

Productivity Agenda
Working Group –
Education, Skills,
Training and Early
Childhood Development

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A national quality framework for early childhood education and care

A discussion paper

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by the Early Childhood Development Sub-group of the Productivity Agenda Working Group for discussion purposes. It is not a policy statement and should not be taken to represent agreed views of the Commonwealth, State or Territory Governments.

1 August 2008

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Chapter 1 - Overview

In December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development, to deliver significant improvements in human capital outcomes for all Australians¹.

This discussion paper provides the basis for the initial round of consultations on the development of a new national quality framework for early childhood education and care to progress these reforms. The consultations will be based on the key questions outlined in this paper and will be used to inform the development of the framework. In addition written submissions are also welcome.

A national quality framework will provide parents, communities and operators of early childhood education and care services with a nationally consistent, streamlined and integrated licensing and accreditation system which ensures quality standards are implemented and maintained across all services. The new quality system will be aspirational and it may take some time to implement the full suite of standards to the highest quality level. This is an opportunity to identify key areas of quality that improve outcomes for children.

It will also include an Early Years Learning Framework linked to national quality standards which will underpin early childhood education and care including universal access to 15 hours a week of affordable quality early learning for 40 weeks a year in the year before formal schooling. The framework will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs. For the first time Australia will have a National Early Learning Framework which recognises that children learn from birth and that learning in school builds on these foundations.

This document is divided into three parts. Part A provides an overview of the early childhood development agenda of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. It also includes information about the consultation arrangements.

Part B relates to the development of an overarching National Quality Framework and includes a summary of the context for the development of national quality standards, an outline the current regulatory arrangements, and explains the need for change. It includes discussion about:

- strong quality standards,
- a quality rating system,
- streamlining or integrating licensing, regulation and accreditation arrangements to increase national consistency, and
- developing a workforce for a new quality early childhood education and care system.

Part C shifts the focus to the National Early Years Learning Framework. It provides an outline of the purpose for the framework and its links to existing state and territory frameworks. It includes an overview of the research informing the development of the Framework. It also outlines the foundations to the Framework (the vision and values) and expectations about outcomes for children and key themes and commitments.

Feedback from families, early childhood professionals and services (including preschools, kindergartens, child care services, family day care, early intervention services, playgroups), universities and training organisations, primary schools and the broader community, is important and welcome.

¹ COAG (2007), 20 December 2007 Communiqué, Council of Australian Governments' Meeting, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/201207/index.htm>

Chapter 2 - Introduction

There is clear evidence that early childhood development provides the foundations for life and learning, both inside and outside the home environment. This involves developing the cognitive, emotional and social skills needed to succeed, as well as achieving sound health and wellbeing. Investing in early childhood, including through quality early childhood education and care, benefits individuals, our community and the economy.

An important component of a broad framework for early childhood development is the provision of quality early childhood learning, development and care across a range of settings, including child care and preschool. High-quality early childhood education and care is important for providing support to parents who choose to participate in education or the workforce, and for ensuring the best possible outcomes for children, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Despite these clear social and economic benefits, a recent OECD report argued that Australia's investment in early education is only one fifth of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average, placing it at the bottom of the ladder of developed nations².

Australia needs to increase its focus on the early years to ensure the wellbeing of our children throughout their lives and to lift the productivity of our nation as a whole. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Commonwealth Government have responded to this need and committed to action.

2.1 What is COAG?

COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. It comprises the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief ministers and the president of the Australian Local Government Association. The Prime Minister chairs COAG.

The role of COAG is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and require cooperative action by governments at all levels.

2.2 What is the COAG agenda for early childhood development?

2.2.1 COAG agreed outcomes

In March 2008³ COAG endorsed a comprehensive set of aspirations, outcomes, progress measures and future policy directions in the key areas of early childhood. The agreed aspiration is that children are born healthy and have access, throughout early childhood, to the support, care and education that will equip them for life and learning, delivered in a way that actively engages parents and meets their workforce participation needs.

This is critical to achieving long-term participation and productivity gains for Australia. Schooling and skills development must be improved now, and must start early as children are the nation's future.

The broad outcomes agreed⁴ for early childhood development are in Box 2.1.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007) *Education at a glance 2007*, Paris.

³ COAG (2008), 26 March 2008 Communiqué, Council of Australian Governments' Meeting, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/260308/index.htm>

⁴ <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/4D1C4470-70B8-4CBA-8C54-E882E5E7EED1/0/COAGForumPaper.pdf>

Box 2.1

OUTCOMES AGREED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

- Children are born healthy
- Children acquire the basic skills for life and learning
- Children will benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children
- All children have access to affordable, quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling
- Quality early childhood education and care supports the workforce participation choices of parents with children in the years before formal schooling

2.2.2 The Commonwealth Government

In the 2008-09 Budget⁵, the Commonwealth Government set out a comprehensive plan to make the early years a national priority. This plan involves reforms to early childhood education and care and a greater focus on healthy childhood development. The key elements of this plan are set out in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2

THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT'S PLAN FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

- The Commonwealth Government's plan for early childhood includes:
- improving access to quality early childhood education and care through:
 - universal access to preschool for all children in the year before formal schooling, 15 hours per week, 40 weeks per year, delivered by a university-qualified early childhood teacher
 - the establishment of 260 early learning and care centres, including six specialist autism centres
 - improving quality of early childhood education and care through:
 - strong National Quality Standards
 - A-E quality rating system
 - support for education and training of the early childhood workforce
 - the development of an Early Years Learning Framework
 - improving the affordability of child care by increasing the child care rebate
 - a new Healthy Kids Check for four year olds
 - national rollout of the Australian Early Development Index
 - a Home Interaction program to help parents prepare their children for school
 - the introduction of *Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines* for use in early childhood settings
 - enhanced early years services for Indigenous children.

⁵ Australian Government (2008) *Budget Measures, Budget Paper No. 2. 2008-2009*, 13 May 2008, www.budget.gov.au

2.2.3 State and territory governments

States and territories have an important role in directly providing early childhood services, including education and curriculum, preschool, maternal and child health services (including antenatal and postnatal services), and parent and family support services. They also provide early intervention services for children at risk or in need of specialist assistance, as well as child protection services and child care licensing and regulation.

State and territory governments are well placed to provide integrated service delivery for children and their families locally. The new COAG early childhood agenda provides a significant opportunity to achieve better integration between the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments.

2.2.4 What COAG is doing?

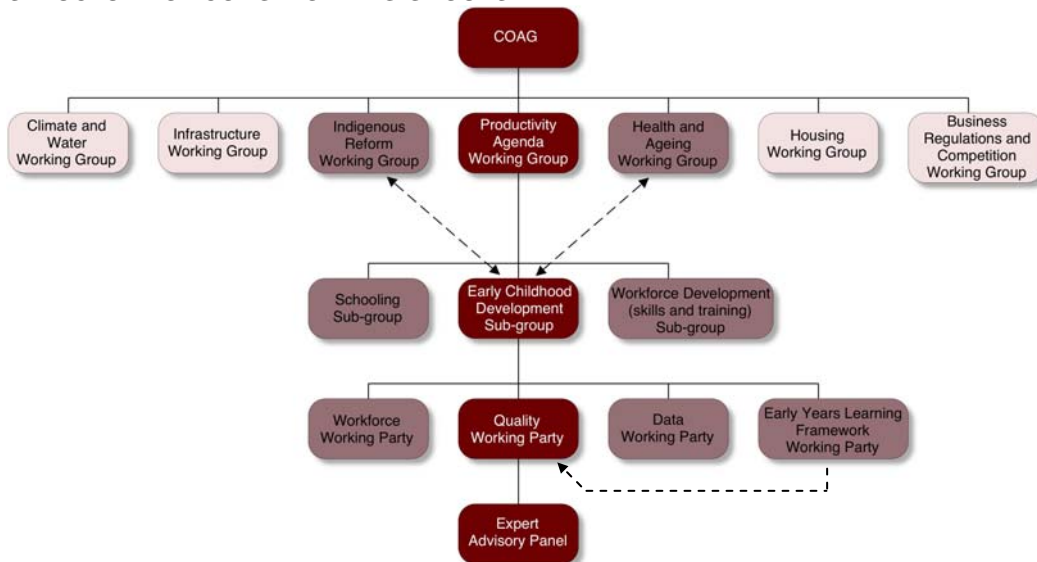
COAG's Productivity Agenda Working Group is responsible for delivering its early childhood agenda through the Early Childhood Development Sub-group.

The sub-group has developed plans for achieving universal access by 2013 to quality early childhood education in the year before schooling, with specific attention to addressing the barriers to access that face Indigenous and disadvantaged children. There is a Commonwealth commitment that this preschool program will be available fifteen hours a week for forty weeks a year and will be delivered by a four year degree qualified early childhood teacher in a range of settings, including long-day care centres and stand-alone preschool programs. The commitment to providing universal access to early learning programs will be complemented by reforms across the early childhood education and care sector, particularly with regard to quality. The sub-group has established four working parties to take forward the key action areas of data improvement, workforce, quality standards and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

Figure 2.1 shows the COAG working group structure and highlights the groups associated with the early childhood agenda and, more specifically, those directly working on the National Quality Framework.

Figure 2.1

STRUCTURE OF COAG WORKING GROUPS



In addition to working together to implement a number of the Commonwealth Government's early childhood education and care commitments, the Productivity Agenda Working Group has agreed to achieve universal access by 2013 to quality early learning programs for all children in the year before formal school as a COAG target. To progress COAG's early childhood agenda, the group has also agreed to five key policy directions. They are:

- improving antenatal care
- strengthening the health, development and learning of 0-5 year olds
- improving the quality and sustainability of the early years learning workforce
- enhancing and integrating the provision of early childhood education and care services
- boosting the participation of parents in the learning and development of their children.

The Productivity Agenda Working Group will also work in partnership with the COAG Indigenous Reform and Health Working Groups on related early childhood reforms. There is an emphasis on improving the lives of Indigenous Australians in many of the COAG reform processes, including two Indigenous-specific early childhood targets:

- to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years old within a decade
- to ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote Indigenous communities have access to a quality early childhood education program within five years.

At its July 2008 meeting COAG agreed⁶ in principle to a National Partnership, with joint funding of more than \$547 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. The National Partnership is based on evidence that improvements in Indigenous child mortality require better access to antenatal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services, child and maternal health services and integrated child and family services. Bilateral plans for implementing the reforms will be agreed between each jurisdiction and the Commonwealth for consideration by COAG in October 2008.

2.2.5 Expert Advisory Panel

While there are a range of mechanisms to facilitate stakeholder input to the COAG agenda, an Expert Advisory Panel on Quality Early Childhood Education and Child Care has been set up to provide advice to the Early Childhood Development Sub-group. The panel will advise on three key areas:

- an integrated and seamless system of licensing and accreditation within a national standards framework for early childhood education and care services
- options for draft quality standards for application in early childhood education and care settings
- options for a five-category rating system.

The panel is made up of experts in the field of early childhood education, practitioners from the early childhood sector, and state government representatives with expertise in child care and early childhood education regulatory arrangements.

⁶ COAG (2008), 3 July 2008 Communiqué, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/030708/index.htm>

Chapter 3 - Consultation process

3.1 Options for providing input

This discussion paper outlines some of the issues that have been identified in developing a National Quality Framework and a National Early Years Learning Framework, and poses a series of key questions that must be addressed in developing options. Additional input beyond the issues identified in this paper is welcome.

Input from a wide range of people and organisations is needed to ensure that the options developed will support the ongoing development of an efficient and effective early childhood education and care sector that achieves improved outcomes for children. Individuals and organisations interested in these reforms are strongly encouraged to contribute submissions toward developing these options.

3.1.1 Public consultation sessions

The reform agenda is a joint partnership between state and territory governments and the Commonwealth Government. Public consultation sessions based on the key questions in this paper will be held around the country in August and September 2008. Any interested party is invited to participate in these sessions.

For details of sessions, see www.deewr.gov.au/COAGforums or call 1800 220 425.

3.1.2 Written submissions

Written submissions from interested individuals and organisations are welcome. Submissions may simply express views in the contributor's own words or use the structured submission form in Appendix A. Details of the submission process are available on www.deewr.gov.au/COAGdiscussionpaper or by sending an email to ECECQualityReformSubmissions@deewr.gov.au

3.1.3 Focus groups

A number of focus groups will also be conducted with families currently using early childhood education and care services. The purpose of these sessions is to gain an in-depth understanding of the various needs and priorities of different families using childhood education and child care services. Focus groups will also be conducted with other key stakeholders.

In addition to these focus groups, families that wish to comment on the reforms should also feel free to participate in public consultation sessions and make written submissions.

Consultations targeting specific stakeholders (for example, peak bodies, early childhood academics and expert practitioners) may also be held.

3.2 What happens next?

Feedback from this consultation process will be taken into account in developing the National Quality Framework. It is expected that an exposure draft of the national quality standards and a rating system will be made available for public consultation later in the year. It is also expected that the broad direction of a more streamlined regulatory system will be publicly announced later this year.

Following national endorsement, the final framework is expected to be introduced from 1 July 2009.

Chapter 4 - Why is change needed?

4.1 The importance of quality early childhood education and care

The Early Childhood Development Sub-group recognises that the family is the most important factor in children's lives and development. Supporting families is, therefore, central to ensuring longer term outcomes for children. To increase Australia's productivity and global competitiveness parents with young children should be able to participate in the workforce, education and training. As a result, a significant proportion of children will be spending some time in formal or informal care from birth. It is essential that this care is of high quality.

There is now extensive evidence supporting the value of quality early childhood education and care, with numerous studies showing they improve short-term outcomes such as school readiness. Longitudinal studies have also shown the benefits on longer term outcomes⁷.

The benefits of early childhood education and care are most significant for disadvantaged children⁸. Early childhood education and care provides a valuable opportunity to overcome the disadvantage experienced by children from a very young age and to help put them on a positive pathway for life and learning, particularly where this is delivered across mainstream services.

Although the benefits for disadvantaged children are widely documented, research, particularly from the Canada and the USA, provides evidence about the importance of universal high quality ECEC services, particularly in the first three years of life. Studies have shown that the extent of children's language exposure in the early years has a significant effect on the verbal skills of children by age three, regardless of socio economic status⁹.

In recent years evidence has mounted that many children arrive at school less than well prepared across a range of school readiness indicators. Universal programs are likely to be more effective at identifying and reaching targeted children. Research also suggests that children from all socio-economic groups benefit from some time spent in high-quality children's services from the age of three¹⁰. The problems of low school readiness, low achievement and drop out rates are not limited to children from disadvantaged families¹¹.

The November 2006 OECD report *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, outlines the following advantages of universal early childhood education programs:

- A reduced risk of 'missing' at-risk children (who do not live in targeted neighbourhoods or whose parents just miss the cut off for subsidised services)
- Greater diversity within the classroom benefits all children.

The value of early childhood education and care extends beyond the individual. Significant economic and social benefits from investing in early childhood education are also important to consider — the rates of return in areas like health and education outcomes are much higher from early investments than those made later in life¹².

⁷ Sammons et al. (2007) *Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive and Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5*, at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe.

⁸ Waldfogel, J. (2004) *Social Mobility, Life Chances, and the Early Years*, CASEpaper 88, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, at <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case>; and Sylva, K. et al. 2007, *Promoting Equality in the Early Years: Report to The Equalities Review*, Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project (EPPE 3-11), at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe

⁹ Mustard, J.F., (2007) *Early Childhood Development*, A report to the Government of South Australia p12

¹⁰ Sammons et al. (2007) *Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive and Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5*, at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe.

¹¹ NIEER, (2004). *Preschool Policy Matters* Issue 6, April 2004 p.5

¹² Cunha, F., Heckman, J., Lochner, L. and Masterov, D. 2006, 'Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation', in E. A. Hanushek and F. Welch (eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Volume 1. Elsevier B.V.

It is clear that just attending early childhood education and care is not sufficient to ensure better developmental outcomes for children — it is the *quality* of the education and care that matters in delivering benefits¹³. Quality services have positive effects on children’s verbal, intellectual/cognitive, and social/behavioural development and, later, on their long-term success in school and life. Furthermore, children from disadvantaged backgrounds have been found to particularly benefit from high-quality services and they are also adversely affected by poor-quality services¹⁴.

While this discussion paper focuses on children from birth to five years and on formal care settings, the Early Childhood Development Sub-group also acknowledges that formal care provided through outside school hours care and family day care for school children are widely used. The standards will therefore also consider how best to enhance the delivery of these types of care.

4.2 Changing community need

Improving health and development outcomes for young children is the combined responsibility of parents, carers, and government on behalf of the community¹⁵. While parents have primary responsibility for raising children, carers also play a significant role. The role of government in formal early childhood education and care is to provide a comprehensive service system, regardless of setting, that responds effectively to the health and developmental needs of children in the years before formal schooling. The way parents, carers and government carry out this responsibility has an impact on children’s early learning and development, as well as later success in school and the workforce.

The early childhood education and care service system in Australia encompasses two sectors — child care and preschool — that have largely been planned, funded and delivered separately. Research literature and practice in other countries demonstrate that the delineation between child care and preschool rests in part on a false distinction between ‘education’ and ‘care’¹⁶. Children are ready and willing to learn wherever they are, and start learning from birth.

The boundaries between child care and preschool are blurring. In some jurisdictions, long day care can include a preschool program. With evidence mounting about the value of early childhood education, traditional child care settings need to refocus on learning and development. In addition, integrated models of care, such as wrap-around care and co-located services, are emerging to meet the needs of families. As the two sectors come together to service changing community need, families need to be able to expect a consistently high level of quality across all formal early childhood education and care settings.

¹³ Sammons et al. (2007) *Influences on Children’s Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive and Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5*, at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe.

¹⁴ Peisner-Feinberg, E., Burchinal, M., Clifford, R., Yazejian, N., Culkin, M., Zelazo, J., Howes, C., Byler, P., Kagan, S., & Rustici, J. (1999). *The children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study go to school*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.; and Sammons, P., Smees, R., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Elliot, K. (2003). *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project, Technical Paper 8b: Measuring the impact on children’s social behavioural development over the pre-school years*. London: Institute of Education/DfES.

¹⁵ Victorian Government (2007), *Victoria’s Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood*, Melbourne.

¹⁶ OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II: Early Education and Care*, OECD, Paris

4.3 Fragmented regulatory arrangements

The Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments fulfil different roles and responsibilities in early childhood education and care¹⁷ (refer to Box 4.1).

Box 4.1

CURRENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Commonwealth Government's role and responsibility for child care includes:

- paying Child Care Benefit (CCB) to families using approved child care services and registered care
- paying Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR) to eligible families using approved child care
- funding the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) to administer quality assurance systems for child care services
- funding organisations to provide information, support and training to service providers
- providing operational and capital funding to some providers.

State and territory government roles and responsibilities vary across jurisdictions. However, generally they are responsible for preschool services. Other roles and responsibilities may include:

- licensing and setting standards for children's service providers
- monitoring and resourcing licensed or funded children's service providers
- providing operational and capital funding to non-government service providers
- delivering some services directly
- developing new child care and preschool services
- providing information, support, training and development opportunities for providers
- providing curriculum and policy support and advice, as well as training and development for management and staff
- planning to ensure the appropriate mix of services is available
- providing information and advice to parents and others about operating standards and the availability of services
- providing dispute resolution and complaints management processes

4.3.1 The role of the Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for quality accreditation of child care through the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC). This accreditation covers the quality of the service, with the aim of ensuring children have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that nurture all aspects of their development.

Accreditation applies to long day care, family day care and outside school hours care sectors only, and applies only to services providing care that attract the Child Care Benefit. Accreditation schemes are different for each care type.

The Commonwealth Government also has a role in early childhood education and care following the Government's commitment to: a national Early Years Learning Framework; universal access to early learning for all children in the year before formal schooling; initiatives to enhance the early childhood education and care workforce; and measures aimed at enhancing Indigenous early childhood education and care.

¹⁷ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2008), *Report on Government Services 2008*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

4.3.2 The role of state and territory governments

State and territory governments currently regulate child care through state and territory based licensing systems. These licensing systems cover the requirements that must be met before a child care service can commence operations, such as building and safety requirements and on-going monitoring of compliance with regulations relevant to each jurisdiction. Violation of these requirements can result in a service being closed.

State and territory governments variously also fund, regulate or have responsibilities for preschools. As noted above, while the situation varies between states and territories, preschools are predominately subject to a regulatory system different from that of child care.

4.3.3 Why the current arrangements are unsatisfactory

The current arrangements for setting, assessing and monitoring quality in the early education and care sectors are fragmented and complex. This complexity stems from:

- shared responsibility for regulating early childhood education and care between the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments (refer to Box 4.1)
- different regulatory arrangements for different services within the early childhood education and care sectors.

In particular, the current arrangements involve significant overlap between Commonwealth Government and state and territory government activities. For example, policies and practices are often checked by both licensing and accreditation. This is particularly problematic from the service providers' perspective because it imposes an increased and unnecessary administrative burden and may reduce the focus on quality.

In addition, there are some gaps or inconsistencies across Australia. For example, some child care sectors are not licensed in some jurisdictions and some, such as home or occasional care services, do not participate in the accreditation system. Moreover, for the most part, preschools are subject to different regulations and standards than child care services.

4.3.4 Reforms to early childhood education and care

The early childhood development work being progressed by the Early Childhood Development Sub-group of COAG has focused to date on early childhood education and care. Box 4.2 provides the shared goals developed to guide the work of the sub-group.

ECD SUB-GROUP GOALS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

- Establish an overarching concept of early childhood education and care that integrates child care and preschool
- Expand access to early learning, and build a culture that prioritises early learning as the foundation for human capital development
- Support parents to engage actively in their child's learning and development from birth
- Ensure parents who wish to work or study have access to affordable, quality early childhood education and care for their children
- Focus on improving quality in early childhood education and care
- Grow the capacity of the early years workforce to deliver exceptional early learning and care, including providing ongoing training and development
- Ensure that early childhood education and care plays a central role in local community development and community life, and is closely linked to other local services
- Tackle disadvantage through early childhood education and care
- Support parental choice and encourage diversity in the provision of early childhood education and care services
- Ensure that continuing development of early childhood education and care is based on the best possible evidence, research and evaluation

4.4 Objectives and key elements of a new national quality framework

In December 2007 COAG agreed to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development, to deliver significant improvements in human capital outcomes for all Australians¹⁸. The Early Childhood Development Sub-group considers that this can be achieved through the development and implementation of a national quality framework:

- to enhance learning and development outcomes for children in different care settings, with an initial focus on early learning in the years prior to formal schooling
- to build a high-quality, integrated national quality system, including accreditation, for early learning and care that takes account of setting, diversity of service delivery and the age and stage of development of children.

This discussion paper sets out three key elements of the National Quality Framework:

- strong quality standards for early childhood education and care
- a quality rating system to drive continuous improvement and provide parents with robust and relevant information about the quality of care and learning
- streamlining or integrating licensing and accreditation arrangements.

The framework is intended to deliver:

- accountability for funding in early childhood education and care services

¹⁸ COAG (2007), 20 December 2007 Communiqué, Council of Australian Governments' Meeting, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/201207/index.htm>

- reassurance for consumers (families and children) about the quality of early childhood education and care services
- certainty for businesses about national regulatory requirements in the provision of services
- an increase in the quality of service over time, including the professional development of the workforce and a culture of continuous improvement among early childhood and care services.

A National Quality Framework is just one part of the COAG reforms to early childhood education and care. Implementation of the standards will be closely linked to workforce strategies to enhance the skills and qualifications of the early childhood workforce. The standards will also reflect and incorporate new *Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines* and an Early Years Learning Framework currently being developed.

At the heart of the reforms is the need to put the child at the centre of policy development and the delivery of services. It is essential to develop a system with a greater focus on outcomes, and that the new standards should reflect this focus. The Early Childhood Development Sub-group recognises, however, that there is also the need to specify certain types of inputs — such as the qualifications of staff and child-to-staff ratios — that have been proved to be key factors for achieving quality.

The OECD supports a system with a greater focus on outcomes, so that early childhood services are founded not only to facilitate labour market participation or other aims but, above all, to improve the present and future wellbeing of children¹⁹.

4.4.1 The contemporary international focus of early childhood programs

The 2006 OECD report *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* is a review of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in 20 OECD countries. It describes the social, economic, conceptual and research factors that influence early childhood policy. The report identifies seven aspects of quality and regulation that are important for evaluating early childhood systems:

- Orientation to quality: the level of attention that government brings to early childhood policy through national legislation, regulation and policy initiatives
- Structural quality: program standards or the overarching structures needed to ensure quality in early childhood programs
- Educational concept and practice: the education approach is generally guided by a national curriculum framework
- Interaction between process and quality: the quality of interaction between early childhood staff and children
- Operational quality: management that focuses on responsiveness to local need
- Child-outcome quality or performance standards: early childhood services not only facilitate labour market or other aims but improve the present and future wellbeing for children
- Standards pertaining to parent/community outreach and involvement: where early childhood education staff work in partnership with families and the community to provide appropriate quality services.

Chapter 5 provides more discussion on the approach to developing the new quality standards in the context of these findings.

4.5 Transitions to a new system

The proposed reforms are a significant change for the early childhood education and care sector. There are also significant challenges to overcome. For instance, services currently not part of the regulatory system will need to be included, the early childhood workforce will need time and resources to develop capacity to implement changes, and services across the sector will need transition and implementation support.

¹⁹ OECD (2006) *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Child Care*, November 2006.p.127.

The reforms will require well thought-out transition arrangements that implement the new agenda without negatively impacting on services, staff and families. A key task of the Early Childhood Development Sub-group is to understand the potential impacts of implementing these changes on early childhood education and care services and the support the sector will need. The feedback received will help design a transition strategy that reflects the wide variety of needs and concerns of services and families, including appropriate sectoral support.

4.5.1 Timing

Initial consultations on the framework will be undertaken during August and September 2008. The input from the consultations, together with advice from the Expert Advisory Panel, will inform the development of draft quality standards, a model for a rating system, and the approach to streamline or integrate licensing, regulation and accreditation arrangements.

These draft proposals will be the basis for further consultation during October and November 2008. Final approval of the reforms will then be sought at the COAG meeting in December 2008. Implementation of the standards and rating system is scheduled for 1 July 2009.

Chapter 5 - What are appropriate quality standards for early childhood education and care?

5.1 Introduction

It is essential that strong quality standards underpin a National Quality Framework. This paper seeks input on the content and coverage of these new standards.

5.2 Content

As outlined in Chapter 4, early childhood education and care improves outcomes for children, particularly disadvantaged children, as well as benefiting society more broadly. However, the evidence also shows that the quality of these early childhood education and care experiences is of key importance²⁰. Research shows that a quality early childhood environment provides for the basic needs of children, including health and safety, positive relationships and opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience²¹. Research also shows that prime structural indicators of the quality of formal care, sometimes referred to as the 'iron triangle', are staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios and group size. As noted earlier, the OECD highlights these factors, as well as educational concept and practice, interaction and process quality, child outcome quality or performance standards, and standards pertaining to parent/community outreach and involvement.

The Early Childhood Development Sub-group of COAG considers that any new standards system must focus on the key drivers of quality and must be simple to administer and understand.

The way quality is defined and reflected in the standards is a key issue for consideration. The current reforms reflect a shift in focus from child care to early childhood education and care, with a focus on the broader outcomes for children. The standards will need to apply to a broader range of care settings, including early childhood education programs for children in the year before school provided in long day care centres and stand-alone preschool services. Having a greater focus on early childhood education and broader outcomes will also assist children in making the transition to school.

These are the main areas that make up a quality system and new national standards could therefore include the following:

- Leadership and management – which would include service governance, commitment to continuous improvement, planning and evaluation, and business management
- Relationships between staff and children – this would include the extent to which a service promotes positive and meaningful interactions between staff and children and the engagement of children in the program
- Family and community partnerships – how a service promotes the engagement of families in the development and delivery of programs, and the development and maintenance of links to the community more generally
- Differentiated play-based curriculum – including the implementation of the new Early Years Learning Framework, and ongoing planning and evaluation of learning programs
- Physical environment – a service's physical space; the way in which the physical environment engages children in learning experiences, and the extent to which the physical environment reflects the context of the community

²⁰ Sammons et al. (2007) *Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive and Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5*, at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe.

²¹ <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECERS/>

- Staffing requirements and arrangements - including professional development, staff qualifications, and staff stability.

The standards will also cover health and safety and other licensing requirements relating to the general operation of services and the wellbeing of children in care.

5.3 Coverage

In March 2008 COAG approved, as a basis for further work, implementation plans for an integrated set of quality standards across all early childhood education and care settings²². However, there are a wide variety of service types within the sector. Different service types operate in different settings, provide different types of services to different age groups, and are currently regulated and accredited under different arrangements. This poses considerable challenges in developing an integrated set of quality standards. While it is intended that the new standards will apply to all service types, the focus of the Early Childhood Development Sub-group at this stage has been on service provision for children aged 0-5. However, the Early Childhood Development Sub-group acknowledges that consideration will need to be given to school-age children in formal care settings.

Particular challenges may exist in integrating quality standards for:

- child care services currently outside the accreditation system, including services that receive direct funding to operate in areas where the market would otherwise fail to deliver
- centre-based care with standards for care provided in other settings such as family day care and outside school hours care
- early childhood education programs for children in the year before formal schooling, delivered in long day care centres
- stand-alone preschools or those located within a school environment and which have traditionally been regulated separately from child care services, commonly by state education departments.

An additional challenge for an integrated system is to ensure that, in extending coverage to all services, including those currently not accredited, existing quality benchmarks are not diluted.

5.3.1 The importance of early learning and transition to school

It is recognised that children learn from birth and that there is a clear need to optimise early childhood environments, at home and elsewhere, to maximise the potential for learning and development.

To support this, a national Early Years Learning Framework will identify the most effective conditions for children's learning and development based on current research. It will recognise the importance of play-based learning, communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) as well as personal, emotional and social development. Part C of this discussion paper describes the proposed outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework in more detail.

One of the goals of the proposed framework is to ensure that children are better prepared prior to commencing their first year of formal schooling. Research has established the importance of early years in laying the foundation for children's subsequent achievement in schooling and for the future. Quality early learning experiences provide a significant basis from which foundations of literacy, numeracy, learning, behaviours and future life opportunities can be developed. More information about this research is available in chapter 12.

A central Commonwealth Government commitment is to ensure that, by 2013, all children will have access to 15 hours of a quality early childhood education or 'preschool' program per week, for 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling. This program is to be planned and delivered by four-year degree-qualified early childhood teachers and accessible through a range of settings, government and non-government, including long day care centres and stand-alone preschool services.

²² COAG (2008), 26 March 2008 Communiqué, Council of Australian Governments' Meeting, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/260308/index.htm>

This commitment refers to a structured play-based preschool program with specific quality elements consistent with the above definition. This is in keeping with international best practice and is important for facilitating a smooth transition to formal schooling. Play-based learning is integral to the delivery of early learning programs for children from birth and in all care environments. Play is one of the vehicles through which young children make sense of their world but it is nonetheless a planned, purposeful, high-quality program.

The role of early childhood educators is also a critical element of quality. Because they are skilled in early childhood learning and development, early childhood teachers are able to continually monitor the progress of each child and provide learning and development experiences that maximise their potential. They have an important role in providing feedback to parents about their child, and in helping the child make the transition to formal schooling through the provision of information to parents.

Additionally, governments are making a substantial investment to ensure that children have the opportunity to access a quality early learning experience to maximise their chances of a successful transition into formal schooling. It is important, therefore, that for transparency and accountability purposes, the key features of quality described above are present and well defined in an early childhood setting.

5.4 Questions

Content

- What do you consider to be key drivers of quality that should be included in the standards? Do you agree with those listed in section 5.2 of this paper (i.e Leadership and management, Relationships between staff and children, Family and community partnerships, Differentiated play-based curriculum, Physical environment, Staffing requirements and arrangements)? Can you suggest others?
- How should the increased focus on early childhood education and care and outcomes for children be reflected in the new standards?
- Given that preschool can be delivered across a range of settings, what is the best way of monitoring and reporting on preschool delivery for four year olds (that is, in the year before formal school)?

Coverage

- What are the considerations in applying an integrated set of standards across all service types, including family day care, outside school hours care, Indigenous services, etc? Possible considerations: health and safety, physical environment and staffing standards in different settings, integrating preschool and child care.
- Would a core set of standards supplemented by service-specific standards overcome these barriers? For example, a modular approach which sets out a common core set of principles, supplemented by specific modules for each service type.
- What other options are there for an integrated set of quality standards?
- How could the standards take account of the age of children?

Impacts

- What are the potential impacts of the introduction of a new set of quality standards on early childhood education and care services? Possible considerations: workforce, financial viability, implementation arrangements, service provision.
- What are the particular issues with changes to the 'iron triangle' structural indicators of quality: staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios, and group size? Possible considerations: workforce, training, relative costs and benefits of each indicator.

Transitions to a new system

- What transition arrangements do you consider appropriate for implementing the proposed changes? What timeframe might be required to fully implement all changes? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transition arrangements? Possible consideration: professional support program.

Chapter 6 - How should service quality be rated?

6.1 Issues

6.1.1 What is the Commonwealth Government doing about a rating system?

The Commonwealth Government announced funding in the 2008-09 Budget to support the development of an A—E quality rating system, which will provide parents with a simple, clear and independently assessed ratings that will enable them to assess the quality of child care and make a better informed choice about where they send their children. The rating system will help drive higher quality early childhood education and care services.

6.1.2 Why is a rating system necessary?

Three objectives have been proposed to guide the development of the quality rating system for early childhood education and care:

- Indicator of service quality — the rating system should summarise a service's achievements in a meaningful way across the scope of the quality standards and regulatory framework
- Continuous improvement in the early childhood education and care sector —the rating system should drive continuous improvement and innovation in the sector
- Information for families and communities — the rating system should provide families and communities with robust and relevant information about the quality of education and care in early childhood settings and facilitate consumer choice.

6.1.3 Design of a rating system

The design of an A—E quality rating system requires consideration of several issues:

- the linkages with the standards — e.g. how the rating system measures quality based on the standards and whether the rating system should consider other elements of service provision in addition to the standards
- the proposed model for streamlining or integrating licensing, regulation and accreditation — how the rating system may incorporate achievement of licensing and accreditation requirements
- the 'qualities' of services at each level — how the levels reflect graduations in quality
- whether the same assessment processes are used for all ratings or whether higher ratings are made using processes such as peer review
- whether assessment at higher levels is a standard part of the assessment process which applies to all levels or takes place by voluntary participation.

There is also a need to consider what principles should be applied to ensure the rating system meets its objectives. Box 6.1 outlines possible principles that could underpin a rating system.

Box 6.1

POSSIBLE PRINCIPLES FOR A RATING SYSTEM

To meet the objectives of providing a reliable indicator of service quality, driving continuous improvement and providing information to parents, the rating system should:

- *Recognise and encourage high quality:* In conjunction with the quality standards (across an integrated system), the rating system should encourage/drive/support/promote a high level of quality as a basic requirement for all service providers
- *Communicate relevant information in a meaningful format:* Information on program quality processes and outcomes will inform policy making and implementation and facilitate families' and communities' understandings about early childhood programs, and inform their service choice
- *Be evidence based:* The rating system should reflect and build the evidence base for an early childhood education and care system that is both high quality and cost effective
- *Apply a consistent framework flexibly across service types:* A single program quality framework should accommodate a range of requirements e.g. remote, Indigenous, etc (as opposed to setting differing and lower standards for non-mainstream services).
- *Encourage partnerships:* The rating system should be built through a partnership between governments, families, communities and providers.

6.1.4 Possible approaches

There are a number of possible approaches to a rating system, which can be grouped into two broad streams:

- assessment against standards
- attainment/building block

In designing a system, the Early Childhood Development Sub-group will assess existing rating systems, including those applying to the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors, as well as international examples.

Box 6.2

EXAMPLE OF A RATING SYSTEM

A voluntary two-tiered excellence rating system is currently being introduced in the Australian VET sector. It includes excellence criteria, which provide a further incentive for registered training organisations to achieve high levels of quality or seek recognition for their existing good-quality practice. High-performing organisations can be recognised as quality committed or outstanding.

Under the **assessment against standards** approach, assessment would be measured against an agreed set of quality standards, with the result graded. At its simplest, services would be given a grade against each standard, and then scores against all standards would be averaged out to give a final rating. Particular standards might be weighted to reflect their relative importance in ensuring quality outcomes.

An alternative approach is the **attainment or building blocks** approach. Under this approach, assessment would be against the attainment of specific outcomes, assessed on a 'pass' or 'fail' basis, with each outcome equating to a level within the rating system. These outcomes, such as passing licensing requirements, meeting minimum standards and then exceeding standards, would be the building blocks of a quality service. Services

would generally need to meet requirements at one level before they could be assessed against requirements at the next level. This approach may offer greater transparency and is likely to be simpler.

A rating system could combine elements of each of these approaches. Assessment based on attainment might be required for entry requirements such as meeting licensing requirements and complying with required quality standards, with a measurement approach to assess higher levels of quality, such as the degree to which a service exceeds the required quality standards.

The publications of ratings would drive continuous improvement. The design of the rating system also allows for linking to additional incentives and rewards to encourage continuous improvement or progression up the ratings scale. The rating system could also include methods for managing unsatisfactory or poor performance, ranging from increased support to help services address problem areas through to penalties for systemic or repeated non-compliance. Examples of incentives might be financial payments, access to resources for research, staff development and mentoring of other services. Penalties might include the withdrawal of access to Child Care Benefit, or changes to licensing conditions.

6.1.5 Challenges in introducing a rating system

The development of a rating system of this type needs to include a thorough assessment of the advantages and potential risks. There are issues for both families and service providers that need to be addressed appropriately as the system is being developed. These issues are discussed below.

For families

The rating system needs to be designed to provide families with meaningful information about the types of services available and a valid, defensible indication of the quality of that service. This provides an opportunity to educate families about the importance of high-quality early childhood education and care and what constitutes such quality in early childhood education and care settings.

However, there is a risk that this type of rating system will have unintended and potentially negative impacts on families. The rating system will need to address concerns from families about the level of confidence they can have in a service. Consequences include potentially undermining a family's confidence in services — especially when the choice of service is limited. Another possible risk is that introduction of ratings may contribute to changing behaviours, such as parents exiting the workforce rather than using a service that only meets basic benchmarks instead of the highest ranking.

For services

There are obvious advantages to services under such a rating system, including:

- recognition of services that have been delivering consistently across the whole of the service
- recognition of exceptional services
- demonstration of quality to current and potential customers.

However, there are also risks for services and families associated with the rating system, including:

- increased demand for higher ranked services
- increased fees for higher ranked services
- perceptions of decreased access to high-quality services for children whose family cannot afford higher ranked services
- the way in which families respond to differential quality in services throughout the system
- financial viability of some services.

6.2 Questions

Objectives

- What do you think should be the objectives for a rating system? Do you agree with the objectives listed in section 6.1.2 (Indicator of service quality, Continuous improvement in the early childhood education and care sector, Information for families and communities)?
- Which objective is the most important? For example, is informing parental choice of service the primary objective?

Design issues

- What principles do you think should underpin the design of the rating system?
- How should services be rated against standards? What should the rating system look like in order to achieve its objectives? Possible considerations: measurement, attainment or other approaches, how the rating system will link to the standards, accreditation and licensing.
- What kind of information should the rating system provide to parents and others in the sector? Possible considerations: grades of quality at each level e.g. A—E, incentives for continuous improvement.
- What potential risks are there in introducing a rating system? How could potential negative implications be minimised?
- Who should carry out the rating process and why?

Coverage

- Should the rating system include all services in the early childhood education and care sector e.g. long day care, preschool, family day care, outside school hours care, Indigenous services, etc? What are the implications of bringing all service types under one rating system?

Impacts

- What are the potential impacts on early childhood education and care services? Possible considerations: workforce, financial viability, implementation arrangements, service provision.

Transitions to a new system

- What transition arrangements do you consider appropriate for implementing the proposed changes? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transitions?
- What timeframes are required to allow services to make the transition to a new rating system?

Chapter 7 - How can we improve the overall regulatory approach?

7.1 Issues

The introduction of a National Quality Framework will require the streamlining or integration of current licensing and accreditation arrangements for the early childhood education and care sector.

Streamlining involves reducing the overlaps in current arrangements by clearly defining and separating the respective roles of the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments. Current gaps could also be filled in this process. Each government would then undertake its respective role but the overall efficiency of the system would be improved.

Integration involves whole-of-system change. It would bring licensing and accreditation together under a single set of national quality standards, which cover the whole scope of operations. An integrated approach should lead to improved overall quality and consistency across states and services. Integration would involve a change of legislative and administrative arrangements and would need to be implemented over time

New national quality standards and a rating system are expected to be introduced from 1 July 2009 — integrated arrangements, if agreed, would take longer than this to be fully implemented. As such, a streamlined approach could be adopted as an interim measure if an integrated approach is sought in the medium-to-long term.

Decisions about streamlined or integrated arrangements will impact on the scope and nature of the quality standards and the rating system to be developed as part of a National Quality Framework:

- in an integrated model the quality standards would be redefined to integrate elements currently covered in the licensing and accreditation requirements;
- in a streamlined model the current separation of roles would continue to exist with greater clarity about where each of the components (structure and process) sits.

7.1.1 Governance and delivery

Governance and delivery arrangements under a streamlined or integrated approach will also need reforming. Options for this reform may include:

- a national early childhood education and care regulatory body jointly governed by the Commonwealth and states and territories to provide oversight of a new system
- legislative framework changes — legislation may be required to implement the new approach, but how that legislative framework is designed may vary greatly. This may range from seeking greater consistency between jurisdictional legislation to implementing an agreed single legislative framework which may involve changes in responsibilities of Governments, and
- new compliance mechanisms — the reforms, particularly under an integrated model, will promote increased compliance across the full scope of quality standards (currently covered separately under licensing and accreditation). For example, a new regulatory approach could involve greater emphasis on supporting and educating service providers and families, and using a risk-based approach to target services not likely to meet requirements. There could also be a wider suite of actions, ranging from support to varying sanctions, which would be used judiciously. A new regulatory approach could also involve only one administering agency, reducing overlaps and red tape for services.

7.2 Questions

Streamlining or integration

- What are the current issues or problems with the existing regulation, licensing and quality assurance system?
- What changes to the structure of the quality assurance system would you suggest to increase consistency, effectiveness and efficiency across service types and/or jurisdictions? How might these changes affect you or your service? Possible considerations: administration, governance and delivery arrangements, reducing administrative duplication.

Transitions to a new system

- What would be issues for you in moving to a streamlined or integrated system? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transitions? How much time should be allowed for the sector to make the transition to the new system? Possible considerations: implementation arrangements, service provision.

Chapter 8 - How do we develop the workforce for a new quality early childhood education and care system?

8.1 Implications for the early childhood education and care workforce

There is increasing acceptance that a well-trained workforce is essential for fostering the best outcomes for children. Key drivers of quality include staff qualifications and experience, child-to-staff ratios, group size and management capability. If requirements in these areas are strengthened there will be implications for the early childhood and care workforce and demand for qualified staff will increase.

In addition, an increasing number of children are accessing early childhood education and care services each year, leading to increasing demand for early childhood professionals. The COAG commitment to universal access to early learning is likely to further drive demand for trained teachers.

8.1.1 What barriers must be overcome?

There are significant demand, supply and retention issues for early childhood education and care professionals. For example:

- Demand for early childhood teachers is strong in most jurisdictions and will only get stronger with the implementation of arrangements to support universal access to early childhood education programs
- The level of remuneration
- Child care workers have been in short supply across the nation for many years
- Job turnover is high – over one in five child care workers leave the occupation every year
- While there has been growth in enrolments in Certificate III child care courses, enrolments in Diploma child care courses have fallen since 2002²³
- The early childhood education and care workforce comprises both qualified and unqualified staff, with staff shortages more significant among qualified staff.

8.1.2 How can the barriers be addressed?

In response to systemic issues surrounding early childhood workforce development, the Commonwealth Government announced a package of measures worth \$126.6 million over four years in the 2008-09 Budget to help build the highly skilled and capable workforce necessary to implement COAG's early childhood reform agenda.

While this package provides a significant first step in addressing the issues in developing the early childhood education and care workforce, more needs to be done. To this end, a Workforce Working Party, comprising the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments, has been established under the auspices of COAG (refer to Figure 2.1).

The Workforce Working Party will develop a National Early Years Workforce Strategy by the end of 2008. The strategy will build on the work of the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council (published as the *National Children's Workforce Study*) and will provide a long term blueprint to improve recruitment and

²³ NCVET (2006) unpublished data from the 2006 Vocational Education and Training Provider Collection.

retention of the early childhood workforce, develop pathways that reward and support the best workers, and raise the level of qualifications.

8.2 Questions

Workforce

- How could the status and recognition of the early childhood education and child care workforce be raised?
- What could be done to address limited advancement options and career paths?
- What possible approaches could be used to improve retention strategies?
- What strategies could be adopted to increase the numbers of Indigenous child care workers and teachers?
- What is the likely impact of any suggestions on the price of and demand for services?
- What possible approaches could be used to address shortages of early childhood teachers in regional and remote areas, long day care services and community preschools?

Chapter 9 - What is the purpose of a National Early Years Learning Framework?

9.1 Background

Governments across Australia recognise the impact of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) on children's lives, including their later school success and long-term life chances. Governments have also recognised the requirement to improve outcomes for Indigenous and disadvantaged children in our society.

The quality of ECEC is driven by a range of interdependent factors^{24 25} including

- the qualifications and training of staff²⁶
- the quality of interactions and relationships between children and ECEC professionals^{27 28 29}
- group size and child-to-staff ratios^{30 31}
- the physical environment³²
- the programs or curricula that support children's learning and development
- connections with family and community
- leadership and management
- health and safety requirements.

These factors are the focus of the quality standards reforms being developed for consideration by COAG.

The Early Years Learning Framework is a key component of the quality reform agenda and will identify the most effective conditions for children's learning based on current research. It will recognise the importance of play-based learning, communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy), as well as personal, emotional and social development.

The development of the Early Years Learning Framework is being progressed through the Early Years Learning Framework Working Group, which reports to the Early Childhood Development Sub-group and to the COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group. Membership of the Early Years Learning Framework Working Group

²⁴ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne

²⁵ OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris.

²⁶ Tayler C., Wills M., Hayden J. and Wilson C. (2006), *A review of the approach to setting national standards and assuring the quality of care in Australian childcare services*, A project commissioned by the Children's Services Sub-Committee of the Community Services Minister's Advisory Council

²⁷ Sylva K. et al (2004), *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*, Sure Start, London.

²⁸ Thorpe, K. et al. (2004), *Preparing for school: Report of the Queensland preparing for school trials 2003-2004*, Queensland University of Technology.

²⁹ Tayler C., Cloney D., Thorpe, K. and Wilson C. (2008), *Early childhood intervention programs: towards a cost-benefit analysis for Australia*, MCEETYA Secretariat, Melbourne.

³⁰ Mooney A. et al (2003), *Early years and childcare international evidence project: Quality*, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, paper for UK Department for Education and Skills, London.

³¹ Phillippsen L., Burchinal M., Howes C. and Cryer D. (1997) 'The prediction of quality from structural features of child care', *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 12, 281-303.

³² Shonkoff, J & Phillips, D. (2000), *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. National Academy Press, Washington, DC.

consists of the Australian Government and all states and territories. This discussion paper has been developed in collaboration with the Australian and state and territory Governments.

The process to develop the framework involves three stages.

The first stage involves both the development of this discussion paper and national stakeholder consultation.

This part of the discussion paper builds on a review of existing early years learning and curriculum frameworks across Australia and a number of other countries conducted by RMIT University³³ and a commissioned paper by Monash University and a broader writing group³⁴.

The second stage is to develop a draft framework. The findings from the first stage, including input from consultations will be used to develop the draft framework. A second round of consultation will occur later in 2008 to obtain input from the early childhood sector on the draft.

The third stage will involve trialling and validation of the Early Years Learning Framework in selected sites in each jurisdiction in early 2009. The final framework will be developed on the basis of the lessons from the trial and validation period.

This discussion paper is based on the most recent research and evidence on the benefits and importance of the early years in a child's development and future success. There is now overwhelming evidence supporting the value of quality ECEC. Numerous studies have shown the benefits of ECEC in improving short-term outcomes such as children's school readiness and school success. Longitudinal studies have also shown the benefits of ECEC for longer-term outcomes³⁵. The benefits are most significant for disadvantaged children³⁶. There is also a wide range of research that shows which quality early experiences for children create the best learning outcomes. Chapter 10 provides information on the research informing the development of the framework.

9.2 What is the framework intended to achieve?

A National Early Years Learning Framework is an early childhood curriculum framework which will guide early childhood educators³⁷ in developing quality early childhood programs in a range of early childhood education and care settings. It will enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age, including in early childhood education programs in the year before formal schooling, as well as their transition to school.

The framework will improve the integration of ECEC services through a consistent focus on individual and group learning and development for children in all ECEC settings. It will also enhance the professional profile and approach of the early years workforce through a common understanding of child development and learning, and consistent practice and language. It will outline the desired outcomes for children in ECEC settings across the birth to five age range, including the year before formal schooling, and enhance their transitions to school.

It will inform parents, families and all Australians about young children's learning. ECEC services will draw on the framework and associated resources to assist in planning and describing children's learning to parents, families, communities and government.

The framework will underpin the National Quality Standards and the COAG commitment to universal access to quality early learning in the year before formal schooling.

³³ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne.

³⁴ Fler, M., Edwards, S.; Nuttall, J.; Cullen, J.; Elliott, A.; Hammer, M.; Maloney, C.; Martin, K.; Winter, P. & Carr, M. (2008). A Research Paper to inform the development of An Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Monash University: Melbourne.

³⁵ Sammons et al. (2007), *Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive and Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5*, at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/epepe.

³⁶ Waldfogel, J. (2004). *Social Mobility, Life Chances, and the Early Years* (Case Paper 88), Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion: London [School of Economics at <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/CP/CASEPaper88.pdf>](http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/CP/CASEPaper88.pdf); Sylva, K. et al. (2007), *Promoting Equality in the Early Years: Report to The Equalities Review, Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project* (EPPE 3-11), at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/epepe

³⁷ Note: The term 'Educators' is used throughout the document to describe all professionals who work with children in early childhood education and care and also includes parents as first teachers.

9.3 How will the framework link to existing state and territory curriculum frameworks and program guidelines for the early years?

The Early Years Learning Framework will be an overarching document that describes the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning.

It will provide the opportunity for states and territories to review their existing frameworks and supporting material in the light of the national work. It is expected that states and territories will embrace the national framework to ensure a consistent and coherent approach.

9.4 Questions

- What philosophy would you want an Australian framework to use? (eg. would it focus on ages and stages of development; a socio cultural approach; or domains of learning eg physical, social, emotional and cognitive?)
- What form or format should the Early Years Learning Framework take that would be most useful to you in guiding your programming for young children?
- How prescriptive do you think the Early Years Learning Framework needs to be? Do you have a preference for the actual length of the framework?
- What type of supporting documents/resources would be most valuable for parents and others working with young children (e.g. family day carers, playgroups)? Do you have any views on the format and size of such documents?
- Do you see any issues with the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework in all education and care settings from July 2009? What suggestions would you offer to overcome these issues?

Part C: A National Early Years Learning Framework

Chapter 10 - What contemporary research informs the development of the framework?

10.1 The importance of the early years

The early years last a lifetime. Although this statement can be dismissed as a truism, it is profoundly significant. There is now an impressive body of evidence, from a wide range of sources, demonstrating that early child development affects health, wellbeing and competence across the balance of the life course³⁸.

Research has established the importance of the early years in laying the foundation for children's subsequent achievement in schooling and for the future³⁹. Quality early childhood learning experiences provide a significant basis from which foundations of literacy, numeracy, learning, behaviours and future life opportunities can be developed⁴⁰.

10.1.1 Impact on short-term outcomes

There is now overwhelming evidence supporting the value of quality ECEC. Numerous studies have shown the benefits of ECEC in improving short-term outcomes, such as children's school readiness and school success.

Effective transition to school programs as part of ECEC have the potential to help children – and their families and communities – feel comfortable, valued and successful in school. Rather than a package to be delivered, school readiness is viewed as a process with multiple participants and multiple perspectives. These are:

- Children's readiness for school
- School's readiness for children, and
- Family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness⁴¹.

10.1.2 Impact on longer term outcomes

Longitudinal studies have also shown the benefits of ECEC on longer term outcomes⁴². The benefits are most significant for disadvantaged children⁴³. ECEC provides a valuable opportunity to overcome the disadvantage experienced by children from a very young age and to help put children onto a positive pathway for life and learning, particularly where this is delivered across mainstream services⁴⁴.

³⁸ Hertzman, C. (2004) *Making Early Childhood Development a Priority: Lessons from Vancouver* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: Ottawa, Ontario.

³⁹ Raban, B. (2000) *Just the Beginning ...*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs: Canberra.

⁴⁰ Walker, K. (2004) *National preschool education inquiry report – For all our children* AEU: Victoria.

⁴¹ Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2007) *Transitions to school: Perceptions, expectations, experiences* University of NSW Press: Sydney.

⁴² Sammons et al. (2007) *Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive and Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5*, at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe

⁴³ Waldfogel, J. (2004) *Social Mobility, Life Chances, and the Early Years* (Case Paper 88), Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion: London *School of Economics* at <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/CP/CASEPaper88.pdf>; and Sylva, K. et al. (2007), *Promoting Equality in the Early Years: Report to The Equalities Review, Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project* (EPPE 3-11), at www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe

⁴⁴ Sylva, K.; Melhuish, E.; Sammons, P.; Siraj-Blatchford, I.; & Taggart, B. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*. DfES: London.

10.1.3 Economics of human capital formation – the need to invest in early childhood

There is increasing recognition of the social and economic benefits of investing in early childhood. The rates of return are much higher from early investments than those made later in life⁴⁵. It has been argued that a nationwide commitment to high-quality early childhood development would have a substantial long-term payoff⁴⁶. The early years of children's learning and development needs to be seen as important in their own right as well as being a foundation for life outcomes⁴⁷. During the early years children inquire, explore and discover much about the world around them, establishing attitudes to learning that remain with them throughout their lives⁴⁸.

Cost-benefit studies show that prevention and early intervention strategies are more effective than treatment programs with clear, flow-on benefits for individuals, families and the broader community. On the basis of an extensive analysis of the evidence, research concludes that investing in quality early childhood programs, particularly for disadvantaged children, has a high economic return.

10.1.4 What the brain research says

Evidence from the neurosciences highlights the first five years as an important period for developing emotional control, attachment to others and language, with the first three years particularly critical⁴⁹. The brain builds itself through rich experiences, whereas stressful experiences in the early years have adverse effects on brain development, consequently impacting on long-term development⁵⁰. Optimum brain development is dependent on positive, nourishing and stimulating environments, coupled with stable, nurturing and responsive relationships.

Young children develop primarily through their relationships with the important people in their lives — their parents and families, their peers and well-trained early childhood professionals⁵¹. These relationships are the 'active ingredients' of the environment's influence on healthy human development⁵².

10.1.5 Significance of the period from birth to the age of three

Caring for infants and toddlers is serious work with significant consequences. Carers of infants and toddlers influence how children come to view and participate in the learning process⁵³. Children in their very early years are particularly vulnerable to all experiences, through both the presence and absence of opportunities. What is

⁴⁵ Cunha, F., Heckman, J., Lochner, L. and Masterov, D. (2006) 'Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation', in E. A. Hanushek and F. Welch (eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Volume 1. Elsevier B.V.

⁴⁶ Lynch, R.G. (2004) *Exceptional Returns: Economic, Fiscal, and Social Benefits of Investment in Early Childhood Development*, Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. http://www.ourfuture.org/docUploads/epi_kids_report.pdf;

Lynch, R.G. (2005). *Early Childhood Investment Yields Big Payoff*. *WestEd Policy Perspectives* WestEd: San Francisco, California: http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/pp-05-02.pdf; Cunha, F., Heckman, J.J., Lochner, L.J. and Masterov, D.V. (2005) 'Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation' in E. Hanushek and F. Welch (Eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Amsterdam: North Holland.

⁴⁷ Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Death, E., Dockett, S., and Farmer, S. (2008) *Programming and Planning in Early Childhood Settings*, Thomson, Southbank Victoria.

⁴⁸ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne

⁴⁹ Shonkoff, J. (2006) *The science of early childhood development: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do*. Presentation at the Early Childhood Forum, 3 March 2006. Melbourne; and Mustard, J.F. (2006) *Early child development and Experience-based brain development: The scientific underpinnings of the impact of early child development in a globalised world*. The Brookings Institution: Washington DC.

⁵⁰ Sims, M. (2007) *Emotional wellbeing: The role of early childhood education professionals*, Edith Cowan University: Western Australia.

⁵¹ Bennett, J. (2004) *UNESCO Policy brief on early childhood: Curriculum in Early Childhood Education and Care*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001374/137401e.pdf>

⁵² National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) 'Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships', NSCDC Working Paper No. 1. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Brandeis University: Waltham, Massachusetts.

⁵³ Lally, J.R. (2007) 'Teaching and caring: Responding to both the vulnerability and competence of infants and toddlers'. *Childcare and Children's Health*. Melbourne, Centre for Community Child Health: Victoria; and Winter, P (2003) *Curriculum for babies and toddlers: an evaluation of the first phase of the South Australian curriculum, standards and accountability framework in selected childcare centres in South Australia*, PhD dissertation University of South Australia, Magill.

included or excluded from their learning has a lasting effect on what and how children develop, learn and understand. The first three years is a time of great opportunity⁵⁴. “Every moment in which an adult provides care to a young infant is a moment rich with learning⁵⁵.”

Relationships are of primary importance to children’s learning and development. Children in the first three years grow and change rapidly and are dependent on adults to meet their physical and emotional needs, more than in any other period of their lives.

Research shows that children from birth to the age of three derive long-term benefits when support is provided to parents and where family capacity and community connectedness are strengthened. Services in the early years that deal with young children and families in a holistic way are more likely to achieve positive outcomes. Effective and respectful partnerships with parents and caregivers are key building blocks for children’s effective learning.

Research shows there are four factors that make a difference in learning for infants and young children⁵⁶:

- relationships between educators and children, including their families
- the understanding educators have and the practices they use to help children learn and develop
- children’s wellbeing while they are attending ECEC services
- children’s involvement in interactions, activities and experience with adults and other children at the service.

10.2 Dispositions

Dispositions are enduring habits of mind that we develop. They are fostered in trusting relationships when children feel safe, participate, take risks and where they succeed⁵⁷. Shaping of positive and robust dispositions in the early years has a positive impact on children’s educational and social outcomes. Dispositions such as curiosity, openness, optimism, risk taking, resilience, concentration and creativity begin at birth⁵⁸.

The development of positive dispositions is central to quality early childhood experiences⁵⁹. Children who come from rich and engaging early childhood educational environments have the foundations laid to become successful learners on their life-long journey. They start school with an eagerness to learn and the dispositions to be fully engaged in their learning⁶⁰.

Access to a variety of open-ended resources, large amounts of time, and opportunities for sustained and shared conversation with educators who are reliable learning partners foster positive dispositions for learning. The identification of creative and challenging environments provides opportunities for educators to explain, orchestrate, commentate on and model learning responses in partnership with children⁶¹

⁵⁴ Lambert, B. & Clyde, M. (2000). *Rethinking early childhood theory and practice*. Social Science Press: Katoomba NSW.

⁵⁵ Lally, J.R (2007) ‘Teaching and caring: Responding to both the vulnerability and competence of infants and toddlers’ *Childcare and Children’s Health Vol. 10 (3)* p. 2 Melbourne, Centre for Community Child Health: Victoria.

⁵⁶ Winter, P (2003) *Curriculum for babies and toddlers: an evaluation of the first phase of the South Australian curriculum, standards and accountability framework in selected childcare centres in South Australia*, PhD dissertation, University of South Australia, Magill.

⁵⁷ Duncan, J.; Jones, C.; & Carr, M. (2008) ‘Learning dispositions and the role of mutual engagement: Factors for consideration in educational settings’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 9 (2), 107-117.

⁵⁸ Katz, L & Chard, Sylvia C (2000: 36) *Engaging Children’s Minds: The Project Approach* Greenwood Publishing Group

⁵⁹ Elliott, A (2006) *Early Childhood Education – Pathways to quality and equity for all children*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Victoria.

⁶⁰ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne

⁶¹ Claxton, G & Carr, M. (2004). A framework for teaching learning: the dynamics of disposition. *Early Years*. 24(1).

10.3 Key components of quality early childhood programs

Nationally and internationally, there has been a focus on providing quality programs for young children. The qualifications and competency of early childhood educators to implement quality programs are critical⁶². Also critical are the interactions with children and a number of principles underpinning quality learning for young children.

10.3.1 Early childhood professionals have an active role in promoting sustaining programs

Play is one of the vehicles that educators use to promote conceptually-focused programs. This in turn, builds progression in sustained shared thinking. Observation, participation and interaction also contribute to such programs. Where early childhood professionals take a more active role in children's learning during play, important long-term outcomes are realised. Conceptually-sustaining programs mean encouraging exploration, risk taking, socialisation and engagement with resources. Conceptually-sustaining programs also draw on relevant cultural resources and learning practices to provide opportunities for exploring processes and concepts, to develop positive dispositions to learning and to use literacy and numeracy in a range of contexts.

10.3.2 Engaging, responsive and reciprocal relationships

Although all children learn, they learn better with the support of others⁶³. Research confirms the social nature of early childhood learning⁶⁴ and identifies the role of talking and working with others as important in the process of learning. Quality early childhood programs involve both teaching and the provision of intentional learning (i.e. the educator has concepts in mind and pedagogical progression as they work with young children) as well as play environments and routines. The most highly-qualified staff provide the most direct teaching but also the kind of interactions that guide but do not dominate children's thinking. It is during periods of sustained shared thinking that both parties contribute to the thinking while developing and extending the discourse⁶⁵.

10.3.3 Partnerships with parents and involvement of families to ensure culturally and linguistically responsive programs and the creation of relevant and meaningful learning experiences

Improved outcomes for children occur when families and early childhood professionals work together. Evidence shows that centre/school, family and community partnerships are the key levers for high-quality outcomes for a diverse range of children⁶⁶. Collaboration can also lead to the development and provision of programs that engage children in early learning by relating to their particular experiences, background and culture.

10.3.4 Acknowledgement of the diversity of ways in which development proceeds and the integrated nature of children's development

Valuing children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity means acknowledging the diversity of ways in which development proceeds. Consideration must be given to the relationship between children's experiences and how these experiences shape their development⁶⁷.

⁶² Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne.

⁶³ Fleer, M. & Raban, B. (2005). *Literacy and numeracy that counts from birth to five years: a review of the literature*. Department of Education, Science and Training: Canberra.

⁶⁴ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne.

⁶⁵ Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004). *Quality teaching in the early years*. In Anning, A., Cullen, J., Fleer, M. *Early Childhood Education, Society and Culture*. Sage Publications: London, UK.

⁶⁶ Biddulph, F, Biddulph J & Biddulph C. (2003). *The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand: Best evidence synthesis*, Ministry of Education: Wellington, NZ.

⁶⁷ Fleer, M. and Williams-Kennedy, D. (2001) *Building bridges: Literacy development in young Indigenous children* Early Childhood Australia

10.4 Developing content and concept knowledge

Parents, culture and language have a powerful influence on achievement. Early childhood programs that put particular emphasis on literacy, numeracy, science and environment have also been found to promote better outcomes for children in their subsequent academic attainment⁶⁸. Young children have a natural curiosity about science, engineering and technology concepts. Engaging them in early learning generates deeper learning and better learning outcomes during the later school years⁶⁹.

Research shows that high-quality experiences occur when staff understand fundamental concepts in areas where children are curious and look for opportunities to foster concept formation during children's play⁷⁰.

Today's information and communication technologies are an integral part of children's lives. Finding ways to use these technologies to optimise and extend children's development and learning must therefore be considered⁷¹. Consideration must also be given to environmental issues and sustainable living that impact significantly on children's lives and are key features of children's concept development.

10.5 Questions

- Is the analysis of the trends in the literature accurate and comprehensive? Are there any other issues in the research relevant to the development of the framework?
- Do you support a focus on language and communication development, social development and play-based learning in the framework?
- How would you define the roles of the educator and the child in the learning process in the framework?

⁶⁸ Sylva, K.; Melhuish, E.; Sammons, P.; Siraj-Blatchford, I.; & Taggart, B. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*. DfES: London.

⁶⁹ Fleer, M. & March, S. (2007). *An investigation of the feasibility of extending the Primary Connections programme to preschool settings*. DEEWR Report

⁷⁰ Cullen, J. (2007). 'Literacy debate in the early years: The New Zealand context'. In R. Openshaw & J. Soler (Eds.), *Reading across international boundaries: History, policy and contexts* (pp. 111-128). Information Age Publishing Inc: Charlotte, NC.

⁷¹ Elliott, A. (2003). *Learning with Computers*. Research in Practice Series. 10 (4).

Chapter 11 - Foundations for the framework

11.1 Introduction

The optimal development of children requires quality early learning experiences from birth in all early childhood education and care environments. As a critical first step the Commonwealth has committed to ensuring that by 2013 all children have access to an affordable, quality early childhood education program for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year in the year before formal schooling. This commitment emphasises a structured play-based preschool program with specific quality elements, including delivery by a four year degree-qualified early childhood teacher, and accessible through a range of settings. The commitment is in keeping with international best practice and is important for facilitating a smooth transition to formal schooling.

The Early Years Learning Framework will underpin this commitment and will be linked to the National Quality Standards to ensure delivery of nationally-consistent quality early childhood education across a range of settings, including formal preschool and long day care, whether in the government, non-government, private or community sectors.

11.2 What is our shared vision for children's early learning?

An agreed vision for early learning and development for all children and their families is fundamental to the development of a national Early Years Learning Framework.

This discussion paper seeks the views of stakeholders and the general public on a suitable vision for early learning and development as part of the framework. The following are current Australian and overseas examples of visions for children's early learning and development:

All children in Australia live as respected individuals and members of society and have access to early learning opportunities that honour childhood as a crucial period in the lifespan and establish foundations for successful participation in society⁷².

Children are competent and capable learners⁷³.

All children should develop a desire and curiosity for learning, and confidence in their own learning⁷⁴.

Children thrive, learn and grow⁷⁵.

⁷² The Early Years Learning Framework Sub-group (2008) Working papers

⁷³ C&K (2006) *Building Waterfalls – a living and learning curriculum framework for adults and children (birth to school age)* Newmarket, Queensland, p30

⁷⁴ OECD (2006) *Starting Strong II* describing Swedish pre-schools (Martin-Korpi, 2005a) p.139

⁷⁵ DEECD (2007) DEECD Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform, Victoria

11.3 What values will underpin the framework?

In developing our vision this paper considers the proposed values to underpin the Early Years Learning Framework. These values reflect the evidence base in relation to early childhood development and a range of existing government commitments and priorities. These include:

- the international rights of children
- respect, compassion and empathy for all
- promoting social inclusion
- recognising Indigenous cultures and identities
- the agency of children (which acknowledges the voices of children as active members of society), and
- a strong partnership between parents, professionals, families and communities.

These are described in more detail below.

11.3.1 The rights of the child

A number of rights are outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Australian Government ratified the convention in December 1990 and it became binding on Australia in January 1991. The framework will reflect the convention, with particular acknowledgement of these rights that are directly relevant to formal early childhood education settings. These are:

- A child's right to education. The state undertakes to take measures to make primary, secondary and higher education and vocational guidance accessible to all.
- Education should be directed to development of the child's personality and abilities, preparation of the child for responsible life, and development of respect for his or her parents, for human rights, for the natural environment and for his or her own cultural and social identity and values and those of others.
- Children of minority communities and Indigenous populations have the right to enjoy their own culture, practise their religion, and use their own language, in community with others of their group.
- The child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate in cultural and artistic life.
- A child capable of forming his or her views has the right to express those views and have them taken into account in all matters affecting children.
- The best interests of the child are to be a primary consideration in all measures concerning children. The state is to provide appropriate care if parents or others responsible fail to do so, and to ensure that institutions for the care and protection of children meet appropriate standards.

11.3.2 Respect, compassion and empathy for all

With regard to ECEC settings, respect, compassion and empathy means:

- children are respected as competent and capable learners,
- children are encouraged to develop respect, compassion and empathy for other children,
- early childhood educators model behaviours by demonstrating respect and esteem for children, parents, colleagues, families and communities, as well as openness to different ideas, perspectives and ways of encouraging expression, and
- early childhood educators are respected as competent and capable teachers, with specific skills and knowledge to stimulate children's learning and guide behaviour.

11.3.3 Promoting social inclusion

Recognising the particular value that high quality early learning has for all children, particularly disadvantaged children, the Early Years Learning Framework will promote inclusive practices including recognition and respect for diversity. The framework will specifically recognise that:

- children are entitled to equality of access to high-quality ECEC programs,
- high quality ECEC programs can increase children’s wellbeing, security, development and learning maximising their opportunities later in life,
- learning opportunities need to be tailored so that they
 - are relevant to individual children
 - acknowledge and engage with children’s specific cultural background
 - respond to special or additional needs.

11.3.4 Cultural recognition and identity for Indigenous children

This value promotes inclusive practices including recognition and respect for diversity with particular emphasis on the need to respect and honour Indigenous heritage, cultures and languages. Early childhood education programs need to be culturally appropriate, recognise and be responsive to the diverse circumstances and requirements of Indigenous communities and families. They should also be designed to enhance Indigenous children’s learning and development and their successful transition to formal schooling.

11.3.5 Agency of children

Young children are capable of being self-directed and self-motivated. These capabilities are present at birth and are significantly affected by different social environments and some innate factors such as temperament⁷⁶. Children are able to form opinions and express and respect ideas. They are also able to develop a connection to their country and a sense of place within it and a sense of agency and will be supported to do this safely. Children’s voices will be respected, heard and acted upon.

In the early years, children are developing their understanding of cause and effect and their interdependence with others and their environments. They are also developing the skills and understandings they need to establish positive peer relationships. Children are capable of collaborating with others, using feedback, deliberating, planning and persisting in learning.

The framework will encourage educators to create opportunities for children to recognise and solve problems and conflicts and to practise these emerging competencies, to build their confidence as learners and encourage the development of positive dispositions.

⁷⁶ Winter, P (2001) *Shifting the quality of education and care for babies and toddlers in centre based childcare with a new curriculum framework*, World Congress of OMEP 21-24 July 2004

11.3.6 Partnership between educators, parents, families and the community

ECEC in formal settings is most effective when child-related information is shared between parents and staff, and parents are involved in decision making about their child's learning program. Parents can then support children at home with activities or materials that complement experiences and educators can support the child in ECEC.

In order to build effective partnerships, the Early Years Learning Framework will encourage:

- collaboration and reciprocity in relationships with parents and families
- recognition that early childhood educators working with parents can bring together their different and complementary understanding about a child to optimise that child's learning and development
- the development of ECEC settings as meeting places for family and community by encouraging organisations and staff members to
 - share satisfying and reciprocal interactions through partnerships with families and communities
 - welcome others and contribute to a sense of community and collaborative decision making
 - affirm, foster and share multiple perspectives, meanings and lifestyles
 - share respect for nature, sustainability and outdoor environments as critical to our present and the future
 - provide continuity, consistency and stability⁷⁷ of staff and relationships.

11.4 Questions

- What would you want included in the framework's vision for early learning and children?
- Would you support the values and rights proposed to underpin the framework?
- What other values or rights would you want included and why?

⁷⁷ C&K (2006) *Building Waterfalls – a living and learning curriculum framework for adults and children (birth to school age)* Newmarket: Queensland, p.30

Chapter 12 - Building the Framework

12.1 What will be the components of the Early Years Learning Framework?

Early learning and curriculum frameworks vary in their approaches to shaping practice⁷⁸. The focus of international early childhood curriculum frameworks depends heavily on the individual nation, with some orientated towards specific learning outcomes and others towards the development of personal attributes and learning dispositions.

It is proposed that the national Early Years Learning Framework will describe what we want children to know, understand and be able to do and set out the most effective ways for educators to optimise children's learning and development.

It is proposed that the framework adopt an approach to learning, teaching, assessing, documenting and planning that is based on individual children's strengths. It will be an overarching document that provides the basis for national consistency across the years from birth to the age of five and during transition to school. It will promote early childhood education and care programs that are relevant locally, socially and culturally. It will be informed by current research and encourage ongoing reflection by the sector, and research about early learning. The framework will include an emphasis on the birth to three years of age as well as a preschool component that will prepare children for a successful transition to school.

Across the world, learning frameworks have been developed with an emphasis on children aged three to five. In line with a review of existing early years learning and curriculum frameworks across Australia and a number of other countries, the national Early Years Learning Framework should emphasise learning for children from birth to the age of five (see Chapter 10).

12.1.1 What are the desired outcomes for children?

The Early Years Learning Framework will outline the desired outcomes for children in ECEC settings across the birth to five years of age, including the year before formal schooling, and as they make the transition to school.

Children's learning experiences and outcomes from birth to the age of five will differ according to their unique capabilities, current learning, interests, community contexts and environment.

The following five outcomes, reflecting the key areas of children's learning and development, are proposed for the framework.

- Children develop physical wellbeing and a range of physical competencies
- Children are effective communicators
- Children are creators, thinkers and problem solvers – and use a variety of media to physically, aesthetically and creatively express themselves
- Children develop an interdependent understanding of self
- Children have a positive sense of self and others and are active participants within society.

These outcomes are broad accomplishments. They reflect the integration of learning and development and are inter-related, and so do not stand alone. Children's learning in relation to each of these outcomes will also be demonstrated with increasing complexity as they grow and develop.

⁷⁸ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne.

12.2 What proposed key themes will the Early Years Learning Framework promote in practice?

Current research has informed the development of the proposed key themes that will inform the structure of the framework. This research confirms the social nature of early childhood learning⁷⁹ and identifies relationships as important in supporting the processes of learning.

It is proposed that the Early Years Learning Framework address five key themes critical to optimising learning. They are:

- strong and capable children
- respectful and trusting relationships
- shared and sustained learning
- connected contexts and people, and
- focussed, active and reflective educators.

The first four themes relate to children while the fifth encompasses the role of early childhood educators, including parents and families, in their daily interactions with children.

12.2.1 Strong and capable children

This theme provides a view of the inherent strengths and capacities of all children. It acknowledges and builds on the following understandings:

- children are competent and capable and start learning from birth
- every child has unique capabilities that should be valued and maximised
- a strong sense of social and cultural identity as well as belonging is central to children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual wellbeing
- children represent their thinking and learning in many ways, and
- children's positive and robust dispositions about themselves and towards learning contribute to their success in life and learning.

12.2.2 Respectful and trusting relationships

This theme recognises the importance of relationships between educators and children, between children themselves, and between educators, parents, families and communities.

- Warm and responsive early relationships are crucial for children's current wellbeing and their success as learners
- Children's friendships and relationships with peers are critical
- Reciprocal family and community connections promote children's health, learning and wellbeing
- Building bridges between the ways of knowing and learning of the home, family and community, and the ways of knowing and learning of the early childhood program, is essential for supporting children's social and cultural identity.

⁷⁹ Wilks, A., Nyland, B., Chancellor, B., & Elliott, S. (2008). *Analysis of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years (Birth to age 8)*. Unpublished paper, RMIT University: Melbourne.

12.2.3 Shared and sustained learning

This theme emphasises that learning styles and strategies, and sustained interactions and high expectations inform children's learning.

- Play provides a platform for children and teachers to participate in meaningful learning
- Children's active participation and deep involvement in learning are beneficial to their success as learners
- Children learn best through interactions with others who have high expectations of them, challenge their ideas, add complexity to their thinking and lead to new levels of learning
- Children's learning is maximised when early childhood educators identify learning moments and harness these as they arise within the learning environment⁸⁰.

12.2.4 Connected people and contexts

This theme acknowledges the importance of culture and connectedness to children's learning.

- Culture shapes every child — their identity, heritage, language, knowledge and relationships are respected and celebrated
- Inclusive and connected learning environments evolve in partnership with parents, families and communities and build on socially and culturally valued approaches to living and learning⁸¹
- The starting point for all learning is what children already know, understand and can do
- Children are global citizens with shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity⁸².

12.2.5 Focussed, active and reflective educators

The Early Learning Framework will acknowledge and build on educators' professional knowledge and skills and encourage strategies to extend children's learning. These strategies should:

- promote a culture of learning through active engagement in the learning process,
- provide children with opportunities to learn in a variety of ways, interweaving play with intentional teaching,
- map children's learning in the teaching and learning process and engage children, parents and families as active participants in documentation and reflection,
- model curiosity, demonstrate a love of learning and practise professional inquiry⁸³, and
- shape inclusive, stimulating and enabling learning environments that evolve from cultural approaches to living and learning.

12.3 What accountability, assessment and documentation will be included in the framework?

The Early Years Learning Framework is one aspect of supporting the national early childhood quality reform agenda. As part of professional accountability, ECEC services will use the framework to assist in planning and describing children's learning to children, parents, families, communities and government.

⁸⁰ Qld Department of Education, Training and the Arts, (2008) *Foundations for Success – guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities*, DRAFT, Queensland government, p17

⁸¹ Qld Department of Education, Training and the Arts, (2008) *Foundations for Success – guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities*, DRAFT, Queensland government p.6

⁸² ECA Code of Ethics, 2006

⁸³ Qld Department of Education, Training and the Arts, (2008) *Foundations for Success – guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities*, DRAFT, Queensland government p3.

The outcomes and key themes, together with supporting evidence, will provide educators with reference points to map and assess children's progress and set broad goals for individuals. The key purpose is to plan for current and future learning and to describe children's learning and progress to children and families. Regular and ongoing assessment is required to facilitate this planning and will describe young children's learning. In order to support this planning, the framework will outline a range of processes for assessing children's learning and progress.

The approach to assessment will be ethical and consider children's holistic development. The framework, including assessment processes, will acknowledge and respond to the cultural and individual context of each child. The outcomes of assessment processes should describe how children are developing, help to identify and understand their strengths and provide a mechanism for identifying current and future learning experiences that will help children develop.

It is proposed that multiple assessment procedures will be included. Children and parents will be actively involved in assessment and documentation of the things that matter most in children's learning. The framework will consider the importance of how children are assessed, with a preference for observations in play-based settings as a vital form of assessment. Children's strengths and competencies will be acknowledged in the assessment process and built upon in the learning environment.

12.4 Questions

- How should the curriculum framework provide guidance and strategies to meet the various learning and development needs of children including those with special needs, English as a second language, and/or challenging behaviours?
- Is it appropriate for children's learning to be assessed? If yes, how should children's learning and development outcomes be assessed?
- How would you ensure the curriculum framework is appropriate for all educators, regardless of qualifications?
- What kind of professional development will need to be provided in order to support educators in using an Early Years Learning Framework?

Appendix A

Form for written submissions (optional)

Information about the submission

Please provide your details below. Consider providing your name, your organisation (if relevant) and your contact details. If you include your contact details you may receive correspondence in relation to outcomes of the consultation process, the development of the reforms or future consultation opportunities.

Name	
Organisation	
Address	
Phone	
Email	

You may remain anonymous if you choose, and your submission will still be considered.

Your interest

Please outline the nature of your interest in the early childhood education and child care sector. For example, you might be a child care provider, a member of a family using long day care or family day care, or an academic with an interest in early childhood education and care issues.

If you choose to remain anonymous you may still wish to provide some details around the nature of your interest in the early childhood education and care sector, as this may assist in understanding your comments.

Consultation questions – National Quality Framework

Strong quality standards

Content

- What do you consider to be key drivers of quality that should be included in the standards? Do you agree with those listed in section 5.2 of this paper? (Leadership and management, Relationships between staff and children, Family and community partnerships, Differentiated play-based curriculum, Physical environment, Staffing requirements and arrangements) Can you suggest others?
- How should the increased focus on early childhood education and care and outcomes for children be reflected in the new standards?

- Given that preschool can be delivered across a range of settings, what is the best way of monitoring and reporting on preschool delivery for four year olds (that is, in the year before formal school)?

Coverage

- What are the considerations in applying an integrated set of standards across all service types, including family day care, outside school hours care, Indigenous services, etc? Possible considerations: health and safety, physical environment and staffing standards in different settings, integrating preschool and child care.
- Would a core set of standards supplemented by service-specific standards overcome these barriers? For example, a modular approach which sets out a common core set of principles, supplemented by specific modules for each service type.
- What other options are there for an integrated set of quality standards?
- How could the standards take account of the age of children?

Impacts

- What are the potential impacts of the introduction of a new set of quality standards on early childhood education and care services? Possible considerations: workforce, financial viability, implementation arrangements, service provision.
- What are the particular issues with changes to the 'iron triangle' structural indicators of quality: staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios, and group size? Possible considerations: workforce, training, relative costs and benefits of each indicator.

Transitions to a new system

- What transition arrangements do you consider appropriate for implementing the proposed changes? What timeframe might be required to fully implement all changes? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transition arrangements? Possible consideration: professional support program.

A quality rating system

Objectives

- What do you think should be the objectives for a rating system? Do you agree with the objectives listed in section 6.1.2 (Indicator of service quality, Continuous improvement in the early childhood education and care sector, Information for families and communities) ?
- Which objective is the most important? For example, is informing parental choice of service the primary objective?

Design issues

- What principles do you think should underpin the design of the rating system?
- How should services be rated against standards? What should the rating system look like in order to achieve its objectives? Possible considerations: measurement, attainment or other approaches, how the rating system will link to the standards, accreditation and licensing.
- What kind of information should the rating system provide to parents and others in the sector? Possible considerations: grades of quality at each level e.g. A—E, incentives for continuous improvement.
- What potential risks are there in introducing a rating system? How could potential negative implications be minimised?
- Who should carry out the rating process and why?

Coverage

- Should the rating system include all services in the early childhood education and care sector e.g. long day care, preschool, family day care, outside school hours care, Indigenous services, etc? What are the implications of bringing all service types under one rating system?

Impacts

- What are the potential impacts on early childhood education and care services? Possible considerations: workforce, financial viability, implementation arrangements, service provision.

Transitions to a new system

- What transition arrangements do you consider appropriate to implement the proposed changes? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transitions?
- What timeframes are required to allow services to transition to a new rating system?

Streamlined and/or integrated licensing and accreditation arrangements

Streamlining and/or integration

- What are the current issues or problems with the existing regulation, licensing and quality assurance system?
- What changes to the structure of the quality assurance system would you suggest to increase consistency, effectiveness and efficiency across service types and/or jurisdictions? How might these changes affect you or your service? Possible considerations: administration, governance and delivery arrangements, reducing administrative duplication.

Transitions to a new system

- What would be the issues for you in moving to a streamlined or integrated system? What supports for the early childhood education and care sector do you think would assist these transitions? How much time should be allowed for the sector to make the transition to the new system? Possible considerations: implementation arrangements, service provision.

Workforce

Workforce

- How could the status and recognition of the early childhood education and child care workforce be raised?
- What could be done to address limited advancement options and career paths?
- What possible approaches could be used to improve retention strategies?
- What strategies could be adopted to increase the numbers of Indigenous child care workers and teachers?
- What is the likely impact of any suggestions on the price of and demand for services?
- What possible approaches could be used to address shortages of early childhood teachers in regional and remote areas, long day care services and community preschools?

Consultation questions – National Early Years Learning Framework

Purpose of the framework

- What philosophy would you want an Australian framework to use? (eg. would it focus on ages and stages of development; a socio cultural approach; or domains of learning eg physical, social, emotional and cognitive?)
- What form or format should the Early Years Learning Framework take that would be most useful to you in guiding your programming for young children?
- How prescriptive do you think the Early Years Learning Framework needs to be? Do you have a preference for the actual length of the Framework?
- What type of supporting documents/resources would be most valuable for parents and others working with young children (e.g. family day carers, playgroups)? Do you have any views on the format and size of such documents?
- Do you see any issues with the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework in all education and care settings from July 2009? What suggestions would you offer to overcome these issues?

Questions relating to research findings

- Is the analysis of the trends in the literature accurate and comprehensive? Are there any other issues in the research relevant to the development of the framework?
- Do you support a focus on language and communication development, social development and play-based learning in the framework?
- How would you define the roles of the educator and the child in the learning process in the framework?

Foundations for the framework

- What would you want included in the framework's vision for early learning and children?
- Would you support the values and rights proposed to underpin the framework?
- What other values or rights would you want included and why?

Building the framework

- How should the curriculum framework provide guidance and strategies to meet the various learning and development needs of children including those with special needs, English as a second language, and/or challenging behaviours?
- Is it appropriate for children's learning to be assessed? If yes, how should children's learning and development outcomes be assessed?
- How would you ensure the curriculum framework is appropriate for all educators, regardless of qualifications?
- What kind of professional development will need to be provided in order to support educators in using an Early Years Learning Framework?

Appendix B

Glossary of terms for a national quality framework

Access: A family is considered to have 'access' to early childhood education when a place is available in a quality early childhood education program where neither distance nor cost presents a barrier to attendance.

Agency: individuals exercise agency when they feel empowered to make choices and decisions⁸⁴.

Attendance: The number of hours a child is present in a preschool program, on a given day or across a defined period (for example a year). Approved absences would need to be taken into account (this could follow a schools model).

Child care: Broad interpretation includes Long Day Care (LDC), Family Day Care (FDC), Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Occasional Care.

Communication and language (including Literacy and numeracy): This includes oral, literacy and numeracy skills and competencies.

Curriculum: This refers to a planned course of action leading to certain outcomes for children, and includes what is desirable, how and why it should be learnt and how best it can be evaluated.

Diversity of settings: Preschool services delivered through the government or non-government sectors, where the latter includes community and private, for-profit and not-for-profit providers as well as the non-government schools systems, or through collaborative arrangements between Long Day Care or Family Day Care providers and preschools.

Early Childhood: The period from 0 to 8 years, encompassing the transition to school. The major policy focus will be on 0-5 years.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program: Structured, play-based education delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher and primarily undertaken in the 12 months prior to compulsory schooling (often referred to as 'preschool').

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): Incorporates preschool and child care for children aged 0-5 years. This term is widely used by UNESCO and the OECD as the overarching term for the education and care of all children from birth to eight years of age. In ECEC educators provide rich, systematic learning opportunities for children, experiences that progress and parallel the developing needs and entitlements that are relevant to the growing child's social and cultural context.

Early childhood educators: This is used to describe all the professionals who work with children in ECEC. It can include seeing parents (and any significant adult carer) as first teachers. In some instances the term early childhood professionals may be used.

Early Childhood Teacher: A teacher with a four-year university degree qualification in early childhood education.

Early learning: Refers to the 'education' children receive (from stimulation, experience and play-based activities) from birth to 5 years. The early years are critically important learning years as children are born learning and are naturally wired up to learn. Children's desire to learn is based on their need to make sense of the world and understand their own experiences. Children learn through their important relationships; they learn when they feel good and are engaged and motivated in what they are learning; and they learn when they are making sense of their world.

⁸⁴ The State of Queensland (Queensland Studies Authority), 2006, Early Years Curriculum Guidelines, Spring Hill, Qld

Enrolment: A child is on the 'roll' as attending a preschool program, or attends a child care centre at the time when a preschool program is delivered.

Four year old: Typically taken to mean children in the year before formal school starts (given school starting ages vary across jurisdictions).

Framework: This refers to the higher level structure or frame within which the programs or curriculum (the content and course of action) are based. A framework will be influenced by the vision, philosophy and the culture of the society related to the values, beliefs and aspirations for children and to their learning and development.

Integrated services: At the narrowest interpretation, means a combination of preschool and child care, but has the potential to refer to a much broader co-location (or direct relationship between) services for children and the parents of young children. The 2020 proposal for child and parent centres, which could include child care, preschool and child health services, is an example of a more broadly defined integrated service.

Intentional teaching: This provides opportunities for educators to purposefully and skilfully make learning explicit. It is crucial educators understand that a focus on intentional teaching does not preclude children's active involvement in the learning process.

Pedagogy: The function or work of teaching; the art or science of teaching, education instructional methods.

Personal, emotional and social development: These describe children's social and emotional development.

Play: In early childhood education and care play encourages exploration, risk taking, socialisation and engagement in learning. Play (both unstructured and structured) provides children with hands-on tasks enabling children to practise problem-solving, trying things in different ways and encourages children to attempt tasks with creativity. Through play children explore and reflect on interests and issues relevant to and meaningful in their lives. The role of adults is central in supporting and extending children's learning through play.

Preschool: Structured, play-based education delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher and primarily undertaken in the 12 months prior to formal schooling (alternative terms for preschool are used in some jurisdictions, such as kindergarten, pre-prep and reception).

Quality: A service — child care or preschool — is provided in accordance with the new and strengthened national quality standards, which are currently being developed.

Remote Indigenous Community: A community that is classified as either 'remote' or 'very remote' according to the MCEETYA remoteness structure, and also classified as an 'Indigenous Location' by the ABS.

Remote Indigenous Strategy: A plan for implementing the commitment to provide universal access to all four year olds living in remote Indigenous communities.

Universal Access: The Commonwealth Government has committed that, by 2013 every four year old will be able to access 15 hours a week of high-quality early childhood education, for 40 weeks a year, which will be delivered by a university-qualified early childhood teacher and across a diversity of settings, and be provided in a form that meets the needs of working parents and at a cost that does not present a barrier to any family.

The Commonwealth Government has the following national priorities for implementing universal access:

1. Improve access for Indigenous, 'at risk' and disadvantaged children, with a particular focus on access in remote communities
2. Reduce the proportion of children not receiving a program at all
3. Raise the average hours of attendance across all jurisdictions
4. Develop practical solutions to reduce cost as a barrier to access
5. Foster service integration across a range of models to assist the workforce participation of parents, and more effectively provide quality early childhood education and care services for children and families.

The order of these may differ on a state-by-state basis.