



**Children First
Alliance**

Submission to Productivity Commission

Early Childhood Education and Care Inquiry

May 2023



Contents

About the Alliance	3
Introduction	4
About this submission	5
Recommendations	5
1. Support all children in our community to access and engage in ECEC.	6
The current ECEC system is not accessible for all families in our community	6
Universal access to ECEC will ensure all children are given the opportunity to thrive	7
Recommendations	7
2. Value and invest in the ECEC workforce to ensure high quality education for children	8
The ECEC workforce wages is some of the lowest in the country	8
Investment is needed in our early childhood educators to address the current wage disparity	8
Recommendation	9
3. Reduce barriers regarding geographical access to early learning centres	10
The current planning systems is failing not-for-profit ECEC providers	10
Planning processes need to support the development of a strong ECEC sector	11
Recommendation	11
Appendix A – Survey released September 2020	12
Appendix B – Survey released November 2019	16

About the Alliance

The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding for purpose providers of children's service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family day care, preschool and outside school hours care.

There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on a child's social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan. Despite this, more than one in five ACT children were developmentally vulnerable when entering school. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC.

The ten community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate 49 ELCs. Together these ELCs provide over 3,600 places to children. The Alliance has ten Founding Members:

- Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT
- Baringa Early Learning Centre
- Capital Region Community Services
- Communities at Work
- Community Services #1
- Goodstart Early Learning ACT
- Northside Community Service
- Woden Community Service
- YMCA Canberra
- YWCA Canberra

Introduction

All children deserve the best start in life. Children can thrive and be healthy when they have what they need to develop well. When we support children's development in the early years, we increase their health and wellbeing, and the success of their communities both now and in the future.

The Alliance welcomes the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care. Quality early education and care (ECEC) develops lifelong skills, resilience and well-being that can immunise against future disadvantage and harm. In the ACT over half (58.4 per cent) of children aged between 0 to 5 years attend CCS approved child care.¹ High quality ECEC makes a significant and lasting impact on children throughout their lives, resulting in them being more likely to succeed in education, economically and socially.

For children experiencing disadvantage, these benefits are even more profound. However, we know that children experiencing disadvantage are less likely to attend ECEC. Access to quality ECEC can contribute to ending intergenerational disadvantage, by ensuring that children do not start school behind their peers. One in five ACT children are developmentally vulnerable when entering school.² This is concerning because children who enter school developmentally vulnerable often fail to catch up, with 10 percent remaining behind through middle school years.³ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.⁴

Investing in universal access to ECEC for all children from birth across the country would start to build solid foundations for children to thrive in those critical years before school. Evidence has shown that investing in children represents an investment in human capital and potential that benefits everyone and can create intergenerational change.

A universal access to ECEC program would need to ensure that the Government also invests in the critical and valuable work of our early childhood educators. Early childhood educators undertake vital work in our communities, supporting the daily learning and wellbeing of over a million young children providing a strong foundation for the next generation of leaders. It is well documented that the ECEC workforce is in crisis.

For an ECEC sector to thrive it must ensure that it supports those in our sector to deliver ongoing quality ECEC. This support must start with the Government funding professional wages for all early childhood educators, through a Fair Work Submission with the Commonwealth providing funding support to increase the award wage.

¹ Productivity Commission (2023). Report on Government Services. Chapter B, Child care, education and training. Accessed <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services>

² ACT Labor (2016). ACT Labor's Education Platform: *Making Canberra's education system even better*. Canberra

³ Lamb, S, Jackson, J, Walstab, A & Huo, S (2015). *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*. Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.

⁴ Australian Early Development Census (2019). *Trends from the AEDC*. AEDC: Canberra

About this submission

This submission focuses on three key policies of the Alliance and provides recommendations for consideration under each of the following areas:

1. Universal access to ECEC for all children from birth.
2. Valuing and investing in the ECEC workforce.
3. Removing geographical barriers to accessing ECEC.

This submission also includes a copy of two survey's undertaken by the Alliance in 2019, these are:

- Early childhood educator edition: Parent and educators views on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT
- Families perceptions and experience of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT

A copy of the survey findings is at Appendix A and B.

The Alliance looks forward to further opportunities to engage in the Inquiry.

Recommendations

- i. The Australian Government review the Activity Test to either extend the hours or remove it to eliminate a current barrier for families experiencing disadvantage to access ECEC.
- ii. The Australian Government invest in the implementation of a universal access program to ECEC for all children from birth.
- iii. The Australian Government urgently fund a significant increase in wages for all early childhood educators, through a Fair Work Submission with the Commonwealth providing funding support to increase the award wage.
- iv. The Australian Government ensure that planning systems and policies across jurisdictions do not create barriers regarding geographical access to ECEC for children and families.

1. Support all children in our community to access and engage in ECEC.

The current ECEC system is not accessible for all families in our community

All children should have the opportunity to attend an ECEC in their community. There are several barriers to children and families accessing ECEC, including costs, limited access to specialist support for children with additional needs, complex paperwork and enrolment processes, lack of trust and access and availability.⁵ According to the OECD families data, Australia ranks among the highest in the world when it comes to net fees for ECEC, the data reports that families spend 26 per cent of average earnings or 20 percent of net family income on early learning.⁶ This compares to the OECD average of 14 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.⁷

According to an analysis by Impact Economics and Policy, the current activity test for the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) limits access to subsidised early education and care and is contributing to at least 126,000 children from the lowest socio-economic households missing out on critical early childhood education and care.⁸

The analysis found that when compared to families earning over \$200,000 per year, low-income families are more likely to be subject to the activity test that limits access to care:

- Single parent families are over three times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised ECEC per week;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are over five times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised ECEC per week;
- Non-English Speaking families are over six times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised ECEC per week; and
- Low-income families earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 are over six times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised ECEC per week.

In short, the activity test is negatively impacting low-income families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, single parent families and families from non-English speaking backgrounds significantly more than other groups who access ECEC.⁹

The evaluation of the 2018 Child Care package found that that the Activity Test was leading to higher out of pocket costs for low-income families only entitled to one full day of subsidised ECEC per week. Nearly a third of families are limited to one full day of ECEC per week use more than their entitlement, leaving them with significant out of pocket costs.¹⁰

⁵ O'Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B and Cole H (2016). *Quality Education for All: Fostering creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners*. Mitchel Institute: Melbourne.

⁶ OECD (2023). *OECD Family Database*. Accessed: <https://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>

⁷ OECD (2023). *OECD Family Database*. Accessed: <https://www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm>

⁸ Impact Economics and Policy (2022). Child care subsidy activity test: undermining child Development and parental participation. Accessed from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61e32e62c8c8337e6fd7a1e6/t/630de5c741a8de08ad48d593/1661855185396/Undermining+Child+Development+And+Parental+Participation+Report_FINAL.pdf

⁹ AIFS (2022), Child Care Package Evaluation: Final report: <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/child-care-package-evaluation-final-report>

¹⁰ Impact Economics and Policy (2022). Child care subsidy activity test: undermining child Development and parental participation. Accessed from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61e32e62c8c8337e6fd7a1e6/t/630de5c741a8de08ad48d593/1661855185396/Undermining+Child+Development+And+Parental+Participation+Report_FINAL.pdf

Universal access to ECEC will ensure all children are given the opportunity to thrive

The breadth of evidence demonstrating the educational and social benefits of children attending ECEC. The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that 11.5 percent of 15-year-olds in Australia attended no pre-primary education.¹¹ The benefits to accessing ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage are most apparent for children accessing 30 hours of ECEC per week.¹² However, children experiencing disadvantage are often less likely to access ECEC.

Evidence has shown that children who attend ECEC also have improved social outcomes. The Effective Provision of Pre-School and Education (EPPE) study, which followed children from the early years throughout their education, found that children who accessed high quality preschool were more likely to have improved social and emotional outcomes. For example, at 16 they had improved self-regulation, and pro-social behaviour.¹³

Families whose children attend Alliance members ECEC services have indicated that they have seen positive outcomes from their children attending an ECEC service. A survey of families whose children attend an Alliance ECEC service found that the majority of parents (83 per cent) indicated that they have seen positive outcomes in social skills as a result of their child attending an early learning centre. Parents also identified greater independence (68 per cent), improved communication skills (64 per cent) and greater confidence (58 per cent) as positive outcomes of their child attending an ELC.¹⁴

There is also increasing evidence on the sound economic policy that is universal access to ECEC. A PwC report commissioned by The Front Project in 2019 concluded that for every dollar invested now, Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life. This is a higher return than many infrastructure projects that are essential to support a growing population and sustain a competitive Australia.¹⁵

The Alliance joins the calls across the sector for investment and implementation of universal access to ECEC for all children. All children in every community, no matter their circumstances, should be able to access at least three days (up to 30 hours) per week of ECEC.

Recommendations

- i. The Australian Government review the Activity Test to either extend the hours or remove it to eliminate a current barrier for families experiencing disadvantage to access ECEC.
- ii. The Australian Government invest in the implementation of a universal access program to ECEC for all children from birth.

¹¹ OECD (2018). *Programme for International Student Assessment's (PISA)*. Accessed: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/ca768d40-en.pdf?expires=1682472160&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=0BDD104D14826D612428BA6D53712CE1>

¹² Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016). *Preschool - Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 3 Year Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation*. Mitchell Institute: Melbourne.

¹³ Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016). *Preschool - Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 3 Year Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation*. Mitchell Institute: Melbourne

¹⁴ Children First Alliance (2019). *Families perceptions and experience of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT*. Accessed: https://www.childrenfirstalliance.org/files/ugd/523a7e_f67fb9e0b9b94586b64b1d4ddbea2d48.pdf

¹⁵ The Front Project (2019). *A smart investment for a smarter Australia*. Accessed https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/Cost-benefit%20analysis_brochure.pdf

2. Value and invest in the ECEC workforce to ensure high quality education for children

The ECEC workforce wages is some of the lowest in the country

The current state of the ECEC workforce is well documented. The economic and social impact of educators has become more evident through the sector's tireless commitment and professionalism since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As essential workers, the ECEC sector has not seen any changes to their wages and conditions.

The issue of wages in the ECEC sector is not new. A 2017, NSW Government literature review of *Early Childhood Education Workforce issues in Australian and international contexts* found that early childhood educators earn below the general workforce average and early childhood teachers often have substantially worse pay and conditions compared with primary school teachers.¹⁶ This is particularly the case for ECTs working in ELCs, as they generally offer lower salaries, longer hours and fewer holidays.¹⁷ There is a mismatch between the pay and conditions available in the sector, and the work skills and qualifications required.

The issue of wages of the ECEC workforce has been well reported as some of the lowest in the country.¹⁸ The early education workforce is predominantly female and one of the lowest paid workforces in the country. The recent 2021 National Early Education Workforce Survey revealed, 96 per cent of the early education sector are women. When looking at the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics the average full-time weekly earnings in Australia is \$1,807.70¹⁹, this is well above the weekly minimum wage of an ECEC Certificate III staff under the Children Services Award of \$940.90 on commencement and \$1,004 after two years.²⁰

Investment is needed in our early childhood educators to address the current wage disparity

A strong qualified workforce is essential to delivering quality ECEC. High quality ECEC services make a significant impact on children, throughout their lives. A literature review on determinants of quality in child-care found that, overall, the most influential factors affecting quality, across age groups and service settings, are the education, qualifications and training of the workforce.²¹

Our early childhood educators are tertiary qualified professionals. The National Quality Framework requires educators to meet strict and professional standards, including qualification requirements, yet the work is not professionally valued and recognised.

The 2017 literature review found that the majority of Australian and international academics and experts agree on the need to improve pay and working conditions.²² This includes offering the same

¹⁶ NSW Government (2017). *Literature Review Early Childhood Education Directorate: Early Childhood Education Workforce issues in Australian and international contexts*. Education NSW: Sydney

¹⁷ NSW Government (2017). *Literature Review Early Childhood Education Directorate: Early Childhood Education Workforce issues in Australian and international contexts*. Education NSW: Sydney

¹⁸ Hermant, N and Selvaratnam, N. (2018). *ABC report: Childcare workers demand Government intervenes to improve wages*. Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-25/childcare-workers-frustrated-over-low-wages/9575176>

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). *6302.0 - Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia/latest-release>

²⁰ Fair Work Ombudsman (2010). *Children's Services Award 2010*. Retrieved from: https://awardviewer.fwo.gov.au/award/show/MA000120#P339_30636

²¹ Huntsman, L. (2008). *Determinants of quality in childcare: A review of the research evidence*. NSW Department of Community Services, Centre for Parenting & Research: Sydney

²² NSW Government (2017). *Literature Review Early Childhood Education Directorate: Early Childhood Education Workforce issues in Australian and international contexts*. Education NSW: Sydney

pay as school teachers with similar qualifications and experience, and an increased status that recognises their responsibilities.

The recent Senate Select Committee on Work and Care heard a myriad of evidence about the current workforce crisis within the care sector, with the final report recommending “The committee further recommends the Australian Government support a priority application to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) through the newly established care and community sector expert panel, for award wage increases for all care sectors including early childhood education, disability care and aged care, and all sectors covered by the relevant childcare, and Social, Community Home Care and Disability Services Industry (SCHADS) Awards.”

It has been long reported that the aged sector has shared similar workforce challenges. The welcomed 15 per cent increase to the minimum wage of direct care and senior food services employees in the aged care sector should be seen as a case study for the ECEC sector.

The Alliance along with many across the ECEC sector have long been calling for investment to increase the award wages of early childhood educators. The United Workers Union is currently calling for a 25 per cent wage rise to address workforce issues facing the sector.²³

Investment is needed in early childhood educators from the Government to continue enabling the broader Australian workforce and to ensure quality early education is accessible to families across our communities.

Recommendation

- iii. The Australian Government urgently fund a significant increase in wages for all early childhood educators, through a Fair Work Submission with the Commonwealth providing funding support to increase the award wage.

²³ United Workers Union (2023). Media release: 25% pay rise needed to end crisis: early educators. Accessed <https://unitedworkers.org.au/media-release/25-pay-rise-needed-to-end-crisis-early-educators/>

3. Reduce barriers regarding geographical access to early learning centres

The current planning systems is failing not-for-profit ECEC providers

Currently consideration is not given to the need for an ELC when approving new centres or the proximity of the centre to others in the ACT. After planning approvals are granted, applications are submitted to Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA) for new services, however CECA's role is to ensure that facilities and service operations comply with relevant legislation. CECA does not assess the need for a new service in a specific geographical location.

The ACT has been the fastest-growing jurisdiction over the past decade, with the ACT Treasury predicting it will reach 784,000 people by 2060.²⁴ The Molonglo Valley will add about 73,000 people, mostly on its northern side near Belconnen. Belconnen, which includes the Ginninderry development to its west, is expected to gain another 69,000 residents, with Gungahlin adding 55,000.²⁵

Data from the ACECQA shows that the number of ECEC services in the ACT has increased from 335 in March 2015 to 374 in March 2023, a 12 per cent increase in nine years. The biggest increase was seen in private for-profit providers increasing from 69 in March 2015 to 112 in March 2023, a 62 per cent increase. While the services operated by not-for-profit organisations decreased from 157 in 2015 to 149 in 2023. The table below provides an overview of the number of services by operator type from March 2015 to March 2023.²⁶

Provider Management Type	Q1 2023	Q1 2022	Q1 2021	Q1 2020	Q1 2019	Q1 2018	Q1 2017	Q1 2016	Q1 2015
Catholic schools	11	13	13	13	13	13	13	12	11
Independent schools	24	24	25	25	24	24	23	25	20
Other	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Private for profit	112	107	101	92	90	87	80	81	69
Private not for profit community managed	125	126	125	128	128	131	133	131	133
Private not for profit other organisations	24	25	24	24	25	23	23	24	24
<i>Subtotal not for profits</i>	<i>149</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>149</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>157</i>
State/Territory government schools	77	78	77	76	78	79	78	79	77
Total	374	374	366	359	359	358	351	353	335

This data is also supported by the analysis by The Australia Institute that noted that about half of Australia's ECEC providers are for-private private companies, and all of the growth in the sector in recent years has been captured by for-profit providers.²⁷

The ACT Government is implementing their universal access to ECEC for three-year old children within not-for-profit services across the ACT. While the Alliance supports this, it is concerned that there are children within areas of the ACT where not-for-profit services do not exist as they are being priced out of the market by large for-profit providers.

Alliance members report the increase in property developers adding ECEC services within their developments (usually high-rise residential properties) within town centres. This creates a glut of

²⁴ <https://www.treasury.act.gov.au/snapshot/demography/act>

²⁵ <https://www.treasury.act.gov.au/snapshot/demography/act>

²⁶ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023). Quarterly National Quality Standard Data (Q3 2013 - Q1 2023). <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshots>

²⁷ https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Economic_Aspects_of_ECEC_in_Australia_FINAL.pdf

ECEC services within town centres (for example Woden Town Centre), reducing access to families that are not within distance of town centres.

The expansion of the sector has implications for the provision of quality care. The quality provision of ECEC is essential to achieving positive lifelong effects for children and requires involvement from a qualified workforce. Attracting educators and teachers to ELCs is already challenging for providers, particularly for people who have a teacher qualification and can work in the school system.

Planning processes need to support the development of a strong ECEC sector

Planning for a strong ECEC sector needs to consider how finite resources are allocated across the sector to provide quality early childhood education to all children across the community. Planning decisions relating to the number, location and size of ELCs impacts the whole sector. This is because finite resources, including adequately qualified staff, are required to ensure that the services being provided are of the highest quality and provide the greatest possible outcomes for children.

The core consideration in determining the need for new ECEC centres should be the outcomes of the child. Children do not benefit when there are too many centres and staff are spread thin, putting at risk the capacity to provide quality care.

The *Education Act 2004* (ACT) S.14 (Austl) outlines the process for the application of Government and non-government Schools in the ACT. For 'in principle approval' for a proposed registration of a non-government school the person must apply in writing to the Minister for approval at least two years, but not more than four years, before the opening day of the school. The Director-General of the Education Directorate must then give public notice of the proposed registration and written comments on the proposed registration be made to the Minister.

Decisions regarding the in-principle approval of the registration of a school must consider the viability and need for the school and potential impact on existing schools.²⁸

When a new ELC is planned for development in the ACT, there is no consideration of need, viability or impact on existing centres. A new ELC can open next door to another centre and several centres can open in the same neighbourhood, with no consideration given to the impact on existing centres or where current gaps exist.

Governments should be ensuring that planning policies are not undermining the provision of quality ECEC services by introducing viability assessments that considers the need for the centre as determined by the existing demand for services and consideration of current and projected population changes and growth. Consideration should also be given to the viability of existing centres, including their capacity to ensure that centres are able to be staffed by qualified ECEC educators and teachers.

Recommendation

- iv. The Australian Government ensure that planning systems and policies across jurisdictions do not create barriers regarding geographical access to ECEC for children and families.

²⁸ ACT Government (2004). *Education Act 2004 (ACT)* S.14 (Austl). Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2004-17/>



Early childhood educator edition: Parent and educators views on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT

Key findings

- 786 parents of children in an Early Learning Centre (ELCs) in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were surveyed about their perceptions and experience of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
- The majority of parents (84%) said that they saw their child’s educator as a trusted source of knowledge about their child’s development and wellbeing.
- Staff were identified as the most common theme when asked what the best thing is about their child’s early learning centre.
- The majority of parents (89%) support higher salaries for early childhood educators.
- The majority (82%) of educators said that they enjoy working with children as the reason that motivated them to work in the ECEC sector.

Survey approach

Two surveys were developed by the Children First Alliance to explore perceptions of early childhood education and care (ECEC). The first survey was distributed to all families that have a child or children in an Early Learning Centre (ELC) of an Alliance member. The second survey was distributed to educators that work in an ECEC service operated by an Alliance member.

Both surveys were created in Survey Monkey and open for a three-week period from 11 October to 3 November 2019.

For questions that were open ended, a thematic analysis was undertaken.

A total of 786 responses were received from the survey sent to families.

A total of 117 responses were received from the survey sent to educators.

Findings

Educator a trusted source of knowledge about child’s development and wellbeing

The majority of parents (84%) said that they saw their child’s educator as a trusted source of knowledge about their child’s development and wellbeing, 8% did not and 8% did not know.

Child’s educators is a trusted source of knowledge	% (n)
Yes	84 (658)
No	8 (59)
Don’t know	8 (67)

Best thing about child's early learning centre

Five key themes were identified when analysing what parents liked most about their child's early learning centre.

The theme of 'staff' was the most common among families, followed by 'culture of centre'.

Themes	Sub-themes
Staff	Trust of staff with children Caring nature of staff Stability of staff at centre Communication with staff
Culture of centre	Play-based learning Philosophy of centre Range of activities Cultural diversity of activities
Environment	Outdoor play area Open plan indoor and outdoor Quality of food Cleanliness of centre
Children experience	Child expressing eagerness to attend Child making friends
Location	Close to home Close to work Close to other child's school

Responses relating to the theme of 'staff'

"The friendliness and confidence I have in the Educators to care for my children"

"The staff and the culture, such an excellent team and the low turnover speaks volumes. The care they have for the children is genuine and really evident in how they do their jobs."

"I love how approachable and caring the educators are. They put 100% into the children and developing secure, safe and supported relationships. This is seen not only through relationships with children but also relationships with families."

Support for higher salaries for early childhood educators

The majority of parents (89%) support higher salaries for early childhood educators, 7% were unsure and 1% did not support higher salaries.

Support for higher salaries for early childhood educators	% (n)
Yes	89 (693)
Unsure	7 (54)
Other (please specify)	3 (26)
No	1 (9)

Of the 3% that indicated other, the main theme from responses was that there is in-principle support for higher salaries for early childhood educators, as long as this increase is not associated with an increase in cost to families.

"Absolutely Yes - Provided that the Government increases subsidies to absorb the increases. Families cannot afford for the salary increases to be passed on to them"

“Yes, so long as the fees for parents don't increase, the money to increase the Educators wages needs to be from the Government.”

Motivations for working in the early childhood education and care sector

The majority (82%) of educators said that they enjoy working with children as the reason that motivated them to work in the ECEC sector, followed by 76% indicating they enjoy educating children and 60% saying they enjoyed working with families.

Motivations for working in ECEC	%(n)
I enjoy working with children	82 (96)
I enjoy educating children	76 (89)
I enjoy working with families	60 (70)
I like to give back to community	44 (52)
I enjoy working for a purpose driven organisation	39 (46)
Other (please specify)	9 (10)

Reason for becoming an early childhood educator

One primary theme was identified by educators as for the reason to becoming an early childhood educator, this was the theme of ‘children’.

The majority of educators identified their interest in working with children as the reason.

Themes	Sub-themes
Children	Interested in children’s development and education Enjoy working with children Rewarding working with children Shaping future generations

Responses relating to the theme of ‘children’

“Early Childhood education is such an important thing, I needed to ensure that I am doing everything I can to help future generations”

“To make a difference in children’s lives”

“I believe in the importance of giving children a proper education from the day that they are born”

“Passion to see children develop and grow and the feeling of how special it was to be apart of that process”

“Because Children are amazing and deserve to be educated by people who have a passion for them.”

About the Children First Alliance

The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding for purpose providers of children’s service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family day care, preschool and outside school hours care. There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on a child’s social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan. Despite this, more than one in five ACT children were developmentally vulnerable when entering school. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all

children have access to ECEC. The nine community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate 43 ELCs. Together these ELCs provide 3,491 places to children.



Families perceptions and experience of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT

Key findings

- 786 parents of children in an Early Learning Centre (ELCs) in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were surveyed about their perceptions and experience of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
- The majority of parents surveyed (83%) indicated that they have seen positive outcomes in the social skills of their children, as a result of them attending an ELC.
- A majority of parents also identified greater independence (68%), communication skills (64%) and greater confidence (58%) as positive outcomes of attendance at an ELC.
- More than two thirds (69%) of parents surveyed considered being close to home as a factor in choosing their child or children’s ELC, with more than half of all parents surveyed (56%) considering staff in their decision about an ELC.
- When asked what the most important factor is when choosing an ELC, 22% of parents identified the ELC being close to home, followed by culture centre (17%) and staff (16%).
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of parents surveyed indicating that they didn’t find it difficult to find a place in an ELC in the ACT for their child or children.
- The majority of parents (80%) support the extension of free Government preschool to three-year-old children in the ACT.

Survey approach

The survey was distributed to all families that have a child or children in an Early Learning Centre (ELC) by an Alliance member.

The survey was created in Survey Monkey and open for a three-week period from 11 October to 3 November 2019.

A total of 786 responses were received.

Findings

Number of children in early childhood education and care service (ECEC)

The majority (73%) of parents surveyed have one child attending an ELC and a quarter (25%) of parents have two children attending.

In total, the parents surveyed have 1,012 children in an ELC in the ACT.

Number of children attending an Early Learning Centre	% (n)
One	73 (575)

Two	25 (193)
Three	2 (14)
Four	- (1)
Five	- (1)

Positive outcomes seen in child/children as a result of them attending an ECEC

The majority of parents (83%) indicated that they have seen positive outcomes in social skills as a result of their child attending an ELC.

Parents also identified greater independence (68%), improved communication skills (64%) and greater confidence (58%) as positive outcomes of their child attending an ELC.

Positive outcomes as a result of child attending an early learning centre	% (n)
Improved social skills	83 (647)
Greater independence	68 (528)
Improved communication skills	64 (502)
Greater confidence	58 (452)
Greater emotional resilience	41 (317)
Other (please specify)	10 (77)

Factors considered in choosing an Early Learning Centre for child and/or children

More than two thirds (69%) of parents considered that being close to home as a factor in choosing their child's early learning centre. More than half of all parents surveyed (56%) considered the staff in their decision.

Inclusions such as lunch (44%), centre culture (43%), quality rating (42%) and approach to learning (41%) were also considered by parents.

When asked what the most important factor is when choosing an ELC, 22% of parents indicated closeness to home, followed by culture centre (17%) and staff (16%).

Factors considered when choosing an early learning centre	All factors considered % (n)	Most important % (n)
Close to home	69 (541)	22 (169)
Staff	56 (440)	16 (123)
Inclusions (eg. Lunch etc)	44 (346)	1 (8)
Centre culture	43 (335)	17 (130)
Quality rating	42 (329)	10 (81)
Approach to learning	41 (325)	7 (51)
Close to work	38 (301)	11 (83)
Cost	35 (273)	5 (37)
Word of mouth	33 (262)	4 (35)
Other (please specify)	17 (130)	8 (62)
Centre being community operated	16 (128)	1 (6)

Finding a place in an Early Learning Centre in the ACT for child and/or children

Almost three-quarters (74%) of parents reported that it was not difficult to find a place in an early learning centre in the ACT for their child/children.

Of these parents, more than one third (35%) of parents found it easy to find a place for their child or children in an ELC, 10% found it very easy and 29% were neutral. Just over one quarter (26%) found it difficult or very difficult to find a place.

Difficulty finding a place in an early learning centre	% (n)
Very difficult	4 (28)
Difficult	22 (176)
Neutral	29 (227)
Easy	35 (276)
Very easy	10 (79)

Support for the extension of free Government preschool to three-year-old children in the ACT

The majority of parents (80%) support the extension of free Government preschool to three-year-old children in the ACT, 16% of families said they were unsure and 5% did not support this policy.

Support the extension of free Government preschool for three-year-old children	% (n)
Yes	80 (623)
Unsure	16 (122)
No	5 (37)

About the Children First Alliance

The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding for purpose providers of children’s service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family day care, preschool and outside school hours care. There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on a child’s social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan. Despite this, more than one in five ACT children were developmentally vulnerable when entering school. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC. The nine community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate 43 ELCs. Together these ELCs provide 3,491 places to children.