



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession

Early Childhood Education and Care
Workforce Capacity Study Summary Report



Summary Report

The Government commissioned Jobs and Skills Australia to undertake a capacity study on the workforce needs for Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector ('the Study'). The Study has been undertaken in partnership with HumanAbility, the Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) with responsibility for the Children's Education and Care, Aged Care and Disability Support, Health, Human Services and Sport and Recreation sector.



What the Study Does

The Study provides critical evidence, insights, and recommendations as appropriate to support current and future workforce planning, including a detailed understanding of the current state and future needs of the sector's workforce to support the development of Government strategy and vision on early years education and care of Australia's children. It focuses on the ECEC workforce and skills issues, particularly attraction and retention, to complement the broader scope of the other inquiries.

The Study also identifies and analyses occupations for each of the different parts of the sector (preschools and kindergartens, centre-based day care (CBDC), family day care (FDC), in-home care (IHC), outside school hours care (OSHC), including services delivered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)), their respective supply and demand factors, and geographical considerations to understand factors that impact training, attracting, and retaining the ECEC workforce.

The Study has investigated the whole ECEC sector but for analytical ease focused on the two relevant Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) industry groups '871 Child Care Services' and '801 Preschool Education' and eight target Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) Occupations (6-digit level) which were validated by the consultation paper.

Engagement and Research Process

The Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the ECEC Capacity Study were open for consultation in late 2023, approved by the Minister of Skills and Training, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP and published on 14th February 2024.

The Study was overseen by a Steering Group with representatives drawn from the sector, including peak bodies, specialist groups, trade unions and researchers and met formally 5 times

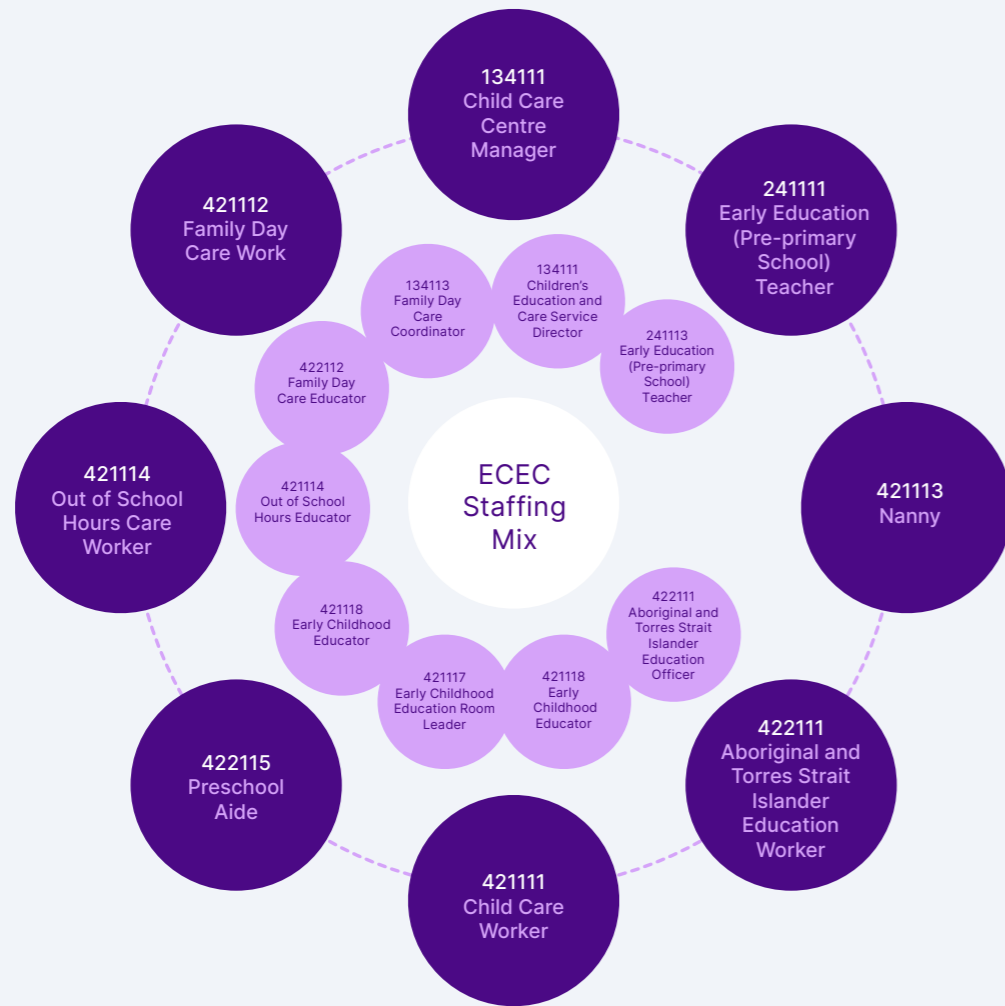
between December 2023 and May 2024. The Study's consultation paper was published on the 20th November 2023, with over 50 submissions received. Stakeholder engagement opportunities were held between November 2023 and March 2024, including three online roundtable-style discussions in March 2024. Steering group members provided extensive feedback on modelling of future workforce demand and supply under various scenarios, undertaken by JSA and Deloitte Access Economics (DAE).

The Study has been conducted with consideration of the Productivity Commission (PC)'s and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)'s inquiries into the ECEC sector in Australia, and other policy developments.

JSA acknowledges the important and widely accepted shift within the ECEC sector to move towards a language of "early education" as opposed to "child care". Specifically, ECEC workers are now more properly referred to as "early childhood educators" instead of "child carers" to better reflect their work processes, qualifications and expertise. However, statistical naming conventions typically lag behind cultural shifts, and some of the data sources used for this report are only subject to comprehensive review infrequently. JSA notes that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of ANZSCO, with future changes flagged for occupations relevant to ECEC.

Throughout this report, terms such as 'early childhood educators and teachers' are used when speaking generally about the workforce. However, to avoid confusion, when referencing a dataset specifically for accuracy field titles as given by the relevant classification used in the dataset, acknowledging that job titles such as 'Childcare Worker' are inconsistent with current preferred terminology. The report has italicised ANZSCO ANZSIC names throughout to indicate where an official classification has been used. ANZSCO current occupation titles and Preliminary Proposed Changes are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Scope of the ECEC Workforce considered for this Study



Note: Figure includes current (dark purple) and any currently preliminary proposed (light purple) occupation titles in the Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

Findings have been drafted to align with *Shaping Our Future, The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022-2031)*; the jurisdictional workforce strategies and the *Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan* related to Priority Reform 2 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. While the *Shaping Our Future, National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy* is well received within the sector and has strong intent, the co-owned nature of the strategy means that the implementation accountability is distributed.

Ongoing work for coordinated evaluation of the strategy is important and progress is being made. It is also noted that there are existing programs in place as part of work on these strategies that align with this report's recommendations.

Jobs and Skills Australia takes care to ensure that all data, figures, and research are true and accurate at the date of publication. Please note however, that they may be subject to change after publication and that changes may be made to the data and the Jobs and Skills Australia website at any time.



The Early Childhood Workforce Today

Australia's early childhood workforce is made up of well over 200,000 individuals. The majority are Early Childhood Educators, including Early Childhood Education Room Leaders, who work directly with children. Early Childhood Teachers and Children's Education and Care Service Directors provide educational and organisational leadership. The sector is also supported by specialised education and care professionals and assistants, and roles such as Administration Assistants, Cooks, and Cleaners.

The ECEC workforce is overwhelmingly female, noting a higher proportion of men working in OSHC settings. The primary caring responsibilities women carry often play a part in the staffing arrangements of the sector and flexible work is a key issue.

There are barriers to employment of those with caring responsibilities for young children, mothers especially, in ECEC. The rate of return to employment following birth of first child (70% for *Child carers*) is lower than for occupations such as *Aged and disabled carers* (76%), and *General clerks* (78%). However, women in ECEC occupations return to employment in the sector at slightly higher levels than *Hairdressers, Waiters, Beauty therapists, and Sales assistants*.

The sector's age distribution is similar to all occupations but varies significantly by service type with educators, particularly those working in OSHC, younger than the general labour force, with FDC educators having an older age profile.

The representation of First Nations individuals is greater in the ECEC workforce, relative to all occupations, as noted in table 1 below, and on par across all focus ECEC occupations with the

Table 1: Selected characteristics by ANZSCO Unit Group, 2021

	4211 Child Carers	4221 Education Aides	2411 Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers	1341 Child Care Centre Managers	Total ECEC Occupations	All
Median age	34	45	40	41	37.9	39.9
Female (%)	95.6%	88.5%	97.6%	91.8%	93.3%	48.6%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (%)	2.9%	5.7%	1.7%	2.5%	3.7%	1.7%
Has a Certificate III and above (%)	79.1%	71.3%	95.6%	93.1%	78.7%	66.1%
Born overseas (%)	37.4%	20.8%	29.0%	25.9%	30.5%	28.5%
Main language spoken other than English (%)	31.4%	12.9%	21.7%	17.0%	23.6%	21.3%
Has a long-term health condition (%)	30.5%	36.7%	36.4%	32.4%	33.0%	28.6%

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021, TableBuilder
 Note: Please see Figure 1 above for details of occupations included within each ANZSCO Unit Group.

The ECEC workforce is overwhelmingly reliant on the relevant Award² for pay and working conditions, with fewer workers on collective agreements than in other education sectors. In May 2023, educators (*Child Carers* 4211) had similar average weekly ordinary time earnings to *Aged and Disabled Carers* despite working around five additional hours

broader population. However, First Nations people are not as well represented across the more highly remunerated occupations in the sector.

In the ECEC workforce there is a higher proportion of people born overseas than for all occupations, with 4 in 10 FDC educators born overseas and a higher proportion of people who have a main language other than English at home.

The majority of the workforce were Australian citizens at the time of the last census, but there is considerable variation by occupation, including between educators in different service types. Many temporary ECEC staff are on study visas with relatively few coming through temporary skilled visa categories.

There are fewer people with disability¹ in the ECEC workforce than the general population but a slightly higher proportion of staff with a long-term health condition.

per week, and ECEC staff earn casual loading less frequently than care sector workers. When comparing the earnings of educators (4211) to other occupations, both male and female educators had lower average weekly earnings than *Storepersons* (7411) and *General Clerks* (5311) despite requiring much higher levels of qualification and significantly

(1) As indicated by a Core Activity Need for Assistance in the ABS Census 2021. The census does not publish disability statistics, however, need for assistance can be used as a proxy. Need for assistance includes short- and long-term health conditions, disability, old or young age, and difficulty with English.
 (2) Award - Children's Services Award 2010

lower average weekly earnings than *Security Officers and Guards* (4422), *Truck Drivers* (7331), *Motor Mechanics* (3213) despite similar qualification requirements.

Early Childhood Teachers earn substantially less than *Primary School Teachers*, despite

the prevalence of dual qualification, and this is intensified for those not working in Preschool settings. Managers in the ECEC industry typically earn less than those in the Health and Welfare Service industry and substantially less than senior staff in other education sectors such as Principals.

Table 2: Employment conditions by occupation, 2023

	4211 Child Carers	4221 Education Aides	2411 Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers	1341 Child Care Centre Managers	Total ECEC Occupations	All
Average hours ¹	25.7	22.7	24.6	32.7	24.9	30.5
Average weekly earnings ¹	\$758.7	\$752.3	\$1094.7	\$1374.0	\$816.4	\$1439.1
Union Membership ²	4.8%	32.5%	7.0%	13.0%	15.1%	11.6%
Has a second job ²	6.8%	12.9%	10.4%	6.6%	9.2%	6.8%
Fixed term employment ³	2.4%	29.8%	4.0%	0.0%	12.5%	4.7%
Casual employment ³	30.2%	14.5%	8.9%	0.0%	21.2%	21.9%
Paid award only ³	70.1%	3.7%	29.0%	15.9%	39.8%	23.2%
Paid collective agreement ³	11.7%	86.7%	54.6%	14.9%	42.8%	34.0%
Paid individual arrangement ³	17.8%	9.2%	13.2%	44.9%	16.0%	38.7%

Sources:
 (1) ABS (2023), Employee Earnings and Hours, TableBuilder, ordinary time,
 (2) ABS (2023), Characteristics of Employment, TableBuilder
 (3) ABS (2023), Employee Earnings and Hours, TableBuilder

The sector's overall regulatory framework has been designed to promote quality education and care. Regulations do add to supply pressures, but funding constraints, increasing service demand, and a tight labour market are also contributing to current workforce pressures. The National Quality Framework (NQF) provides the workforce with an essential quality standard to assure children's safety and quality early learning. *Shaping Our Future*, and its linked jurisdictionally based ECEC workforce strategies, provide a strong basis for further development and professionalism of this critical education sector. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) provides a robust base for training and development in the sector which underpins initial ECEC education in Australia and educators should be supported to engage with it in ongoing training and development.

Average wages in the ECEC sector are currently lower than in a number of related sectors, as noted above, and occupations for both Early Childhood Educators and *Early Childhood Teachers*. Various processes are underway through the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to consider wage increases for workers in the sector (apart from standalone Preschools, where higher rates currently apply). Stakeholders universally report workforce strain, exacerbated by high levels of recruitment activity driven by growth and turnover which impacts service delivery capability and pressures quality. There are relatively high rates of work-related injuries in ECEC which can further contribute to worker attrition. The rate of serious injury claims in the Childcare Services industry group (ANZSIC 871) in 2021-22³ (Safe Work Australia NDS for Compensation-based Statistics) was 14.2 claims per million hours worked, compared to 6.5 claims

(3) SWA Data for 2021-22 are preliminary (denoted by a 'p') and subject to revision in future years as further claims are finalised. 'Serious claims' are claims involving one working week or more off work.

per million hours worked in all industries. These reports are corroborated by JSA evidence of high and increasing vacancy rates since 2015 and stakeholder reports of recruitment difficulty. These workforce pressures impact staff remaining in the sector through workload strain and stress in roles, significant out of paid hours working, including collaborative working such as evening unpaid meetings. There has been a large increase in the reliance on trainees to meet demand for new Early Childhood Educators, relying on the 'actively working towards a qualification' provision in the regulations. High reliance on trainees impacts the quality and amount of contact time that can be provided by the trainees and the experienced staff supervising them.

Consultation showed strong community feeling of unmet demand for ECEC services which is linked anecdotally to workforce shortages. Unmet demand is felt particularly within regional and remote areas which impact wider labour force participation, specifically the participation of primary carers who are overwhelmingly female. This is supported by the analysis of Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census (NWC) data, while noting that it also shows some pockets of underutilised capacity.

Modelling indicates that there is a current shortfall of around 21,000 qualified ECEC professionals needed to meet existing demand and support more sustainable working conditions. An additional 18,000 qualified ECEC staff would be required to meet estimated unmet demand in services not yet established. Finally, over 18,000 staff would be required to fully realise CCS changes and expanded preschool policies.

Finding 1

Current workforce levels are not sustainable to even meet current levels of demand taking into account numerous factors including:

- Evidence of overtime being worked
- Insufficient provision for ongoing professional development
- Increasing reliance on trainees to meet workforce requirements, given their 20% allocation of paid work time for off-the-job learning
- Time spent by more established staff recruiting and onboarding new staff and providing on the job supervision to trainees. The high and

increasing use of waivers by services not meeting National Regulations regarding staffing arrangements.

Worker screening (e.g. WWCC/WWVP) and child safety regulatory requirements have an impact on workforce recruitment practices. However, it is important to consider any efforts to grow the workforce in balance with ensuring the safety of children and suitability of workers particularly in light of the review of Child Safety Arrangements under the NQF and outcomes of the 2023 Ministerial Forum on Child Safety. The National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030 highlights the key role of organisations in providing services to children and young people in a child safe way, which includes implementing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and enhancing national arrangements for information sharing. Regulatory differences across jurisdictions (States and Territories) and service types (e.g. CBDC, FDC, OSHC, & preschool/ kindergarten) impact movement interstate and equity of esteem in an increasingly nationalised system and cause barriers for sharing of good practice, resources and training.

Noting proposed changes to ANZSCO occupation classifications, current role descriptions do not capture the work required and performed in ECEC. Clear understanding of roles is particularly important in providing appropriate training and professional development that ensures ECEC staff and centre managers are providing the services communities and families need.

The NWC provides an important insight on the ECEC workforce but could be further strengthened with alignment to *Shaping Our Future*, reporting on service profile as well as individual educator, more attentiveness to roles, hours worked, including at multiple services and study engagement of staff. There would be benefits should the NWC be able to be completed by individual educators and staff not just the service manager.

Finding 2

Data gaps and inconsistencies constrain effective workforce planning. This includes difficulty capturing the extent of unmet service demand, inconsistencies in scope and estimates between the National Workforce Census (NWC) and Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey and other collections, and insufficient data on the First Nations ECEC workforce.

› **Cameo**

Chelsea and Shelly, Room leaders

Chelsea and Shelly were at different stages in their lives when they both applied to be trainees at Jenny's Early Learning Centres in Bendigo, Victoria. Chelsea was 17 when she finished high school and began her traineeship at Jenny's ELC, five years later Chelsea is a room leader loving her work. In contrast, Shelly was aged 46 when she left her career in sewing at a factory to undertake the traineeship. Shelly's former workmates "thought [she] was crazy to switch jobs", however ten years later, Shelly is also a room leader and is happy she didn't take that advice.

Source: [Case study: Jenny's Early Learning Centres - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)



› **Cameo**

Melissa Harpur, Early Childhood Teacher

Melissa's journey to becoming an Early Childhood Teacher began when she completed her diploma at TAFE and gained a position at a local preschool. With support from the preschool, Melissa enrolled in the Bachelor of Education the Early Years where she was partnered with mentor 'Aunty' Deb Wray from the Woolyungah Indigenous Centre for additional support. In her final year of study, Melissa undertook practical experience at an early learning centre where she grew in confidence. Melissa now works as an Early Childhood Teacher at this centre and collaborates with other services in playgroups for Aboriginal children and families.

Melissa enjoys her career but finds it very busy. Nevertheless, she finds it interesting and has plans for further training in the field. In 2023 Melissa was undertaking further training at TAFE and plans to study a Master of Special Education with a focus on First Nations perspectives in the early childhood sector.

Source: [Early Childhood Educator addresses her future | myfuture](#)



Future states

Finding 3

To meet projected national population growth increases (1.3 per cent per year) and increased female participation in the workforce, the ECEC workforce will need to grow by around 1.5 per cent per year by 2034 to service the increase in demand.

Finding 4

The current ECEC workforce would likely need to grow by an extra 8 per cent to satisfy current estimated unmet demand for early childhood services and another 8 per cent to meet unmet demand for qualified workers.

Finding 5

In order to meet the various policies already committed to by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, the ECEC workforce will likely need to increase by an annual average growth rate of 1.9 per cent per year overall and by 3.2 per cent per year for Early Childhood Teachers.

There is evidence that further expanding access to early childhood education to a universal model of up to 30 hours per week, including universal preschool for 3 and 4 year olds, could deliver substantial benefits for child development, social inclusion and long-term skills growth, as well as women's labour force participation. Achieving this secular increase in access would add to the scale of future workforce demand.

Modelling commissioned by JSA looked at the likely future demand for early childhood services over the next ten years. The modelling took into account current levels of unmet demand (for children already accessing services only), future population growth and changes in the participation rate, and the commitments that have been made to expand preschool access for 3 and 4 year olds.

Finding 6

To implement universal access and universal preschool for 3 and 4 year olds and up to 30 hours per week over three days of ECEC to be available to all children, the ECEC workforce will likely need to grow by 3.0 per cent per year with Early Childhood Teachers needing to grow by 5.4 per cent per year.

Attention therefore needs to turn to the likely future supply of *Early Childhood Educators* and *Early Childhood Teachers*. Aggregate supply is expected to increase by 2.0% per year over the next 10 years. The biggest contributions to supply growth are expected to come from 'movements between occupations' and Vocational Education and Training (VET) completions.

Finding 7

If current pay and conditions are maintained the sector will need to draw in aggregate supply for *Child Care Workers* from outside the labour force, requiring extra training effort and time and exacerbating existing workforce pressures. In 2034, the *Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teacher* occupation is expected to continue to record a shortfall in staff.

Finding 8

When examined at the regional (SA4) level workforce shortages are apparent in most regions across major cities, regional and remote Australia and are forecast to persist over the next ten years.



Sustainable and ongoing learning and development

In submissions and through roundtable discussions, stakeholders affirmed their commitment to improving and sustaining quality education and care, their support for the current NQF settings as the means for achieving that, and the importance of a close relationship with the education and training system in delivering and maintaining a skilled workforce.

Broadly, the existing qualifications and delivery mechanisms continue to serve the sector well but there are some tensions and gaps relating to

- The appropriate content for the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care as the bedrock qualification
- Opportunities for students and workers to enter the sector in supporting roles (e.g. excluded from ratios) without undertaking the Certificate III
- The strain arising from a large increase in Certificate III traineeships to meet workforce demand
- Enrolment arrangements for the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care that may be too strict
- Accessibility of work placements without financial support for VET and higher education students (or being able to count current employment towards placements)
- A lack of flexibility to recognise the potential for professionals with alternative qualifications to substitute for *Early Childhood Teachers* where there is already at least one ECT employed in the service
- Access to funded training for international students

There is also an opportunity to foster a more supportive environment to assist more First Nations Australians to complete qualifications. These concerns could be alleviated by taking an orientation to sustainable and ongoing learning and development and are further explored in findings and recommendations outlined in this section.

Finding 9

Developing the ECEC profession and assuring high quality workforce practice is linked to high quality qualifications delivery and assessment and availability of ongoing professional development, including relating to child safety.

Recommendation 1

Services and ECEC workers delivering high quality ECEC, quality assessments, and improved professional development are identified, and their practices disseminated across the sector. Pathways could potentially include through the proposed *Shaping our Future* national professional practice

network, or through development of additional recognition and incentive tools by governments.

Finding 10

Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care is the bedrock workforce qualification across service types. However, there is a widespread concern across the ECEC sector that the current content of Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care is too complex and broadly focused. Current delivery methods of the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care also contribute to making success in ECEC more difficult for some cohorts, including delivery in schools. The block-mode delivery requiring intensive focus away from family or community, and for those with differing levels of literacy.

Recommendation 2

HumanAbility to review the current content of the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, in collaboration with States and Territories, to identify opportunities to reduce the complexity of the learning outcomes, without detracting from quality.

Recommendation 3

HumanAbility to consider how the national training system can better support more graduated pathways into Early Childhood Educator roles. Education and Training Providers should work with Governments to continue to develop and fund programs that will provide an accessible pathway into Early Childhood Educator roles by:

- encouraging development of pre-employment programs.
- assessing the appropriateness of SkillSets for different service types where the full qualification is not nationally mandated for workforce (particularly OSHC) including reviewing existing OSHC SkillSets.
- incentivising the development of resources to support high quality simulated training and assessment before on the job placement.

Recommendation 4

Governments should support completions of ECEC qualifications in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships to ensure sustainability and drive access. As a senior secondary pathway alternative, consider supporting the further development

of a taster skillset designed to be delivered in VET in schools and other settings with explicit arrangements with RTOs and ECEC providers that support the student to complete the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

Finding 11

Traineeships form a critical part of the workforce pipeline and should offer a well-supported way to earn and learn. In an expanding system, new trainees are very important, but the recent, very large influx of traineeships (doubling since 2020) has produced a bottleneck for senior staffing in terms of meeting regulatory compliance and on-the-job mentorship.

Recommendation 5

The sector should systematically recognise the role of senior and experienced staff in supporting trainee induction, development, assessment and mentoring. Classification arrangements and role descriptions (including in any relevant Award review) and in allocation of non-contact time is also in scope.

Finding 12

The role of Diploma qualified educators is the fulcrum of the long day care setting and Diploma enrolments have fallen in recent years. A contributing factor is that the Diploma entry requirement of a completed Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care within the two most recent training packages, and the minimal pay increase associated with the higher qualification, has discouraged Diploma enrolments since 2021.

Recommendation 6

States and Territories should examine ways to support enrolments in ECEC Diploma courses, including by not limiting the time since completing the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care which allows for staff currently working in the sector to access funding.

Recommendation 7

HumanAbility should review training package arrangements to ensure they are fit for purpose. Further considerations could include developing a bridging course for the current Diploma ECEC targeted at educators returning to the sector who already hold a recognised ECEC qualification but have not worked in the system for several years, or potentially expanded to those transitioning from adjacent sectors.

Finding 13

Many students enrolled in ECEC courses also work in the sector. However, outside formal traineeships employment experience only in specific situations counts towards their qualification, raising concerns about placement poverty. This places pressure on the system of placements, where there are significant hours required in both VET and higher education ECEC qualifications. This may also place significant financial strain on students, noting current plans to introduce paid placements for higher education students.

Recommendation 8

To support an ongoing pipeline of well qualified workers completing qualifications in a timely fashion, there should be consideration of financial investment in 'wrap-around support' for existing educators to attain higher qualifications e.g. paid study leave and the negotiation of study calendars and assessment that fit in with workplace needs.

Recommendation 9

In order to support the career progression of people with primary carer responsibilities, training providers in VET and higher education should have explicit strategies for the inclusion of parents in key ECEC courses. This includes ensuring there are processes in place to identify the cultural and family needs of the learner cohort and ensuring reasonable access to support services including for the education and care of children and other supports for parents such as scheduling for training, placements and assessment with consideration to cultural and family needs.

Finding 14

A key issue contributing to the shortage of *Early Childhood Teachers* is leaks in the pipeline from dual accredited degree courses. Education providers frequently offer Early Childhood and Primary School training as a combined course. There are significant sectoral concerns particularly with crowded curriculum in dual accredited accelerated courses and in the 0–12 years accredited routes. The ECEC sector may be less served by shared training, since graduates are more likely to seek work in schools, typically offering better pay and working conditions which makes the sector less competitive.

Recommendation 10

Governments should seek to improve completions in ECEC by:

- i. continuing to support paid placements within ECEC with potential outcome measures relating to time spent working in the sector or in regional or remote settings.
- ii. scoping career changer accelerated programs for ECTs aimed at those working in related sectors with some educational or development expertise.
- iii. reconsidering any arrangements within the Higher Education Loan Program that create inequity between universities and other institutes of higher education, incentivising students to enrol in one over the other.

Recommendation 11

Accreditation authorities and education and training providers to consider:

- i. accreditation of exit awards, particularly higher education diploma level qualifications after the first year to recognise partial/progress completion of bachelor's degree at AQF Level 5 as equivalent to a Diploma.
- ii. investigation of space in higher education programming to enable a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care to be undertaken alongside Tertiary Primary School Teaching study in a concurrent mode, using RPL or similar.

Recommendation 12

Noting the importance of child safety within the context of teacher registration, progress national teacher registration alignment to enable movement between jurisdictions of qualified ECTs and for teachers from other sectors willing to upskill with ECEC qualifications. Continue to support refinements in overseas assessment recognition of ECT courses.

Recommendation 13

In meeting and filling persistent and ongoing workforce shortages for ECTs, ACECQA and jurisdictions could consider reviewing the definition of a 'suitably qualified person' including the potential, possible temporary, inclusion of other non-teaching degrees which provide a sound foundation for Early Childhood Teacher capabilities.

(4) <https://ielts.com.au/australia>

Finding 15

International students have been a recently increasing cohort, particularly in early childhood teaching courses, it is important to ensure that supports are in place to support them and their workplaces.

Recommendation 14

TEQSA and ASQA should ensure education and training providers have plans for the protection of international students in settings to prevent misunderstandings of employment arrangements including hours of work and duties.

Recommendation 15

Higher education institutions may consider whether the Professional IELTS⁴ is more appropriate than the Academic IELTS for Early Childhood Education courses.

Recommendation 16

Higher education institutions should ensure that progress assessment protocols within accredited courses particularly for newly arrived international students are robust to enable students to have time to settle into their new national contexts and professional identities before placements. ACECQA should continue to offer eLearning induction materials provided as part of *Shaping our Future*.

Finding 16

First Nations leadership of education and training providers has been shown to make a significant difference to access and success of First Nations students. However, there are relatively few Aboriginal Community Controlled education and training providers delivering ECEC qualifications for First Nations Australians. For these and other reasons the First Nations community may be poorly served by education and training pathways into ECEC, particularly for higher education routes including relating to curriculum, assessment and delivery arrangements.

Recommendation 17

Governments examine the viability of current funding arrangements for ACCO led registered training organisations (RTOs) and higher education providers in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to gain ECEC qualifications.

Recommendation 18

Ensure that all education providers have strategies e.g. reconciliation action plans, including explicit engagement with culturally safe, appropriate and responsive curriculum, assessment and delivery arrangements.

Finding 17

There is not sufficient First Nations curriculum coverage in either Certificate III or Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care and higher education qualifications, including relating to cultural safety. The current unit (CHCECE054) offered within the ECEC Training Package is not sufficient for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to engage with culture within an early learning education context.

Recommendation 19

HumanAbility should encourage the development of units in the ECEC training package that extend cultural knowledge and Indigenous knowledges. Higher education providers should establish teacher education programs that recognise, enable and celebrate First Nations ways of learning and being.

Recommendation 20

Recognise and explore the importance of cultural knowledge in the ECEC workforce through prioritised inclusion in enterprise agreements.

Finding 18

Many new ECEC educators are working towards qualifications. It helps the sector to count these workers in compliance with regulatory requirements. However, this may place some in senior positions without sufficient preparation.

Recommendation 21

Provide advice – and establish a link to support the provision of – guidance to education and training providers around satisfactory progress to support ECEC service-based assessment of staff meeting working towards requirements.

Recommendation 22

Employers to allow for ongoing professional development for all staff through investigating the impact of closure days or paid backfill. This includes for meeting compliance requirements including medical training such as First Aid, CPR, Anaphylaxis and support to facilitate child safety. Also consider the funding of professional support coordinators with remit to take into account specific community and regional needs.

Finding 19

Across ECEC training pathways there is in practice little recognition of prior learning (RPL) and experience. This intersects with problems with credit transfer, RPL and advanced standing in educational settings. It also fails to acknowledge learning that has taken place in workplaces and other settings impeding ECEC qualification uptake and completion.

Recommendation 23

Regulators and HumanAbility should consider qualification protocol changes to incentivise quality RPL and investigate system wide protocols for evidencing experiential learning and facilitating advanced standing for higher education and credit transfer for VET.

- i. Clarifying RPL protocols for the existing ECEC workforce and for those wishing to re-engage with the ECEC sector to make RPL more accessible to staff.
- ii. Investing in ECEC training package specific toolkits which support the processing of RPL within RTOs combined with assurance of compliance with RTO Standards for RTOs offering RPL and credit transfer.

Strong foundations for rewarding ECEC careers

A fundamental barrier for many people looking to build a successful career in ECEC is the low levels of remuneration.



Avenues to improve remuneration levels would improve the attractiveness of ECEC, improve retention and promote more career progression. Other issues that detract from successful careers include:

- The low pay rate premium for Diploma-qualified staff relative to Certificate III-qualified staff
- Low recognition and absence of funding for specialised roles, particularly to support more inclusive education and care settings
- Demands placed upon Centre Directors, without adequate options for training and support
- Barriers for migrants from progressing to more senior roles
- Support for First Nations workers, both in ACCOs and other service settings.

Overall, these issues could be progressed by re-examining roles within ECEC using a scopes of practice approach and are further explored in findings and recommendations outlined in this section.

Finding 20

ECEC remuneration is low compared to other competing occupations, which presents a significant disincentive to entry and accelerates attrition.

Recommendation 24

Wage rates in awards and enterprise agreements should be as competitive as possible, particularly for ECTs with respect to primary school teachers and Early Childhood Educators with respect to other VET-trained occupations in the care and administrative sectors.

Recommendation 25

Governments should contribute funding to drive long-term wage growth for ECEC workers.

Recommendation 26

Consider a campaign to ensure new and existing staff are aware of their pay and condition entitlements.

Finding 21

The rewards for further study, especially wages at Award Rates between Certificate III and Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care are insufficient for many ECEC staff to find motivating. One key consequence is that this impedes pathways into middle leadership in the sector.

Recommendation 27

As part of any award review, consider the levels of remuneration provided to Diploma-qualified educators working in room leader positions, Educational Leaders, middle leaders, workplace assessors, mentors and other specialised roles as a matter of temporary or permanent career progression.

Finding 22

A key barrier to workforce entry and retention is that ECEC workplaces may be located at a considerable distance from workers' homes, including in metropolitan settings where there is lack of affordable housing where there is the highest density of service provision.

Recommendation 28

Improve the attractiveness of ECEC work by considering the provision of employee incentives. This could further enable employers to offer benefits to employees who have barriers to return – in particular for transport for hard to reach services in regional or high-cost areas and subsidy of ECEC for their own children.

Recommendation 29

Incentivise and promote rostering and staffing arrangements that provide flexibility, with options considered including four-day work week or a nine-day fortnight to enable ECEC staff to better manage work-life balance, stress and workload.

Finding 23

ECEC requires staff who are skilled in a wide range of specialisations. However, the ways that ECEC careers are currently structured offer relatively few opportunities for specialised roles. The inability to specialise causes gaps in provision and career progression opportunities for ECEC staff and can be contrasted against other sectors.

Recommendation 30

Governments should consider how funding might be made available to support educators to meet identified needs, including:

- appropriate funding for subsidised supervision sessions for senior staff in regional and remote locations with a Child Behaviour Specialist or Psychologist to debrief and discuss children's educational concerns.

- investment in evidence-informed trauma resources and trauma informed training for educators, to support children with additional needs.
- resources and training to support early years educators in implementation of the NDIS recommendations in relation to identification of children's developmental needs and establishing inclusive educational and care settings.

Recommendation 31

HumanAbility to consider specialisation pathways within the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and Diploma Early Childhood Education and Care to serve different service types particularly IHC, OSHC and FDC delivery. This could include identifying alternative existing units that could support inclusive education for different identified needs and particularly for First Nations children.

Finding 24

ECEC staff report a lack of leadership structure and capacity with the sector which often results in administrative overload — including complying with regulation and managing parent expectations — which is a psychosocial hazard that detracts from job satisfaction and drives attrition.

Recommendation 32

HumanAbility to consider sectoral need for ECEC use of leadership skillsets, micro credentials or similar, including reviewing previous usage of advanced diploma leadership qualifications that were specific to children's education and care, or the development of elective units in current leadership and management qualifications.

Recommendation 33

Ensure that employer guidance and education is improved on WHS duties and obligations to eliminate or minimise psychosocial hazards (and any other hazard) so far as is reasonably practicable, and all ECEC staff are provided access to a high quality Employee Assistance Program to support their wellbeing.

Finding 25

There are straightforward routes for new migrants to complete entry level qualifications. However, migrant ECEC staff often face particular barriers, including funding, to their career development in Australia.

Recommendation 34

States and Territories should review arrangements for course fee rates for international students working within services while studying.

Recommendation 35

As part of the Migration Strategy implementation, relevant parties should consider Early Childhood Educator (421111) & Teacher (241111) roles for eligibility in employer sponsored skilled visa programs, with broad consultation across the ECEC sector.

Finding 26

There is increased demand for early childhood education that appropriately serves diverse families and their communities including CALD communities, in regional and remote areas, for neurodiverse children and those with disabilities.

Recommendation 36

All governments to explore in shared guidance and resources including to support early years educators in identification of children's developmental needs and establishing inclusive care settings.

Recommendation 37

The Department of Education and state and territory departments support the development and implementation of innovative solutions or incentives to staffing issues of identified need, including programs that provide financial and mentoring support to members of communities with specific needs to enter the ECEC workforce.

Finding 27

The presence of First Nations staff within early childhood settings is critical for promoting participation, growth and development of First Nations children. While there are a number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations involved in the delivery of ECEC, well-supported, culturally safe opportunities for First Nations ECEC

staff in non ACCO settings are less embedded in the ECEC sector and these opportunities should be assured. Appropriate and culturally safe service provision requires more specialised roles, especially for First Nations children.

Recommendation 38

Education Ministers should incentivise and include an explicit focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce both within ACCOs and across mainstream services and investigate sustainable funding for ACCOs.

Recommendation 39

Governments should formalise a process for ensuring ECEC sector is given adequate guidance from First Nations peak bodies and representatives on strategies to promote the employment, cultural safety and support of First Nations peoples working in the sector.

Finding 28

Scopes of practice are a valuable concept for workforce development. The roles, regulations and hierarchies that govern the ECEC workforce have a significant impact on staffing and their ability to deliver services that serve the needs of families and their communities.

Recommendation 40

The Australian Government should develop a national information resource to promote ECEC career and training pathways and attract new entrants from school leavers and people seeking career changing opportunities. This should include strategies to boost the diversity of the ECEC workforce and align to the Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan with increased education, training and recruitment of First Nations professionals as a priority.

Recommendation 41

Multiple parties should review the role of supernumerary staff (excluded from ratio and not responsible for supervising children) for administrative support and other roles. Gaps could be identified for any positions which are not recognised and considered through industrial instruments for administrative educational support roles to be created in the ECEC sector. A particular focus may also be to scope resources that services can use to support the creation of specialised administration support roles.

> Cameo

Marcquis Hepburn, Early Childhood Educator

Marcquis, an Early Childhood Educator, acknowledges that the support of colleagues and mentors helped him achieve the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Child Care Trainee of the Year. In a female dominated sector, Marcquis encourages males to enter the sector to facilitate learning and development in children. Marcquis is passionate about ECEC and plans to undertake a university degree in early childhood. In the future, Marcquis sees himself directing his own centre and would like to specialise in education and care for children with additional needs.

“Marcquis supports networking in the child care and early learning sector and emphasises the importance of attending courses and conferences with other early childhood educators to ensure a streamlined approach to children’s development needs.”

Source: [Early childhood educator celebrates the small steps | myfuture](#)



> Cameo

Krista Lynch, Centre Manager

Proud Kamilaroi woman Krista is a qualified Early Childhood Educator and leader in Tamworth NSW. Krista has completed a Certificate III and Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care which has enabled her to lead several centres in northwest NSW. Through additional training and study, Krista was able to work her way up from room leader to centre manager and is now an area manager travelling across centres in NSW.

While Krista has completed four TAFE courses, Krista “loved being able to study while gaining on the job experience in early childhood education” and strongly encourages other First Nations People to consider a career in ECEC. Krista says “On the job learning is a great way for mob to earn and learn” and allows you to pass on cultural knowledge and practice to future leaders.

Source: [Krista's path to a successful career in early education | Your Career](#)





Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

For more information, see
*Early Childhood Education
and Care Workforce Capacity Study*
in full at

JobsandSkills.gov.au

