amendments can be received.

⁵ Mulhearn, G. 2018, *Recognising and Acknowledging Complexity*
<https://www.trb.sa.edu.au/sites/default/files/Recognisingandacknowledgingcomplexity-Final%20project%20report-13%20september%202018.pdf>

⁶ Press, F., Harrison, L., Wong, S., Gibson, M., Cumming, T., & Ryan, S. (2020). The hidden complexity of early childhood educators’ work: The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work study. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 21(2), 172–175.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949120931986>