



Solving the ECEC Workforce Crisis

for cost effective, long-term benefits

#BestStartInLife

ACA Submission to Employment White Paper



DECEMBER 2022



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Summary Outline of Submission

This submission focuses primarily on the Labour Force Participation component of the White Paper's Scope and Themes, with an emphasis on the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. It talks to the objectives of full employment and increasing labour productivity growth and incomes, including the approach to achieving these objectives.

The **single most pressing issue** facing the early learning sector Australia-wide right now is the **critical workforce shortage of qualified educators**. Without adequate numbers of entrants into the sector, **over 12,500 early learning service providers** across the country are struggling to meet the demand for places and to meet the regulatory requirements for the educator-to-child ratios.

As the backbone of the Australian economy, the early learning sector's viability and sustainability are critical components of achieving the Australian Government's objectives of full employment, productivity growth for the benefit of all Australians, along with women's economic participation and equality.





Executive Summary

This submission was put together in response to the Federal Treasury's call for submissions to the Employment White Paper. The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) appreciates the invitation to provide a submission. We are gratified that the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector was identified as central to the government's roadmap to build a bigger, better-trained and more productive workforce – to boost incomes and living standards and create more opportunities for more Australians. ACA welcomes the opportunity to contribute our lived experiences to this important policy discussion.

As the backbone of the Australian economy, the early learning sector's viability and sustainability are critical components of achieving the Australian Government's objectives of full employment, productivity growth for the benefit of all Australians, along with women's economic participation and equality. This has been clearly recognised by the Albanese Government as affordable and accessible childcare was the cornerstone of its election commitment and its signature legislation enshrining this amongst the first to be passed by a new Parliament.

But we know that well ahead of 1 July 2023 - when the increase in Child Care Subsidy takes effect - the demand for our ECEC services will surge to a level that we simply will not be able to accommodate, unless more is done by the Australian Government to help us retain and attract quality educators. It is critical that this is done without our families bearing additional costs that will negate the impact of the government's new affordability measures.

We recommend the following suite of seven cost effective, sensible, policies and regulatory changes, which if implemented as intended, will go a long way to mitigating the current educator shortage to protect families from being forced out of their beloved service, to protect the economy from further disruption and to ensure our ECEC services can remain the safe and reliable harbour of education and nurture our children deserve.

As a priority, we call on the Australian Government to:

- Improve educator remuneration via a government-funded wage increase and other sector-specific benefits
- Widen the pipeline of qualified local candidates
- Widen the pipeline of qualified international candidates (skilled migration)
- Promote the ECEC sector and job opportunities to jobseekers
- Differentiate employment support for Australia's Critical Workers
- Introduce an international exchange program for the sector
- Revise Mid-Career Transition Programs



Who we are & what we do

As the national peak body in the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) represents more than **3,000 provider members** who employ **more than 75,000 educators**, who, in turn, care for more than **360,000 families** throughout Australia. We are laser focussed on ensuring all families have an opportunity to access affordable, quality ECEC and that no child is left behind.

The ACA has existed in various forms for more than 30 years. Our experience means that we understand the critical role a quality ECEC program plays in the life of children and their families and the importance of a viable long day care sector in preparing children for the best start in life and learning. We are the key enabler of women returning to the workforce and our services supply the bedrock of a functioning economy.

ACA has been closely monitoring the early learning workforce shortage over the past ten years. What was a challenge before the pandemic is now a crisis. Right now, we need 10,000 educators.

The gap between sector workforce needs and supply has continued to widen, with many early learning service providers across the country currently unable to attract and retain adequately qualified, experienced and capable Early Childhood Educators.

This situation is now impacting the ability of many services to offer places for children on a daily basis, with families struggling to find consistent care. We know the cause of this is complex and there is no simple solution.

On behalf of members, ACA offers a suite of cost effective short and long-term policies. This includes improved direct targeted funding and associated funding models as well as industrial options that might better balance wages and operational efficiency without forcing parents to face any increased costs. It might also include bargaining or changes to the industry's modern award. As part of this, we remain open to engaging with all sector stakeholders including government, peak associations, unions and larger employers.

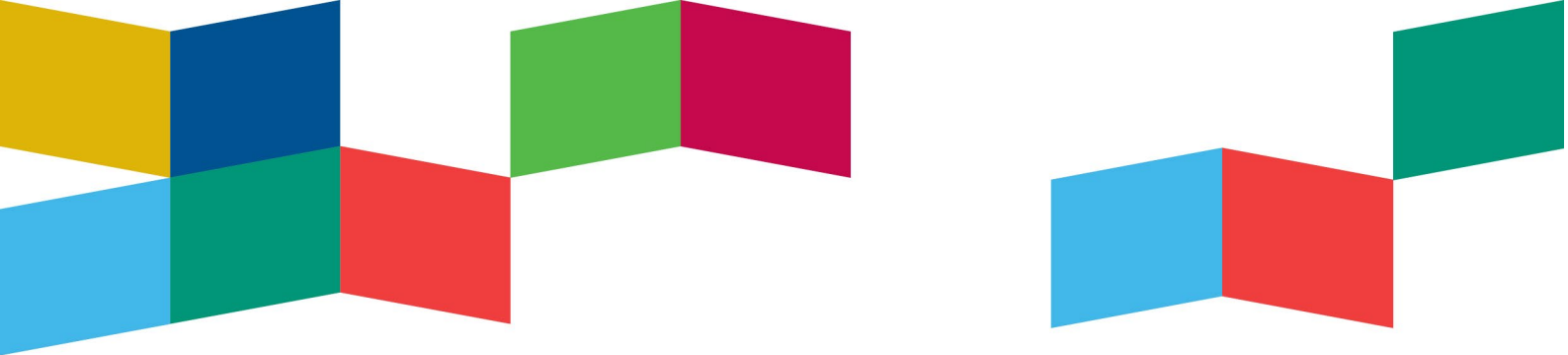
The underpinning challenge will always be the question of funding for the sector. All service types are struggling to maintain financial viability, so any increase in employee costs will currently result in an increase in fees to families. A 10% increase in wages – if not funded by the government – will lead to fee increases for families. *

This is not fair on families who are already doing it tough with increasing interest rates and an unprecedented rise in inflation.

We need to know that families won't face further financial burden whilst we support our educators. There are many different ways the government could provide funding support in our sector to support educators, and we are working with it to determine the best return on investment for taxpayers.

ACA will continue to work closely and collaboratively with the Australian Government, and all sector stakeholders, as we move forward to find sustainable and effective solutions that allows us to continue to ensure every child has the best start in life.

** ACA have engaged with external consultants Dandolo Partners Pty Ltd to undertake research to quantify the likely fee increase as a result of a wage rise at various increments. ACA will present the findings of this report to the government early in 2023.*



The problem: National workforce crisis in the early learning sector

Workforce shortages exist across all industries and sectors of employment in Australia. A workforce crisis in the early learning (child care) sector, creates a disastrous flow on effect for the rest of the Australian economy.

It is now well recognised that the early learning sector is an important lynchpin in ensuring that working parents can continue in the workforce for every other industry or sector. The ECEC sector is pivotal to delivering true economic security for women.

A viable, sustainable early learning sector is critical in order to provide the opportunity for Australian parents of young children to participate in the economy, expand their employment, undertake further training and study and help build a pipeline across the broader workforce. They can do this, knowing their child is being nurtured and educated in a world-class ECEC service.

However, none of these objectives can be achieved, without urgently resolving the serious workforce issues embroiling the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector.

The early learning (child care) sector is experiencing a **nation-wide workforce crisis**. There are simply not enough entrants into the sector to meet the demand for educators and to meet our regulatory requirements for the educator-to-child ratios. Right now, we urgently need at least 10,000 well-trained, competent Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers to fill vacancies.

An already dire situation has been further amplified by the impacts of COVID-19, the growing demand for places for children, the growing issue of new centre builds and increased population sizes in rural and remote areas. Sourcing Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) is an increasingly urgent challenge Australia-wide.

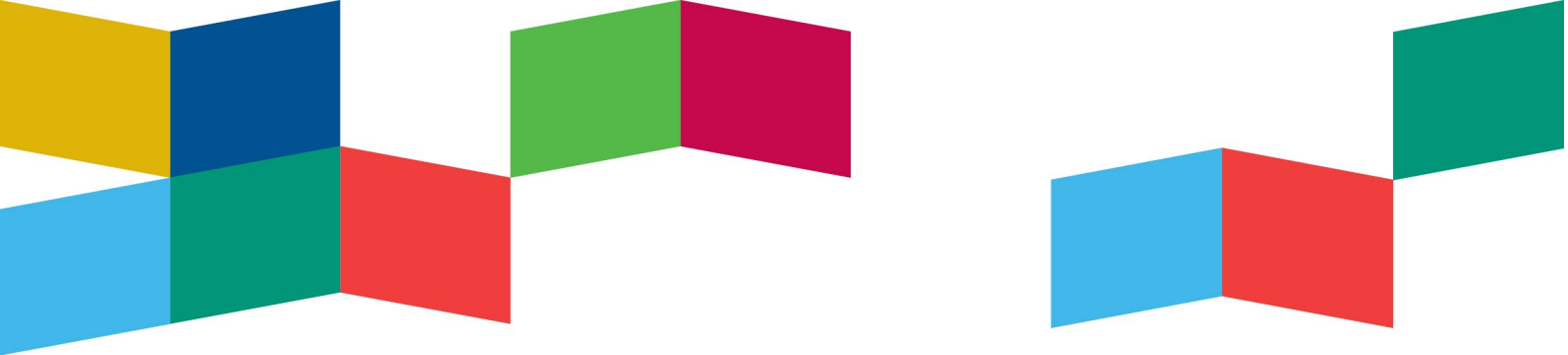
The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) has predicted that Australia will need around 39,000 additional educators, including 9,000 additional ECTs, by 2023¹. Meanwhile the National Skills Commission's Labour Market Insights indicate a national shortage of both Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers, with overall employment in Education and Training projected to grow by 149,600 (or 13.4%) over the five years to November 2026².

A recent report³ produced by CELA (Community Early Learning Australia), ELAA (Early Learning Association Australia) and CCC (Community Child Care Association) revealed that over 4,500 job vacancies (minimum) were advertised in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in the first six months of 2021 and nearly half of all vacancies remained unfilled during that period. In 2022 the problem has grown exponentially for the sector, compounded by low unemployment rates

¹ Page 18, ACECQA Workforce Report 2019 - <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/ProgressingNationalApproachChildrensEducationCareWorkforce.pdf>

² <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/industries/industry-details?industryCode=P>

³ <https://bit.ly/CELAWorkforceReportNov2021>



and the lasting economic and social impacts of COVID-19. The latest National Skills Commission data shows there were over 7,000 ECEC roles advertised nationally at the end of September 2022.⁴

The Australian Government's 'Cheaper Child Care' legislation to improve affordability for families was successfully passed through Parliament in late November and is set to take effect in July 2023. Once implemented, these affordability measures are expected to increase demand for children's places in early learning services by 37,000 extra places nationally.

However, this welcomed additional support for families was voted into law at the same time as the *Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Bill 2022* (the Bill).

We applaud the Government's objective to 'get wages moving' but, like many other ECEC peak bodies, ACA is concerned that the multi-employer bargaining provisions of this new legislation could result in the imposition of higher wages across the whole sector without government planning or financial support.

This substantial investment to deliver greater affordability under the 'Cheaper Child Care' legislation will be negated if parents are forced to bear the increase in costs from wage rises.

Other state-based initiatives for pre-school and kindergarten will also create extra demand. Together, these initiatives will exacerbate the workforce crisis in long day care services as they are collectively rolled out in 2023.

Across the board, there is already a critical shortage of Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, Diploma of Early Childhood Education & Care and degree-qualified ECEC candidates. We know wage increases – amongst many other training and retention initiatives – are a central pillar to attracting and retaining the educators we urgently need.

But without government funding any wage increase, the resulting cost impacts on families will be unbearable.

A timely and sufficient investment, by Government, to remedy the critical workforce shortages in the ECEC sector will ultimately contribute to the whole economy and our national wellbeing.

⁴ <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/insights/2022-skills-priority-list>



How did we get here?

THE BIG PICTURE

- The early learning (child care) sector is regulated by the Australian Children Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) which administers the National Quality Framework (NQF). The NQF applies to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as well as Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services.
- Over 16,500 children's education and care services operate as approved providers under the NQF - **over 8,000 long day care services**, 3,000 preschools/kindergartens, 500 family day care services and 4,500 outside school hours care services.⁵
- Of these, 1% are large operators (owning 25 or more services), 19% are medium-sized (2-24 services) and **80% are small-sized (owning 1 service)**.
- 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 **70% rise since 2013** ⁶.
- **Rapid growth in Long Day Care (LDC)** - Since the last census LDC has seen an influx of workers, who now account for an enormous 68% of all educators in ECEC
- Growth in the sector will be expected to continue to increase over the five years to November 2025, with employment expected to increase by around 16,000⁷.

⁵ <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>

⁷ <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/reports/job-openings-and-replacement-rates-occupation>



WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

- The majority of the total ECEC workforce (92.1%) is female, with the median age being 36 years for female workers and 27 years for male workers⁸.
- The average age of all ECEC workers was 37 for females and 32 years for males.
- 2.9 per cent of the total staff in the ECEC workforce are Indigenous Australians.

Hours of work

- Across the ECEC sector the distribution of hours worked were fairly even between 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).⁹

Staff turnover

- In Australia, the percentage of job turnover amongst early childhood education and care (ECEC) employees each year has been estimated to be more than 30% for over a decade¹⁰.
- “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%.”¹¹
- Retention, in particular, has been identified as a significant challenge for the sector in Australia and across the developed world. International research indicates that Early Childhood Educator retention rates continue to be poor compared to other occupational groups.¹²

⁸ <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/reports/job-openings-and-replacement-rates-occupation>

⁹ 2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census report - <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>

¹⁰ [Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, 2006](#); United Voice, 2011a, 2014.

¹¹ University of QLD – Low pay but still we stay: Retention in early childhood education & care

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328376512_Low_pay_but_still_we_stay_Retention_in_early_childhood_education_and_care

¹² Gable et al., 2007; Rolfe, 2005; Whitebook and Sakai, 2003



WORKFORCE EDUCATION SNAPSHOT

- In terms of the mix of qualifications among workers in the sector, the number of people who undertook and completed Diplomas of Early Childhood Education and Care has increased since 2016, with Bachelor Degrees flat lining and Certificate IIIs in Early Childhood Education and Care facing a slight decline¹³.
- Strong growth is required in all three qualifications to address staff shortages across the sector.
- Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) also report a substantial number of drop-outs mid-course. There is no data to clearly indicate the individual students' reasons for abandoning their studies.

WHAT HAS CAUSED THIS DEFICIT OF QUALIFIED CANDIDATES IN THE ECEC SECTOR?

The shortage of ECEC staff is a problem that has been accumulating over the last decade, with a combination of factors contributing to what is now a workforce crisis.

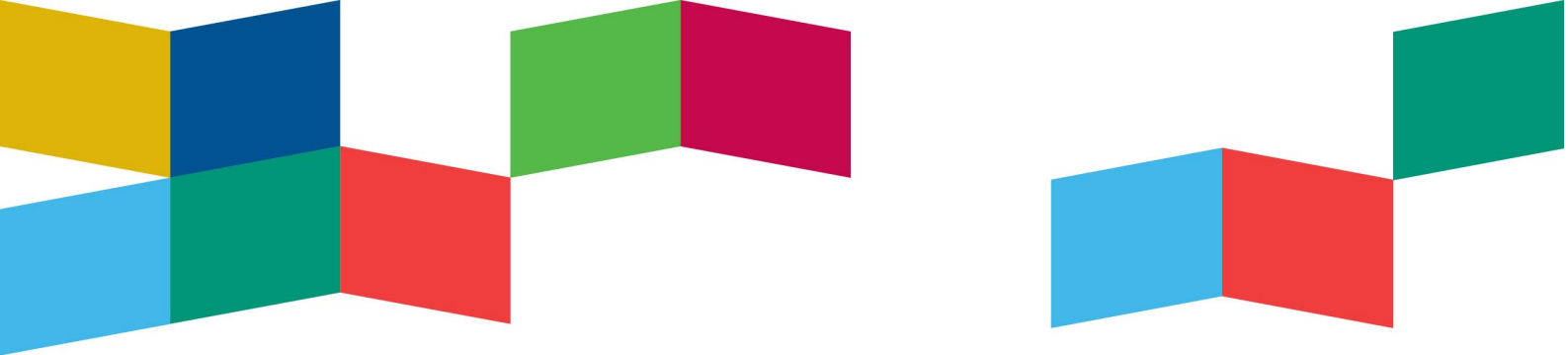
These factors may vary from service provider to service provider, depending on their geographic location.

However, overall we have identified the following key issues that have contributed to national workforce shortage:

- the rapid growth of the sector over the last decade (ie. new centre builds).
This growth simply hasn't been matched by the number of people being trained up to enter the sector;
- the introduction of the National Quality Framework mandating qualification requirements and reducing educator-to-child ratios;
- the impacts of the COVID pandemic:
These have included staff losses due to vaccine mandates, ever-changing regulatory and safety processes with additional layers of administration, increases in staff taking sick leave and remaining staff feeling over-worked;
- a perceived lack of career recognition¹⁴;

¹³ <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>

¹⁴ University of England study into professionalism in early childhood education settings.
<https://theconversation.com/covid-chaos-has-shed-light-on-many-issues-in-the-australian-childcare-sector-here-are-4-of-them-174404>

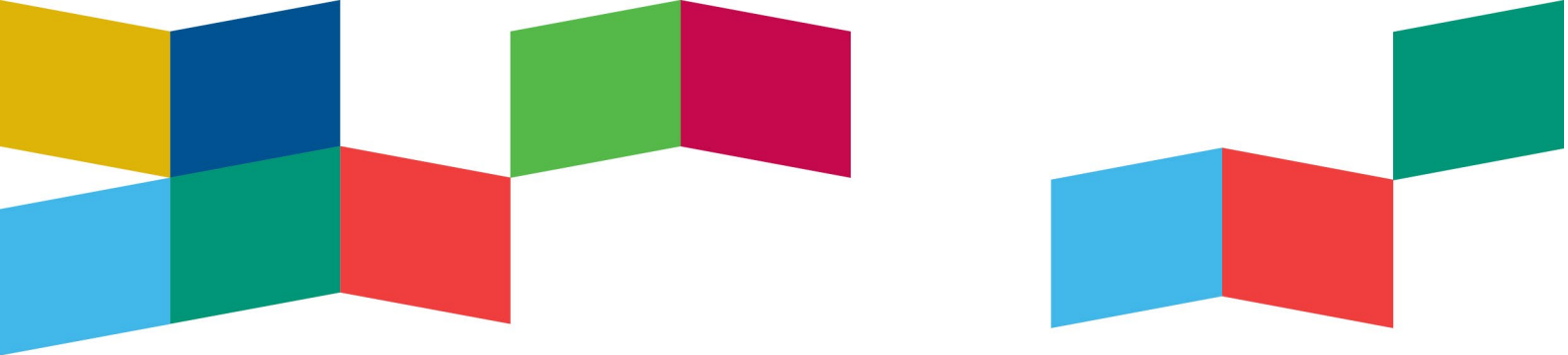
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- lower staff wages in comparison to other career options;
 - a strained workplace culture where the senior staff are not sufficiently trained in leadership;
Whilst a positive work culture is often cited as a reason for staff retention, a poor or strained work culture from exhausted staff can contribute to staff turnover.
 - a perceived lack of career progression opportunities;
 - the opportunities for ECTs to gain higher salary conditions, teaching at schools;
 - qualification requirements, including length and cost of studies, people dropping out of courses; and
 - challenging work conditions.
The ECEC sector is one of 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.

CONFIDENCE LEVELS AMONG ECEC SERVICE PROVIDERS

In a recent survey of ACA members:

- **75% said they were not at all confident or not very confident** about being able to successfully recruit and maintain staff at their early learning service.
- **Over 74%** cited workforce shortages as the **biggest issue** facing the early learning (child care) sector.
- **86%** said they thought a wage increase would improve the attraction and retention of their staff.

Survey respondents ranked staff wages as the most important factor in relation to the attraction and retention of staff, with a positive workforce culture ranked second, structure of work & flexibility of hours ranked third (unfortunately this is difficult in offering due to National Regulations and Law), career development and promotion opportunities ranked fourth and other workplace benefits such as a wellbeing plan, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), discounts with local suppliers, onsite medical check-ups, etc ranked last.



Below are some of the comments from our recent survey of ACA members:

"Workforce planning is always on the back of our minds. We have very little contingency."

"Across our 4 centres, we currently have approximately 9 vacancies, many of which we have been trying to fill for 6 months. Our major concern here is the additional pressure it puts on our remaining staff to 'pick up the slack' and that this will result in even further resignations."

"Much harder to find Cert III and Diploma trained educators than before the pandemic. Also the service location in a higher socio-economic area is a huge disadvantage because staff cannot afford to live in the area and have to travel from afar."

"Responses to ads and hiring efforts have fallen through the floor in the last two years. This is despite being the most attractive employer in the sector in our area."

"Finding new staff is a disaster – it's been 10 months of no shows for interviews."

"It's really, really hard to get educators. They apply, come for the interview and we never hear from them. They doing it for Centrelink."

"We are finding there are not enough staff available in the industry."

"After 25 years in the sector I have never, ever, seen a workforce crisis like this, finding educators is just about impossible"

According to the Government own Census 2022, more than 50% of ECEC educators are paid over the award rate. Clearly this alone is not sufficient to attract the quality candidates our services need and our families deserve.

IMPLICATIONS OF NEW INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION

The landmark IR reforms introduced via the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Bill 2022 by the Federal Government in October were passed through Parliament at the end of November, which means they will soon become law and take effect incrementally in 2023.

Along with the many other sectors, ACA is concerned that the multi-employer bargaining provisions could result in the imposition of higher wages across the whole sector without government planning or financial support.

Without government financial support for wage rises, sadly parents will bear the brunt of these changes through increased costs. The resulting affordability issues may limit the ongoing participation of parents in the workforce.

Wage rises forced upon small operators may even force them out of business, reducing access to high-quality early learning services for families and reducing job vacancies across the sector.



The Solutions

We urge the Australian Government to support the retention of qualified, experienced educators already working in the sector as well as attracting qualified and experienced candidates back to the sector by maximising workplace benefits as outlined in the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPROVE EDUCATOR REMUNERATION (WAGES & BENEFITS)

We call on the Australian Government to:

- co-ordinate an immediate national wage increase without affecting fees for families through a **two-stage process**:
 - Stage 1** - The Australian Government provides a **short-term** wage supplement grant for a 15% increase in wages, including a transparent mechanism that ensures accountability that the wage supplement has been directly passed on to the workforce. The mechanism must include consideration to the consequential impact of superannuation, workers compensation insurance, Award-associated replacement staff to meet ratios and payroll tax (a cost only borne by for-profit providers). The proposed wage supplement grant would need to be co-designed by all relevant stakeholders to ensure there are no unintended consequences.
 - Stage 2** - The terms of reference for the Australian Government's planned Productivity Commission inquiry should include establishing a subsidised rate for the implementation of the government's 90% universal subsidy, which adequately covers the cost of delivering high-quality ECEC including wages and conditions that recognise the essential role of Early Childhood Educators and teachers.
- It should also consider the relevant on-costs incurred as a result of any increase to wages, in order to ensure that the government's intended benefit of affordability to families is maintained under all circumstances.
- The new revised subsidy would provide long-term certainty and remove the need for the temporary wage supplement, without negatively impacting affordability for families.
- 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*;
 - Allow for a fringe benefits tax exemption for service providers in the context of providing fringe benefits to employees such as salary sacrifice in relation to early learning (child care), cars, electronic devices, etc. This initiative could help attract jobseekers to the sector by lowering their income tax threshold and therefore boosting their income.



WIDEN THE PIPELINE OF QUALIFIED LOCAL CANDIDATES

We call on the Australian Government 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.
Eg. 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
Eg. 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
- Engage with State and Territory Governments to ensure school-based ECEC Cert III apprenticeships are promoted via career advisors and seen as a viable pathway to complete their Year 12 school qualification (HSC, VCE or equivalent). This would provide students with ready-made employment options at the completion of school, with an immediate pathway to a Diploma in ECEC qualification via a traineeship at approved early childhood education and care services.
- Establish a micro-credential targeted at educators who already hold a recognised ECEC qualification but have not worked in the system for a number of 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 supplement their existing qualifications. This 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. Eg. Diploma in Outside School Hours Care, Diploma of School Age Education. These qualifications could be recognised with an accompanying skills-set that addresses early childhood programming and planning components.
- 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. Eg. Degrees in Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Psychology, Musical Therapy and Fine Arts (Reggio Emilia approach).
- 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. (Currently some jurisdictions do not recognise this.)

- 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.
- Incentivise applicants for the Bachelor of Education (Birth to Five Years) by further reducing the cost to students.
- 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 take on a teaching (ECT) degree through a conditional waiver of HECS-HELP fees. This can be tested through a two-year pilot project across key areas of need.

WIDEN THE PIPELINE OF QUALIFIED INTERNATIONAL CANDIDATES (SKILLED MIGRATION)

- Accelerate 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 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).

PROMOTE THE ECEC SECTOR & JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO JOBSEEKERS

- Implement an immediate national education campaign to promote the career path of working in the sector
 - Coordinate a multi-channel, multi-year communications program initially promoting the societal value of children's early learning and care, followed by promoting careers within the sector, featuring a call to action to a centralised communications asset with a jobs board.
 - The campaign must target beyond the entry role and encourage unemployed Australians to consider working in the early learning sector through an entry-level Traineeship or to enrol in an Early Childhood Teaching Degree.



DIFFERENTIATE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR AUSTRALIA'S CRITICAL WORKERS

During the COVID pandemic, Australian State and Territory Governments invoked a category of workers that were critical to the ongoing function of the state's society. Such categories were described as Authorised Workers or Critical Workers within the context of their respective Public Health Orders, and included health care professionals, transport personnel, food production and distribution as well as Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers.

There is growing recognition that Australia should support and retain its Critical Workers as a priority above other employment categories. There will always be a critical need to have adequate numbers and skillsets of such Critical Workers - not just during a global health crisis.

While considering practical solutions for wages, we recommend the following options:

- increase the tax-free threshold for Critical Workers including Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers;
- convert the next tier of the Critical Workers' taxable income range such that instead of tax, their employers are required to contribute that amount towards their nominated superannuation funds; and
- enable Critical Workers to have their before-tax super contribution to attract a lower tax rate if not 0%.

INTRODUCE AN INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM

- Implement an international exchange program, similar to the New Colombo Plan Scholarships program*, for Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers, allowing them to travel to and from Australia to other countries for a 12 month or more period with qualifications recognised
 - This would require collaboration between the Federal Department of Education and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
 - As Early Childhood Educators and teachers tend to be young and toward the lower of 20-40 years old age range, they are in an age range that is most likely to travel and experience new overseas environments.

The benefits would include building public and peer respect and appreciation of educators and teachers and creating exciting opportunities and reasons to join the sector.

* <https://www.monash.edu/study-abroad/overseas/financial/new-colombo-plan>

REVISE MID-CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAMS

The previous Federal Government funded the Mid-Career Checkpoint program (\$75 million over four years to 2023-2024) which supports eligible carers, predominantly women, to return to paid work, or advance or change their career.

We recommend the government

- revises this program into specific Mid-Career Transition Programs via grant funding awarded to industry peak bodies to facilitate industry-specific programs to assist with:
 - their reform advocacies with regulatory authorities to remove unnecessary regulatory barriers to assist mid-career individuals to transition to early childhood education and care sector; and
 - their recruitment of eligible mid-career individuals to the early childhood education and care sector.



Conclusion

A strong and sustainable early learning sector is vital to the economic health of this nation and improving our early learning system is a fundamental economic reform, as reflected in Prime Minister Albanese's Cheaper Childcare pledge¹⁵.

It was further emphasised by the new Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth, the Honourable Dr Anne Aly MP, who told Parliament in June 2022 *"those early years are critical to development. If a child has good foundations in the early years, it carries on to later life and improved outcomes. Investing in early years means better outcomes for education, fewer challenges for children born into challenging circumstances, [less] antisocial behaviour and youth crime."*¹⁶

We need to ensure that all families – including those with only one child in early learning and those with additional needs – have ongoing, equitable and affordable access to our world-class early learning services.

ACA respectfully requests the Australian Government's careful consideration of the recommendations set out in this Policy Proposal.

With their adoption by the Australian Government, we can ensure that all families, including working mothers, can participate in Australia's workforce whilst all children, including our most vulnerable, can have the best start in life.

We look forward to supporting the commitments of the new Albanese Government to support the economic recovery of Australia and ensure that all Australian families, including those who are essential workers and/or from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, can continue to access our world class ECEC services.

¹⁵ <https://anthonyalbanese.com.au/my-plan/cheaper-child-care>

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/14/the-aspiration-of-universal-childcare-anne-aly-on-what-drives-labors-ambitious-plans>



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