



Consultation on a Ten Year National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2021–30) – May 2021



National Children's Education
and Care Workforce Strategy

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1. What's this about?

The [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) opens with a simple, powerful statement – ‘Education has the power to transform lives.’ It commits all Australian governments to work with the education community to attract, develop, support and retain high quality teachers, educators and leaders in Australia’s education system.

Children’s education and care is an integral part of that system and sets the foundations for lifelong learning and development. It is also an area of significant government investment, as well as an essential contributor to the broader national economy.

State and territory governments regulate more than 16,000 children’s education and care services under the [National Quality Framework](#) (NQF). These include around:

- 8,000 long day care services, which typically cater for very young children until they start formal schooling
- 3,000 preschools/kindergartens, which typically cater for children in the year or two years before they start formal schooling
- 500 family day care services, which typically cater for small groups of very young children in an educator’s home until they start formal schooling

- 4,500 outside school hours care services, which typically cater for school aged children before and after they attend school, as well as during the school holidays.

Around 1.5 million children in Australia attend these services, with individual children attending anywhere from a few irregular hours to more than 50 hours every week.

More than 150,000 teachers and educators work in the children’s education and care sector, with most of the sector workforce being certificate III and diploma qualified educators, but an increasing proportion being degree trained teachers.

The national workforce strategy is a joint partnership between all governments, the children’s education and care sector, and other key stakeholders.

In December 2019, Education Ministers [endorsed](#) the development of a new national workforce strategy as a joint partnership between all governments, the children’s education and care sector, and other key stakeholders.

While a number of initiatives and strategies already exist in relation to the sector workforce, there is broad recognition that the breadth and complexity of workforce related issues require all stakeholders to collaborate on a jointly developed and jointly owned ten year national strategy.

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), on behalf of all governments, has been asked to lead the development of the new strategy, including stakeholder and public consultation.

ACECQA has undertaken extensive consultations with national sector stakeholders and government representatives. These two groups, in addition to ACECQA's [workforce report](#) findings in 2019, have shaped the potential actions and initiatives included in this consultation paper.

We now want your views on actions and initiatives that you believe will assist in improving the supply, attraction, retention and quality of the sector workforce.

Between **Monday 3 May** and **Monday 31 May 2021**, you and all interested parties are strongly encouraged to provide feedback via the [online survey](#).

ACECQA will analyse all feedback and use it to inform the development of the ten year workforce strategy (2021–30), which is scheduled to be considered by national sector stakeholders, government representatives and Education Ministers in the second half of this year.



2. What's the problem?

Consultations with the children's education and care sector over recent years have identified persistent and increasingly pressing issues with the attraction, supply and retention of educators and, in particular, teachers. There is also a need to balance an ongoing focus on workforce quality with meeting the demand for educators and teachers in a growing sector.

The [2019 Employment Projections](#) for the five years to May 2024 suggest that the children's education and care sector will require in the region of 30,000 additional educators (a 20% increase) and 7,000 additional teachers (a 16% increase). These projections do not take account of the impact of COVID-19 and may therefore not reflect current labour market conditions, however they are indicative of employment growth expectations prior to the global pandemic.

In the context of declining enrolments in approved qualifications (the number of enrolments in the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care declined by more than a third between 2016 and 2019, while commencement numbers for early childhood initial teacher training degrees in 2018 down by a quarter compared to 2012), the children's education and care sector faces significant and increasingly urgent workforce challenges. There has also been a notable increase in

staffing waivers in recent years (at the start of 2021, 6.3% of services had a waiver in place for one or more of the NQF staffing requirements, compared to 3.1% at the start of 2017).

There are persistent and increasingly pressing issues with the attraction, supply and retention of educators and, in particular, early childhood teachers.

The diverse makeup of the sector also adds significant complexity. For example:

- there are more than 7,000 providers approved to operate children's education and care services, with more than 80% of these approved to operate a single service
- one-third of all services are operated by large providers (those approved to operate more than 25 services), while 37% of services are operated by single service providers
- 'private for profit' providers operate two-thirds of long day care services, more than 60% of family day care services and around half of outside school hours care services, compared to only 2% of preschools/ kindergartens

- there are no national qualification requirements for outside school hours care educators, with state and territory requirements varying significantly (New South Wales and Tasmania do not have any qualification requirements for outside school hours care educators)
- preschools in Tasmania and most preschools in Western Australia are out of scope of the NQF, as are some other types of services nationally, such as occasional and in-home care.

All stakeholders – employers, higher and vocational education and training institutes, national, state and territory regulatory bodies and authorities, educators, teachers, unions and governments – have an important role to play in advancing the goal of a sustainable, highly skilled workforce.

Representatives of these stakeholders have been, and will continue to be, involved throughout the development, delivery and evaluation of the new national workforce strategy.

The success of the strategy relies upon meaningful collective action. All stakeholders will have an important role to play in advancing any agreed actions and initiatives, with the strategy's success a collective responsibility.

To complement this consultation, ACECQA has published an [online workforce snapshot](#) that brings together a range of different data sets to provide a sector workforce profile, as well as indicators relating to workforce demand and supply.



3. What's currently being done?

Governments are implementing measures to improve the supply, retention and quality of educators and early childhood teachers, including:

- tertiary scholarships
- traineeships
- grants programs
- financial incentives for students and employers
- professional learning programs
- targeted support for teachers located in regional and remote areas
- mental health and wellbeing programs
- communication campaigns to raise the profile of the sector
- new university, vocational education and training, and short course opportunities
- initiatives to connect job seekers with potential employers
- census and data collection activities.

Individual providers of children's education and care services, and other key sector stakeholders, also continue to invest in attracting, retaining and developing their educators and teachers, including:

- professional learning opportunities
- mentoring programs

- incentives to upskill, such as employer sponsored scholarships
- offering above award pay and conditions
- positive and supportive workplaces.

However, as highlighted in the [workforce report](#), the issue of workforce supply and quality continues to be a national problem.

Governments, individual providers and other key sector stakeholders continue to invest in a range of measures, however the issue of workforce supply and quality remains a national problem.

One of the main concerns raised regularly by the sector is the absence of an overarching national workforce strategy to offer economies of scale and provide solutions at a system level. Workforce issues and challenges are complex and enduring, and a coordinated, collaborative, long-term, Australia-wide approach is required to provide comprehensive solutions.

4. What's the goal of the new national workforce strategy?

A successful strategy will ensure that Australia's children's education and care sector has a sustainable, high quality workforce that meets the needs of children and their families, the requirements of the NQF, and promotes positive educational and developmental outcomes for future generations.

The ten-year national workforce strategy (2021–30) is proposed to be structured around six interrelated focus areas. Setting the timeframe of the strategy over the next decade allows actions and initiatives within each focus area to be pursued either over the short (within the

next three years), medium (within the next six years) or long (within the next ten years) term, as appropriate.

It also allows for the strategy to be regularly reviewed and revised as required to ensure it reflects emerging workforce issues, challenges and needs.

The focus areas are interrelated, in that opportunities, issues and challenges relating to one will often impact, either positively or negatively, on others.

Professional recognition

Workforce professional standing, including pay and conditions, registration, and community perceptions and value.

Data and evidence

Enhanced national data collection, analysis, and strategic discussion.

Qualifications and career pathways

Supporting quality, improving consistency and reducing complexity, as well as enabling flexible career progression.

Attraction and retention

Workforce diversity, including attracting the right people into the sector, and valuing and retaining high calibre staff.

Leadership and capability

Workforce culture, including professional development, leadership and mentoring, and management capability.

Wellbeing

Helping service providers to have strong mental health and wellbeing supports for their workforce.



Below is a summary of each of the six focus areas, including potential actions and initiatives for the national workforce strategy. They are not an exhaustive list, nor are they ordered in terms of priority, and additional suggestions are welcome.

Some potential actions and initiatives fit more clearly within a single focus area, while others could support multiple focus areas.

The success of the national workforce strategy will rest on meaningful collective action from all stakeholders.

It is important to emphasise the need for collective action – no stakeholder group can be responsible for all actions and initiatives. The success of the national workforce strategy will rest on meaningful collective action from all stakeholders – employers, higher and vocational education and training institutes, national, state and territory regulatory bodies and authorities, educators, teachers, unions and governments.

It is also important to emphasise that the potential opportunities for collective action are suggestions only at this stage – they are not exhaustive, and require further consideration, discussion and agreement on timescales, roles, responsibilities and implementation. This consultation period will provide valuable feedback to inform that process.





Focus area 1

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

Summary

- There is growing recognition of children's education and care as an essential service, including the sector's role in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing, and enabling parents and carers to continue working during natural disasters and national emergencies.
- Community understanding and appreciation of the value and importance of children's education and care impacts the supply of high quality educators and teachers, as well as the engagement, satisfaction and wellbeing of the workforce.
- Sector pay and conditions compound the challenge of improving professional recognition, attracting and retaining teachers, and motivating educators to seek higher qualifications.
- Ongoing professional development and career progression are also key elements in improving professional recognition.
- Teacher registration is lifting the professional recognition of early childhood teachers and supporting them to undertake in-service professional development each year. However, it is not nationally mandated or consistent, nor is it fully contextualised for their distinct role in non-school settings.



Potential actions and initiatives

- ◆ Investigate options for improving professional standing, and workforce pay and conditions, including examining the associated barriers and constraints.
- ◆ Implement nationally consistent early childhood teacher registration, including agreement on qualification requirements to be eligible for registration and resources that are contextualised for early childhood settings.
- ◆ Enhance mentoring and induction support for new teachers at local, jurisdictional and national levels.
- ◆ Promote the importance of a career in children's education and care through a national communications campaign, including highlighting career opportunities in a growing sector.
- ◆ Agree and consistently use contemporary terminology to describe the children's education and care sector, and its workforce (e.g. from 'childcare' to 'education and care').
- ◆ Develop options for a national registration system for educators (i.e. certificate III and diploma level educators) to improve professional recognition and embed ongoing professional development.



Focus area 2

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Summary

- Realising the benefits of children's education and care is dependent upon service providers being able to attract and retain qualified, skilled and experienced teachers and educators.
- Workforce diversity is important, particularly to deliver quality outcomes for all children.
- Based on the most recent national workforce census, more than 90% of educators and teachers identify as female, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and teachers underrepresented at only 2% of the workforce.
- Targeted strategies are required to overcome barriers for certain groups of potential educators and teachers, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- There is considerable workforce attrition to other sectors, notably the school sector for early childhood teachers who are dual qualified as primary school teachers.
- The ongoing cost of recruitment and induction is a barrier to employers investing in ongoing professional development for educators and teachers.
- Continuity of educators and teachers particularly impacts the quality of educational programs and practice, as well as the consistency of relationships with children and their families.
- There is a lack of information about clear, attainable career pathways in the children's education and care sector.
- Overseas trained teachers often need to negotiate complex assessment and approval processes before they are able to commence work.



Potential actions and initiatives

- ◆ Building from a review of previous and current programs, develop targeted programs to support studies and placements for specified groups of potential educators and teachers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, individuals located in regional and remote areas, and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- ◆ Review and streamline existing application and approval processes for overseas trained educators and teachers.
- ◆ Develop an accessible suite of resources highlighting the careers and career pathways available within the children's education and care sector, tailored to specific groups of potential educators and teachers, and aimed at both school leavers and mature age career changers.



Focus area 3

LEADERSHIP AND CAPABILITY

Summary

- Genuine and sustained quality improvement in children's education and care is a shared responsibility, with service providers and leaders, teachers and educators all playing vital roles.
- Educators and teachers are impacted by the culture and relationships at the individual service level, and feel valued when their employers invest in their professional development.
- Poor service management frequently leads to high staff turnover.
- Teachers, particularly those in regional and remote areas, often feel isolated and need access to mentoring and professional networks to enhance their practice.
- Taking on an educational leadership role at a service can be daunting, and many educators and teachers would benefit from additional support and guidance. Newly qualified early childhood teachers may predominantly have theoretical, rather than practical skills and experience, which is challenging if they are expected to perform leadership roles from their first day of employment.
- Service leaders are also often expected to undertake multiple roles and responsibilities, including providing pedagogical and administrative leadership, as well as backfilling staff illness or absence.
- The advent of micro-credentials (mini-qualifications that demonstrate skills, knowledge or experience in a given subject area or capability) offers a range of opportunities beyond traditional higher education, and vocational education and training.



Potential actions and initiatives

- ◆ Improve access to core professional development for educators and teachers, including an online 'Induction to the NQF' training package.
- ◆ Improve access to an increasing range of micro-credentials for educators and teachers in areas of identified need, for example leadership and management capability, cultural competency and safety, and educating and caring for children with additional needs.
- ◆ Establish a leadership and mentoring network at a national level for educators and teachers to access online, which includes opportunities for local networking and engagement.
- ◆ Building from a review of existing resources, develop and promote a suite of leadership resources for educators and teachers.



Focus area 4

WELLBEING

Summary

- Teachers and educators undertake professional, demanding and complex work every day.
- Service providers and management have clear responsibilities in terms of workplace health and safety, as well as expectations in terms of promoting a positive workplace environment that safeguards staff wellbeing.
- Beyond Blue's [Be You](#) provides educators and teachers with knowledge, resources and strategies to develop valuable skills, while also providing an effective model for implementing a whole-learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- Educators' and teachers' wellbeing is an increasingly urgent priority, exacerbated by the impact of recent natural disasters and national emergencies.
- Many educators and teachers feel stressed by the daily demands of their roles and responsibilities, are concerned about burnout, and encounter significant challenges in finding the time to access wellbeing supports.
- Those seeking to upskill are also often juggling study with ongoing employment and family responsibilities.



Potential actions and initiatives

- ◆ Investigate options for improved wellbeing supports, including affordable and coordinated access to an employee assistance program, supporting service providers to have a strong mental health, resilience building and wellbeing culture, and examining the associated barriers and constraints to accessing wellbeing supports.
- ◆ Building from a review of existing resources, develop and promote targeted wellbeing resources for educators and teachers.
- ◆ Initiate and promote ongoing Australian research monitoring the wellbeing of educators and teachers over time.



Focus area 5

QUALIFICATIONS AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Summary

- The NQF has progressively introduced important requirements that have improved the ratio of educators and teachers to children, as well as mandated qualification requirements for educators and teachers.
- Initial teacher education accreditation processes are not nationally consistent and can sometimes prioritise school focused content and professional practice.
- Most initial teacher education students who graduate as dual qualified teachers intend to seek employment as a primary school teacher, rather than as an early childhood teacher.
- As at 1 January 2021, more than one in ten long day care services have a waiver for one or more of the staffing requirements stipulated under the NQF, with the waiver most frequently relating to the early childhood teacher requirements.
- There are no national qualification requirements for outside school hours care educators, with state and territory requirements varying significantly. Early childhood teacher requirements also vary by state and territory.
- The process to review and update vocational education and training qualifications can be complex and lengthy, partly due to the breadth of stakeholders involved. This presents challenges to quickly update qualifications to reflect shifting priorities.



Potential actions and initiatives

- ◆ Review staffing and qualification requirements under the NQF, with a focus on early childhood teachers and outside school hours care educators, to improve consistency, support quality and reduce complexity.
- ◆ Review requirements for initial teacher education programs, including considering contemporary and emerging skills and knowledge needed for early childhood teaching, innovative design and delivery approaches, and programs that cover children from birth to 12 years of age.
- ◆ Continue the ongoing focus on the quality of vocational education and training, including reforms aimed at improving responsiveness and sector engagement in qualification development and review, and student retention and completion rates.



Focus area 6

DATA AND EVIDENCE

Summary

- High quality data and evidence about workforce supply and demand enables informed policy making and strategic planning.
- Data and evidence concerning the children's education and care sector workforce is often not contemporary or comprehensive.
- There is also limited information about the uptake of previous workforce related initiatives, as well as their relative effectiveness and impact on workforce supply.
- Employers are often unaware of workforce related initiatives or find the administrative burden of accessing them outweighs the benefit.

Potential actions and initiatives

- ◆ Undertake a biennial national workforce census to provide comprehensive and contemporary information about a range of key workforce related indicators.
- ◆ Develop options for a longer term data collection system, including a live national workforce database of educators to provide up-to-date data and evidence for relevant stakeholders.
- ◆ Commit to an evaluation plan for the national workforce strategy, including regular dedicated stakeholder forums for strategic discussion of workforce related issues and priorities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, individuals located in regional and remote areas, individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and data and evidence gaps.



5. How can I have my say?

Throughout May, we want your views on actions and initiatives that you believe will assist in improving the supply, retention and quality of the sector workforce.

Between **Monday 3 May** and **Monday 31 May 2021**, you and all interested parties are strongly encouraged to provide feedback via the online survey.

The survey starts by asking some demographic questions, for example the state and territory in which you live, and whether you work in the children's education and care sector. Please note that you will not be asked any personally identifiable or confidential questions.

The survey then walks you through the six focus areas and asks for your level of support for each of the potential actions and initiatives, as well as the relative importance you place on them.

It also provides an opportunity for you to suggest additional actions and initiatives, and offer any overarching feedback.

Taking the professional recognition focus area as an example, you are given the following options for the six potential actions and initiatives:

- Strongly support; Support; Neither support nor oppose; Oppose; Strongly oppose

You are then asked to rank the six potential actions and initiatives from most important to least important.

Finally, you are asked to suggest any other potential actions and initiatives, and provide any overall comments about the focus area and the potential actions and initiatives that you would like to make, including suggested timescales, roles, responsibilities and implementation. The format is the same for each of the six focus areas.

If you indicate that you work as an educator or teacher in the children's education and care sector, you will also be asked the following questions:

- whether you work at more than one service
- whether you work full time, part time or on a casual basis
- whether you are the [educational leader](#)
- how long you have worked in the sector
- whether you are studying towards a [NQF approved qualification](#)
- whether you intend to continue working in the sector
- whether you would recommend working in the sector to a friend or family member.

Take the survey here