



ACA Response to Terms of Reference

Review of Apprenticeship Incentive System

May 2024



#BestStartInLife



Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Effectiveness & Efficiency of the Apprenticeship Incentive System	7
Cost-of-living pressures impacting apprentices/trainees	10
Holistic view of the apprenticeship system	13
Effectiveness of Incentive System for people with additional barriers	16
Aligning AIS with 2023 Employment White Paper Priorities & the Government's broader economic objectives	18
References	21

Foreword

As part of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relation’s review of the Apprenticeship Incentive System (AIS), key sector stakeholders were invited to provide their feedback on matters raised in the Terms of Reference.

As the peak body for privately-owned early learning (childcare) services, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents more than 2,500 owner/ operator members and approximately 360,000 families throughout Australia. We work on behalf of Long Day Care (LDC) service owners and operators, predominantly private, to ensure families have an opportunity to access affordable, quality ECEC throughout Australia which would not be possible without a strong educator workforce.

Over the past few years, there has been a rapid surge in the demand for LDC services, as parents increasingly require extended operating hours to facilitate their return to work. These demands are reflected in the dramatic growth of the workforce, with an influx of LDC educators who now account for an enormous 68% of all educators in ECEC¹.

To effectively address the increasing demands of the early education demands of families, our sector needs more streamlined pathways and incentives to attract, retain, and support trainees and apprentices entering the ECEC sector.

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this review, which assesses the government-funded support mechanisms in place to enable more individuals to embark on and successfully complete apprenticeships and traineeships.

The tasks carried out by apprentices and trainees in their ECEC roles significantly differ from those in other sectors, often entailing heightened responsibilities including compliance with a raft of regulatory requirements. These scenarios will be explored in greater detail in this submission.

We acknowledge the vital role that apprentices and trainees play in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector and believe that their development and growth are crucial to the sector's continued success.

Paul Mondo
President



¹ Department of Education (2021) *National Workforce Census Report*, Department of Education <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-nationalworkforce-census-report>



Executive Summary

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector has been the bedrock of the Australian economy, through even the harshest lockdowns of the most severe two years of the pandemic.

Across Australia, the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector employs over 216,619 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 40% rise in staff numbers since 2013².

According to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NVCER), approximately 21,855 apprentices and trainees were employed across the ECEC sector as of 30 September 2023³.

‘This is a good way to get your skills up and understand the industry completely. You are supported (by centre staff) throughout this course and have access to resources to help further your knowledge and understanding of the industry.’

Apprentice Educator

ACA Apprentice and trainee consultation, 1 May 2024

However there has been a notable increase in the number of apprentices and trainees **unable** to complete their ECEC training, with **9,085** individuals withdrawing annually in September 2023, compared to **3,410** withdrawals in September 2019⁴.

This is a key factor to consider in the review of the Apprenticeship Incentive System (AIS).

In order to effectively address the concerning trend of increased non-completion rates among apprentice and trainee educators in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector and offer the most appropriate supports, it is essential to conduct a thorough examination of the unique challenges and experiences faced by both ECEC employers and apprentices.

Unlike other industries, the specific circumstances of ECEC employers and apprentices require a nuanced understanding, as their experiences are distinct and have a significant impact on the sector's overall performance.

² Ibid

³ NVCER (2024) Data Builder, NVCER, www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#app-latest

⁴ Ibid



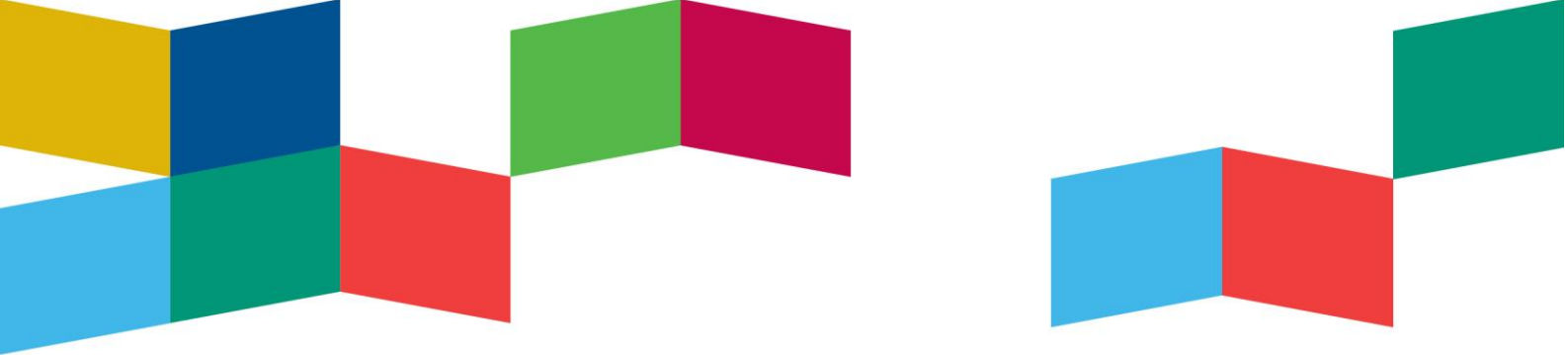
Some of the key challenges impacting apprentices/trainees in the ECEC sector include:

- The implications of the current ECEC workforce shortages on experienced mentors available in the workplace to support apprentice's learning and development.
- The large volume and complex content associated with Certificate 3 in ECEC coursework, when compared to other industries' apprentices training.
- The workforce management issues that ECEC Managers face when providing apprentices with dedicated study time away from their duties. This is compounded by workforce shortages and the determination of whether the apprentice has gained sufficient experience to be counted within staffing ratios.
- The lack of awareness around the available financial and non-financial supports for apprentices and employers.⁵ This is further exacerbated by administrative complexities and delays in the registration and onboarding processes.
- The notable absence of incentives for employers, following the conclusion of schemes such as the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencement Scheme. In the absence of sufficient funding measures to provide support, employers face increased costs when taking on apprentices and trainees.

ACA GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Improve Educator Remuneration with Direct Government Funding**
ACA strongly advocates for the government to commit to funding improved wages for apprentice and trainee educators. **Simplify Apprenticeship Incentives program**
Improve efficiencies to simplify and streamline administrative and registration process for both ECEC service provider (employer) and trainee.
- **Support Apprentices with funded study time**
Provide funding the backfill expenses for employers once an apprentice is included in the mandatory ratio. This support would aid in accommodating dedicated study time for apprentices and staffing arrangements effectively.
- **Greater Support for First Nations Apprentices**
Promote greater First Nations cultural representation in the ECEC sector through greater investment for more First Nations trainees by creating culturally responsive learning environments, content and RTO's that are adaptable and responsive to inclusive practices

⁵ ACA Apprentice and trainee consultation, and ACA Directors and Providers Consultation, 1 May 2024



for First Nations apprentices and trainees.

- **Promote culturally safe study and work environments**

Create programs that support the development of culturally safe and inclusive training environments, which support diversity and also offer ECEC support to working mothers.

- **Improve Employer Benefits**

Bring back the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencement Scheme to incentivize employers, considering the critical workforce shortages in the ECEC sector.

ACA advocates for an increase in wage subsidy to 50% for the first 12 months of the traineeship.

- **Reinforce education about financial support options via the AASN**

ACA recommends that the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) plays a stronger role in educating apprentices/trainees about the Australian Apprenticeship Training Support Payment (AATSP)



Effectiveness & Efficiency of the Apprenticeship Incentive System

EFFECTIVENESS OF ECEC APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

Apprenticeships and traineeships serve as an excellent career pathway for individuals new to the early learning sector.

Apprenticeships and traineeships in the early learning sector:

- offer a valuable opportunity for jobseekers to gain work experience and earn while they learn, while working towards a nationally recognized qualification.
- provide employees with a unique opportunity for hands-on job-specific learning specific to their role with children and the individual centre, allowing trainees to understand centre-specific practices and culture.
- assist in supporting staffing levels across centres (with time and experience), helping to cover staff absenteeism and annual leave.

Many ACA member owners/operators can attest to the value of apprenticeships and traineeships in introducing and supporting new entrants to the early learning sector, allowing them to develop professionally, set their career path and progress into different ECEC roles including leadership positions.

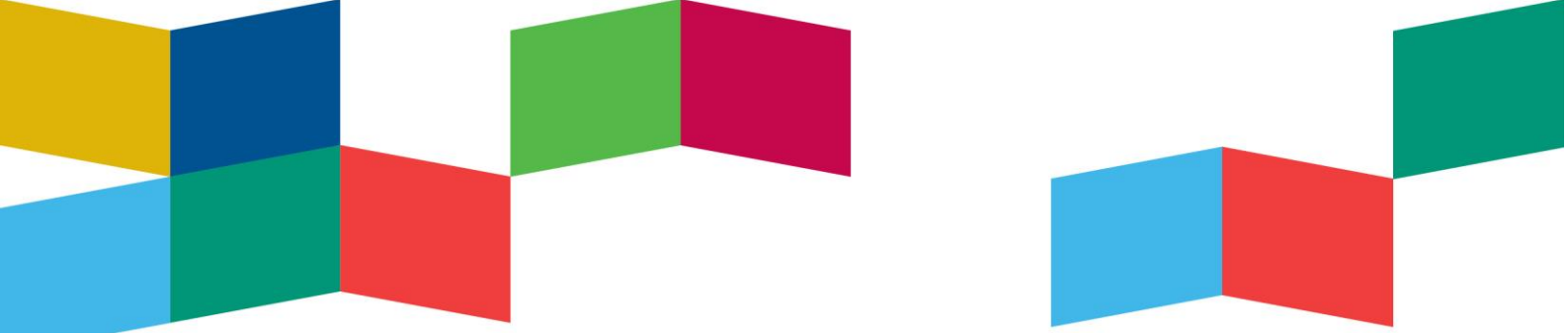
This career pathway includes stepping into the role of Nominated Supervisor/Centre Director, becoming an Approved Provider (i.e. owner operator) and taking on ECEC advocacy leadership roles. ACA Treasurer Jae Fraser presents himself as a wonderful example of the career path that was opened to him on taking on a trainee role in an early learning service. Jae's career progressed from early childhood educator to senior management roles, to becoming then owner/operator of his own early learning services.

Jae is now the Approved Provider of The Scholars Group which has 14 services across Queensland. In addition to his ACA National role, Jae is also ACA QLD Vice President.

CHALLENGES WITH EXISTING TRAINING FRAMEWORK

The Federal Government has made significant funding commitments to subsidize the expenses of ECEC courses, such as offering Fee-Free TAFE opportunities. This is a fantastic start to incentivising the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships, but it only addresses one element of the barriers to completing training.

While the Apprenticeship Incentive System (AIS) has the potential to drive positive outcomes, there are several additional factors that can influence its effectiveness and efficiency. These factors warrant further examination and consideration, as they offer opportunities for improvement and refinement to optimize the system's overall impact.



This includes ineffective administrative systems and delays, lack of incentives for both apprentices and employers and low apprentice wages.

Challenges navigating the system

The existing AIS program is complicated and presents difficulties for ECEC apprentices, trainees, and employers to understand and navigate.

Feedback from ACA members suggests that the system is cumbersome, leading to delays of 3 to 6 months for apprentices to complete full registration before they can begin their studies.

This delay also hampers employers' capacity to effectively utilize and nurture their apprentices' educators, resulting in delays in qualifying new staff members. Consequently, this impacts the service's short and long-term ability to meet staff-to-child ratios which in turn affect's the service's ability to offer increased availability to families.

The complicated AIS issues extend to affect the access to the current incentives available to apprentices and employers, as many are underutilized across the ECEC sector. Many ECEC trainees and employers report feeling overwhelmed in trying to access incentives because of the different criteria for each category of funding, and confusion with the difference between Commonwealth and State funding.⁶

Low apprentice wages

Probably the most significant challenge faced by the sector is the struggle to attract individuals to traineeships in the context of comparatively very low current wage levels and benefits, which act as a deterrent for potential candidates.

ACA acknowledges the government's commitment to support apprentices in the Budget announcement to increase the apprentice payments and the Australian Apprenticeship Award loans scheme. However, greater investment is needed to attract and retain apprentice educators.

As the ECEC sector has lower remuneration compared with other sectors⁷, apprentice educators consequently receive a low starting wage which makes it difficult for many to continue. Many ECEC centre Directors and Managers report losing numerous apprentice educators to other industries that offer higher wages⁸.

Please refer to Section 2 of this paper on page 10, which relates to cost of living for more details of how this affects apprentice and trainee educators.

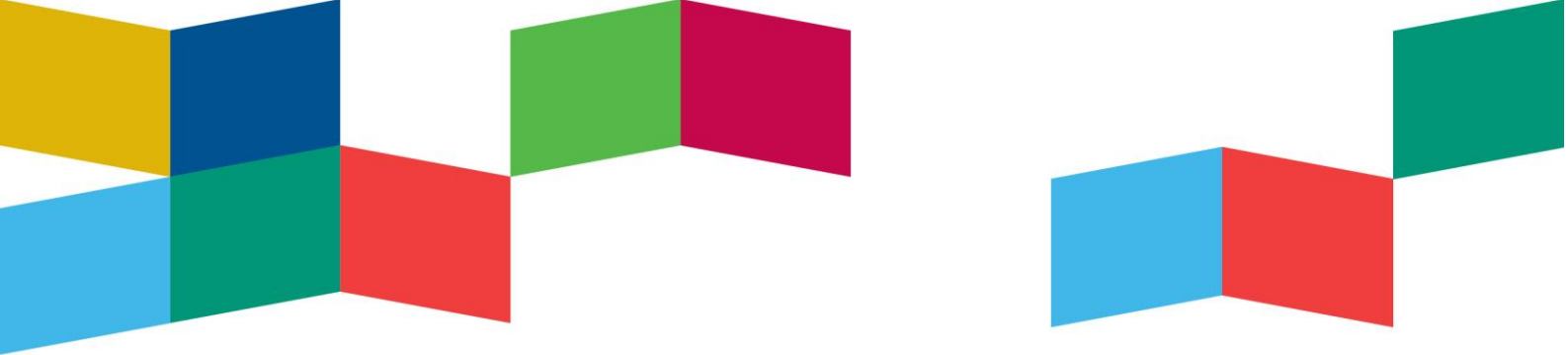
Lack of employer incentives

Following the conclusion of schemes such as the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencement Scheme, there is a notable absence of incentives for employers to take on apprentices and trainees.

⁶ ACA Providers and Directors Consultation, 1 May 2024

⁷ Macdonald, P., Thorpe, K., Irvine, S., (2018) *Low pay but still we stay: Retention in early childhood education and care*, Journal of Industrial Relations vol 60, Australia <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/122934/2/122934.pdf>

⁸ 22 Productivity Commission (2023) *Draft report: A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission



In the absence of sufficient funding measures to provide support, employers face increased costs when taking on apprentices and trainees.

ACA recognizes that the latest Budget announcements signify the government's decision to boost hiring incentives for priority occupation employers by an extra \$1,000 over a span of 12 months, starting from July. While we value this commitment, we believe further investments are necessary to adequately cover the expenses associated with supporting and training apprentice educators within the ECEC sector.



Cost-of-living pressures impacting apprentices/trainees

COST-OF-LIVING & FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Across Australia, communities are experiencing substantial financial stresses due to the increases cost of living, with households recording the 'largest annual rise in living costs... a peak of 9.6 per cent in the June 2023 quarter.'⁹

The soaring cost of living poses a substantial burden, especially for lower-income individuals such as apprentices and trainees in the ECEC sector. Under the Children's Services Award (2010), an ECEC apprentice in their first year earns approximately \$21.55 per hour, which equates to \$775.80 gross weekly income¹⁰.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Due to the rising cost of living and inadequate apprentice educator wages, numerous educators in training depend on financial assistance from their parents or partners to cover rent expenses, enabling them to pursue and complete their qualifications. This highlights a flaw in the system, as it relies on external financial support for apprentice educators and fails to provide sufficient wages for them to achieve financial independence and self-sufficiency.

This ECEC apprentice shared her insights to ACA:

'I am young and still live at home, but it was still a big financial hit moving from retail.'¹¹

Whilst current apprentice wage mechanisms appear to work, they exclude a group of people from undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships who may not have the support of parents or a partner, and risk living on the poverty line to upskill and secure ECEC qualifications.

"...the cost-of-living pressures severely affected my motivation to finish my apprenticeship."
ECEC Apprentice¹²

⁹ ACA Apprentice and trainee consultation, 1 May 2024

¹⁰ Note this is based on apprentices aged 18 years or older, employed less one year in the industry and does not include overtime rates.

¹¹ ACA Apprentice and trainee consultation, 1 May 2024

¹² ACA Apprentice and trainee consultation, 1 May 2024



Current data indicates that those on lower incomes are experiencing the greatest financial strains with the increase cost of living. According to Anglicare Australia's 2023 Housing Affordability report, many workers on award wages, such as early educators, are paying well over a third of their income on rent in 2023.¹³

It is worth noting that Anglicare's calculations are based on full-time employment, earning adult wages, and being fully qualified, which excludes trainees or apprentices. As per their findings, the average apprentice educator would on average allocate 73% of their income to rent, this is variable with higher rents in metropolitan areas or regions with limited housing availability.¹⁴

Non-discretionary expenses, such as healthcare, food, electricity, and petrol, have also seen a significant increase. This rise, coupled with low incomes, intensifies financial anxiety among apprentice educators.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO COST-OF-LIVING PRESSURES

There are a range of other factors that contribute to the cost-of-living pressures for apprentices and trainees, these include:

- Lack of affordable housing local to their employment, this is particularly prevalent in rural and remote locations (but we are also seeing this experienced in metropolitan areas).¹⁵ Consequently, trainees and apprentices often have to live further away from the workplace and commuting longer distances.
- Little incentive for trainees, with the low wages associated with the ECEC sector even upon completion of qualifications. Many were unaware of financial and non-financial government supports available to them as an apprentice, which highlights the gap in awareness, communicating these benefits and people accessing additional support mechanisms.¹⁶

As essential expenses continue to increase, ECEC apprenticeship wages remain stagnant, potentially prompting apprentices and trainees in the sector to withdraw due to financial constraints. With workforce shortages already putting significant strain on the ECEC sector, the rising rates of apprenticeship non-completion attributed to low wages may further exacerbate the situation, leading to more departures from the sector and deterring new entrants.

Australian Apprenticeship Training Support Payment

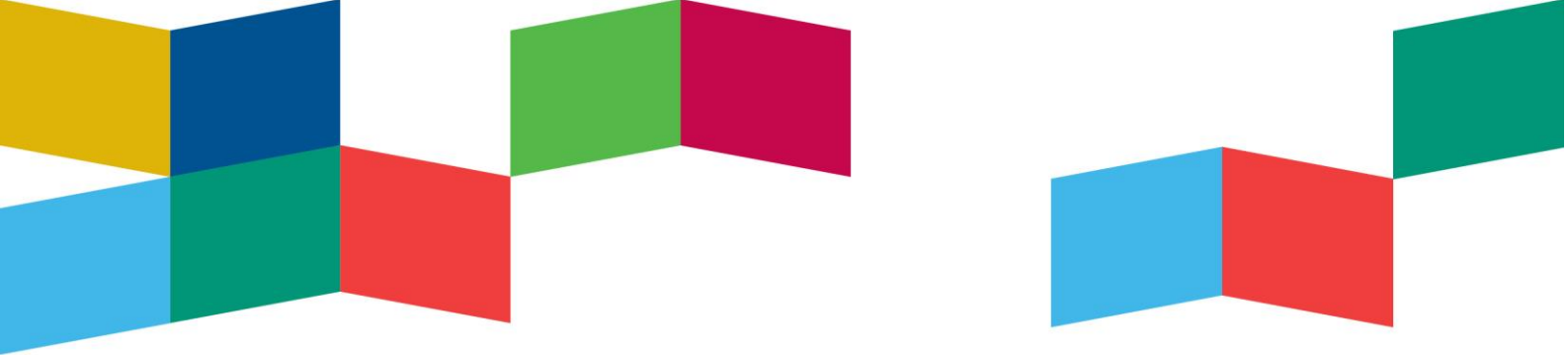
ACA acknowledges the benefits of the Australian Apprenticeship Training Support Payment, which can now pay up to \$10,000 over the course of an apprenticeship to support eligible individuals to complete their Australian Apprenticeship. Despite this payment being in place, feedback from ACA members reinforces the difficulties of apprentices/trainees meeting the cost of living.

¹³ Anglicare Australia (2023) *An Index of Affordable Rentals for Australia's Essential Workers*, April 2023, Anglicare

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Productivity Commission (2023) *Draft report: A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission

¹⁶ ACA Apprentices and Trainees consultation and Providers and Directors Consultation, 1 May 2024



ACA is concerned that perhaps there is a lack of awareness among the sector about this opportunity for government support, and would like to see the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) play a stronger role in educating apprentices/trainees about this payment and ensuring they take advantage if it.

This could be a key question to ask then during their scheduled “check in” site visit, which usually takes place within the first few weeks/months of commencing the course.

ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO COMPLETION

Challenges with the Certificate 3 Courseload

Consistent feedback from our sector has indicated the current Certificate 3 in ECEC has a heavy and unsustainable courseload for apprentices. This is based on feedback which describes the large amount of content and course complexities identified by both employers and apprentices¹⁷.

These elements add to the stress and overwhelm felt by apprentices and trainees, especially those new to the sector, which may influence their ability to complete the qualification. Furthermore, the demanding course workload places extra pressure on apprentices, who indicate the need for increased study time, compared to qualifications in other industries¹⁸.

Apprentices and trainees also acknowledged the challenges of maintaining full-time work and study, as they struggled to achieve a satisfactory work/life balance and grappled with the associated stress.

Mixed Levels of Registered Training Organisation’s (RTO’s) Support

Across Australia, there are a diverse range of RTOs servicing the training needs of ECEC services and supporting apprentices. Feedback from ACA members suggests that apprentice educators have experienced differing degrees of support from their RTOs¹⁹. Many expressed feeling a lack of support, citing minimal communication or delayed responses from their training provider²⁰.

Despite facing these challenges and frequently feeling inclined to quit, apprentice and trainee educators expressed their determination to persist. They cited support from their managers, workplace, encouragement from friends and family, and a strong motivation to attain a qualification in the ECEC sector, aligning with their long-term career aspirations²¹.

¹⁷ ACA Providers and Directors Consultation and ACA Apprentices and Trainees Feedback, 1 May 2024

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ ACA Apprentices and Trainees Feedback, 1 May 2024

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid



Holistic view of the apprenticeship system

The key components and challenges facing the apprenticeship system include:

- the quality and support from RTO providers
- inconsistencies among approved providers regarding their capacity to support apprentices/trainees, compounded by ECEC workforce shortages
- regulatory requirements around educator-to-child ratios
- inefficiencies in AIS and the absence of employer incentives complicate the integration of apprentice educators in the ECEC sector. are a crucial component of the apprenticeship system for approved providers and their apprentices/trainee.

QUALITY & SUPPORT OF REGISTERED TRAINING ORGANISATIONS (RTOs)

For early childhood educators, their training experience with a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) can make or break their overall learning experience, ultimately influencing their likelihood of completing their studies and achieving their career goals.

For Approved Providers, RTOs provide a foundation for effective training and supports the development of skilled and competent workers.

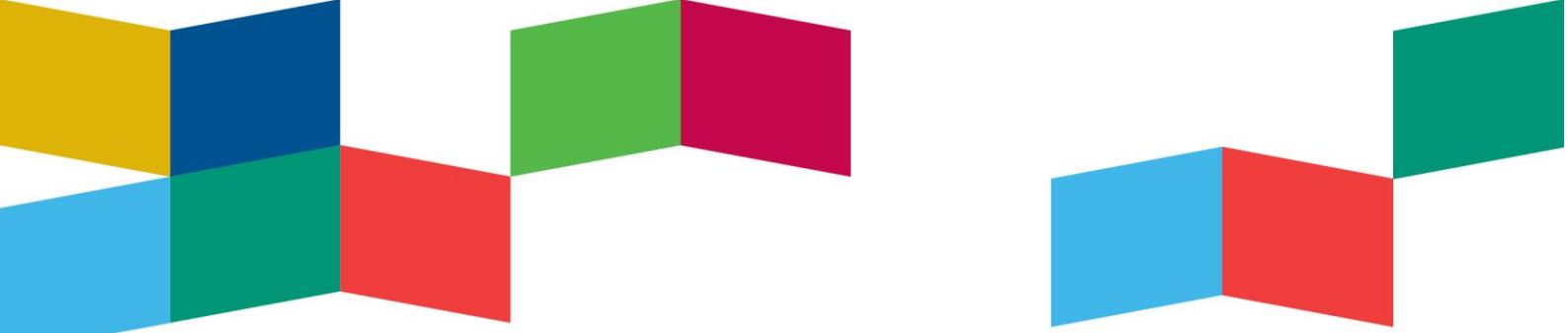
The quality of the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) has a significant and far-reaching impact on the apprentice/trainee's educational outcomes and long-term success in their ECEC service.

The consistency of quality of RTOs is therefore an important factor in ensuring a reliable and robust apprenticeship system Australia-wide.

Inconsistency in training standards across state is a major issue, with varying quality among RTOs making it difficult for Approved Providers to assess the competency of candidates who have been trained via different RTOs or from interstate.

Factors that may contribute to a low-quality training experience could include:

- inadequate training content;
- low quality of trainers and assessors;
- lack of responsiveness to student enquiries;
- high courseloads which require quick completion; and
- lack of supervision or visiting students by the RTO on their placements.



Low-quality training can place undue pressures and stress on the trainee or apprentice, contributing to the high percentage of candidates who do not complete their courses.

WORKPLACE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT APPRENTICE EDUCATORS

The ongoing workforce shortages in ECEC present challenges in securing available and experienced mentors in the workplace to support apprentices' learning and development. Senior staff spend on average 19 hours per week with part time apprentices and fulltime apprentices is 40 hours per week to support and train them²².

Many ECEC services face difficulties in their capacity to support apprentices due to these workforce constraints. The workforce challenges also mean that some Room Leaders supporting students may lack experience themselves, making it challenging for them to role model and guide quality practice²³.

Despite this, ECEC service leaders describe measures to support their apprentices through:

- intensive mentoring or buddy system and in the workplace support they offer trainees access to an Educational Leader who is to help when they need it,
- facilitating small group of trainees in the workplaces studying to connect and support each other,
- ensuring the trainee has their weekly time off the floor is crucial to them succeeding and not feeling completely overwhelmed, and
- having a positive workplace where employees are happy, motivated and feel supported by their manager.²⁴

There are many pressures for apprentices who are entering a new sector while simultaneously working and studying full-time. This demands that apprentice educators be motivated, focused, and committed to dedicating study time to complete their training. As part of this, apprentice educators require scheduled time off the floor for dedicated study to address their learning needs.

ECEC Managers report the challenges to support apprentice educators access dedicated study. This includes the limited funding ECEC services have which allows apprentices to have up to three hours per week to be off the floor and focus on their studies.

Other challenges are online coursework requirements during the service operating hours with some training providers choosing to hold two hour Zoom calls during work hours. This diminishes the apprentices' available time to complete follow-up study and assessments. Many apprentice educators expressed the desire to have more flexibility with the mandatory online training sessions, including having such Zoom training calls held outside of work hours, to support balance their work commitments.

²² 5 and 10 Page, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (2022) *Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper 2022*, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government
<https://www.dewr.gov.au/australianapprenticeships/resources/australian-apprenticeship-services-and-supports-discussion-paper>

²³ ACA Providers and Directors Consultation, 1 May 2024

²⁴ Ibid



ECEC REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Another aspect that sets ECEC apprenticeships apart from those in other industries is the regulatory mandates regarding staffing and qualifications, particularly concerning the educator-to-child ratio.

As many new ECEC educators are progressing towards qualifications, they are frequently included in the mandatory ratio requirements for educators to children, typically based on the Director's evaluation of the trainee's skills and competency levels, often after a period of three months or longer in the role.

Once an apprentice or trainee is factored into the staffing ratios, it can pose challenges for service providers in allocating study time, as it requires them to be off the floor, affects rostering, and results in additional costs for ECEC services due to the need for staff backfilling, which is compounded by workforce shortage issues. These staffing ratios need to strike a balance between meeting the educator-to-child ratios and providing adequate study time to support trainees.

WIDER SYSTEMIC IMPEDIMENTS

AIS system inefficiencies

ECEC employers report that the AIS application process to register their apprentice and the claim funding is complex, time consuming and has delays, which may deter some from taking on apprentices.

There are consistent reports of significant lag time between when trainee/ apprentice educator signs up and is officially registered.²⁵ These delays mean they are not able to begin their study and can sometimes be up to several months lag time. This creates a tension for employers trying to attract and retain new entrants to ECEC and keep them engaged, while the paperwork is finalised, with the employer's scope to utilise this staff member fully.

Lack of incentives and funding for employers

In recent times, there has been a decrease in incentives and support for ECEC employers to engage trainees and apprentices. This trend is evident across all industries, as highlighted by the Business NSW 2023 survey that revealed that 70 percent of the 12,000 surveyed employers expressed a desire for additional incentives from the government to hire apprentices and trainees.²⁶

Previously, employers benefited from the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencement Scheme, which was funded by the Australian Government and operated from 5 October 2020 to 30 June 2022. This scheme offered a subsidy to any business that hired an Australian Apprentice, covering 50 percent of the wages paid to a new or recommencing apprentice or trainee for a period of 12 months from the start date.

With the cessation of the subsidy scheme, businesses employing trainees or apprentices now qualify for only a 10% wage subsidy. As a result, this subsidy inadequately recognizes the investment of time and resources required, particularly given the acute workforce shortages in the ECEC sector.

²⁵ ACA Providers and Directors Consultation, 1 May 2024

²⁶ F. Lucas (2023) *ASA Network calls for boost in support for apprenticeships as skills shortages bite*, The Sector <https://thesector.com.au/2023/05/05/asa-network-calls-for-boost-in-support-for-apprenticeships-as-skills-shortages-bite/>



Effectiveness of Incentive System for people with additional barriers

The ACA believes there is more work to be done to create training environments that encourage the take up and completion of apprenticeships and traineeships by women and people who face additional barriers to undertaking training (including people in rural, regional and remote areas and First Nations peoples).

Training environments that are culturally safe and inclusive to accommodate diverse groups of ECEC trainees nationwide would help to address some of the barriers preventing people from completing their training. Various opportunities exist to cultivate training environments that cater to these diverse needs.

These opportunities include providing enhanced support for:

- **Women**

Targeted initiatives that offer greater support for mothers seeking to undertake a traineeship could include benefits such as ECEC options to support their study and workplace participation.

- **First Nations People**

We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) families are more likely to engage and participate in ECEC, if the service is cultural safe, has connection with their community, and has ATSI educators working in the centre. It is therefore imperative to strengthen the AIS to support and encourage ATSI community members to work in the ECEC sector.

ACA supports greater First Nations cultural representation in the ECEC sector and workforce through greater investment and support for more First Nations trainees and apprentices by creating culturally responsive learning environments, content and RTO's that are adaptable and responsive to inclusive practices for First Nations apprentices and trainees.²⁷

There are also opportunities to explore partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled education providers and support with the delivery of ECEC qualifications for First Nations Australians, exploring delivery models that respond to different geographic and communities' needs.

²⁷ ACA supports the Productivity Commission's draft recommendation 3.5: Improve pathways and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to obtain ECEC qualifications



- **People with of varying literacy levels**

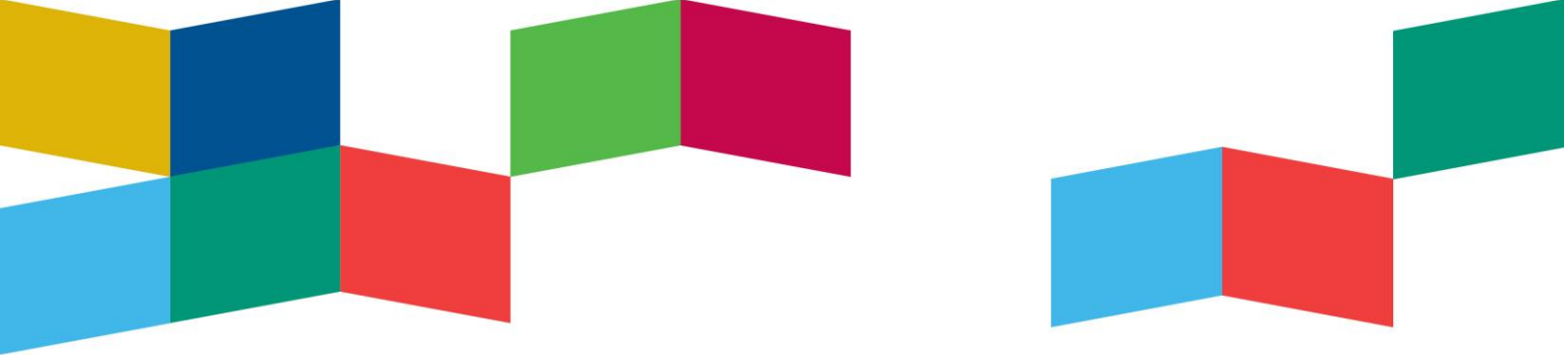
We recommend a review of Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care with the aim of simplifying the language used and offering training delivery methods that reach a wider audience including cohorts of people who may not meet the current literacy level requirements.

- **People in regional and remote areas**

Geographical constraints frequently restrict the choice of available training providers for trainees. There is a pressing need for increased flexibility to address the diverse delivery model requirements of various communities.

Apprentice educators studying remotely may require extra support, as they are more likely to experience isolation, difficulty staying motivated, and face challenges with limited face-to-face sessions. These compounded barriers can leave them feeling unsupported in consistently achieving their qualification goals.

Furthermore, apprentices in remote locations experience additional challenges accessing training because of limited digital access. technology and internet to undertake their studies.



Aligning AIS with 2023 Employment White Paper Priorities & the Government's broader economic objectives

The Australian Government's Employment White Paper 2023 ("the White Paper") emphasizes the importance of addressing skills shortages and actively developing a robust and skilled workforce as a key strategy for achieving full employment and driving productivity growth. To accomplish this, the government recognizes that a significant increase in the number of high-skilled workers will be necessary.

The paper recommends delivering sustained and inclusive full employment, promoting job security and strong, sustainable wage growth, reigniting productivity growth, filling skills needs and building our future workforce and overcoming barriers to employment and broadening opportunity.

The White Paper acknowledges the significant contribution of the ECEC sector to the government's economic objectives and Australia's productivity.

It outlines the structure of the ECEC sector and the key issues impacting the ongoing, reliable delivery of high-quality ECEC services.

The White Paper acknowledges that the ECEC sector has:

- an important role for a child's lifelong learning, as it will affect their ongoing educational trajectory, training, and future employment opportunities;²⁸
- a largely female dominated workforce;²⁹
- significant workforce shortage issues;³⁰ and
- implications of workforce shortages on access to ECEC as a barrier for families' workforce participation.³¹

²⁸ 14, 142, 209 and 210 Australian Government (2023) *Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*, September 2023, Australian Government, Canberra, Australia <https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report>

²⁹ 63 Ibid

³⁰ 157 Ibid

³¹ 11 Ibid



AREAS OF HIGH & EMERGING SKILLS NEEDS

The ACA has conducted a series of regular surveys among our members to demonstrate the extent of the impact of the national workforce crisis in the early learning sector. In February 2023, our survey (672 respondents) showed that 67% of respondents capped their enrolment numbers and turned families away due to lack of staff, with a total of 16,300 places removed from Australian families across one week alone in February.³²

Elevated government backing and investment in the ECEC sector, with a focus on supporting employers and apprentice educators, will increase the pool of highly skilled and qualified educators. This will expand available enrolment opportunities for families and bolster women's workforce engagement, with an estimated cumulative value of \$6 billion by 2050.³³

OPPORTUNITIES, LEVERS & INITIATIVES BEYOND THE AIS

The ACA supports the recommendations of the White Paper, which include delivering sustained and inclusive full employment along with the promotion of job security and strong, sustainable wage growth.

We believe the AIS plays a strong role in supporting these objectives, by addressing barriers to entry-level employment.

The White Paper acknowledges that education and training providers play a crucial role in supporting apprentices. For apprentices to successfully complete their apprenticeships, they require personalized support and mentoring to address mental health challenges and navigate workplace issues.³⁴

The White Paper recognised how the quality of training providers directly influences the overall outcomes of apprentices and employer satisfaction, consequently impacting the workplace.

According to the White Paper, there has been a decline in employer satisfaction, with 50.6% of employers of apprentices and trainees indicating poor quality or low standard training.³⁵

The White Paper outlines the government's commitment to address the current ECEC workforce issues through:

- the action plan by 'invested in workforce skills and training measures for the early childhood education and care sector'.³⁶

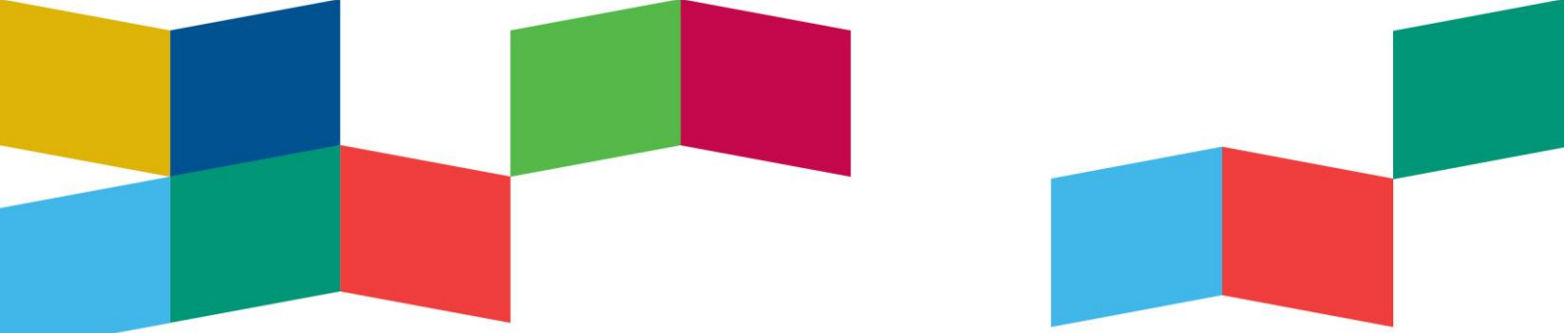
³² ACA (2024) [Survey Feedback: Capped enrolments due to staff shortages](#), ACA

³³ 24, PWC, 2014, Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia, <https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/putting-value-on-ecec.pdf>

³⁴ 122 Australian Government (2023) *Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*, September 2023, Australian Government, Canberra, Australia <https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report>

³⁵ 123 *ibid*

³⁶ Section 3 Planning for our future workforce, Actions to support a dynamic and inclusive labour market. 203 Australian Government (2023) *Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*, September 2023, Australian Government, Canberra, Australia <https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report>

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- the Five Pillar Productivity agenda to ‘building a skilled and adaptable workforce’ and ‘better targeting skills needs through workforce planning and tailored responses to industry challenges.’³⁷
 - commissioning Jobs and Skills Australia to undertake an ECEC workforce capacity study to better understand ECEC workforce needs and inform additional support, funding, and policies.³⁸

In conclusion, the AIS plays a vital role in advancing these objectives by addressing the obstacles that prevent entry-level employment in the early learning sector. Furthermore, the provision of enhanced government support and improved training quality for both apprentice educators and employers is crucial in addressing these challenges.

³⁷ 188 Ibid

³⁸ 231 Ibid



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