



ECA is a voice for young children.

Early Childhood Australia (NSW Branch) represents approximately 1,000 members who work across a range of services including preschool and long day care as well as tertiary providers of early childhood education..

Our mission statement:

Early Childhood Australia will advocate to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

To inform this submission the ECA NSW Branch surveyed over 700 members and received a 12% response rate.

Our values are:

- The rights of children
- Leadership, excellence and respect
- Courage, honesty and openness
- Collaboration and diversity
- Justice
- Social inclusion of children

SUMMARY OF ECA NSW MEMBERS RESPONSE TO SELECTED ISSUES FROM THE DRAFT REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE ECEC WORKFORCE

The NSW Branch of Early Childhood Australia developed a survey and distributed to over 700 of its members in NSW. 10 questions were developed from the recommendations and findings of the draft document. We had a 12% response rate to questions which were basically Yes or No to Agree or Disagree. Provision was made for our members to make comment on each of the questions. The Branch was delighted with the thoughtfulness of these comments which seem to truly reflect peoples experience as part of the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce in NSW.

78% of members agreed that *the government should require the ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information about service quality. These people agreed that this published information should be comprehensive, comparable across services and clearly explained and easy to access.* (3.1) However, their comments suggested that there needs to be strict guidelines with constructive feedback in language which was free from jargon. They felt there needed to be a strength based model to support the development of the sector and be a true indicator of quality. They did not want this to resemble the information on the “My School” website.

87.8% of participants *agreed that government should provide financial support to low income families so they can access a range of early childhood education and services which meet their needs.* Issues raised were the possibilities of preschools being covered by the CCB entitlement in NSW, the desire for free access to early childhood services for all services regardless of income and that there equity of access to early childhood services is important as often those children from low income families are the most needy of the services. We need to be mindful that early childhood services do not become only an option for middle class families.

94.3% of participants agreed that *ECEC regulators should provide ongoing consultation with stakeholders and timely dissemination of best practice. Governments should ensure that all ECEC regulators initiate robust evaluative processes so that regulator impacts are minimised.* (3.4) There was some comment about how is the term ‘robust’ defined and some members thought that because breach of regulation is punishable by law – how much more robust should we be. However other comments were strongly in favour of strong, consistent thoughtful and transparent evaluation and that children deserve nothing less than a robust evaluative processes.

Where voluntary committees currently manage ECEC services, governments should ensure that professional management support (such as cluster management or other shared services) is readily available to assist with management and leadership (3.5) 93.2% agreed with this draft recommendation. Throughout the comments there was concern expressed that the way things stand at the moment there is a lot of responsibility for these voluntary management committees and the turnover rate does not allow for the growth of social capital and individual skill development. Whilst the sector appears to welcome support in this area, they have acknowledged that organisations such as CCSA and Community Child Care do provide this support to their members. The hope was that government needs to respect autonomy of these groups and be considerate of the time constraints that volunteers may have.

100% of participants in our survey agreed that *in implementing the National Quality Standard, governments should ensure adequate resourcing for regulators to enable appropriate training of their staff in the new regulatory arrangement and their effective implementation (including assessors).* (3.6) The comments received in this survey seem to reflect the concerns which have been recently expressed across the sector. Assessors need to have an early childhood background with university qualifications in early childhood, and a broad range of experience within the sector as well as a qualification in training and assessment. When assessing for quality in early childhood staff needed to have a depth of understanding of what that looks like in an early childhood setting. If the assessors are to have the respect of the profession they need to have the necessary qualifications and experience.

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of early childhood teachers to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, salary and conditions need to be on par with primary school teachers working in the Department of Education (5.1) 96.7% agreed with this finding and commented consistently that not having parity in wages and conditions it is difficult to attract and retain early childhood teachers and it contributes to lower morale and burn out in the profession. There also was a view that government needed to take responsibility of the funding of early childhood teachers so that smaller services could remain viable.

92.1% of participants in the survey agreed *that wages for early childhood workers with a Certificate III or diploma should also be increased* (5.1) given the hours of work, the responsibility, the level of expertise required when working with children in the early years. Many felt undervalued particularly when people who work in shops and supermarkets take home higher wages with less responsibility, paperwork and better conditions.

Whilst 88% of participants in our survey agreed *that the new Family Day Care worker to child ratios will be better for children under school age considering Family Day Care places may be reduced* comments were made that the smaller mixed aged grouping is good for children particularly when there are only one or two children under 2. Concern was expressed about the loss of 5000 places in NSW and Family Day Carer business viability when they are now required only to have four children under school age at any one time. Our participants expressed concern that this too would affect the funding of family day care schemes. Through this survey it was agreed that it was important that families had choice about the type of care being available for their children and that maybe in the family day care situation there needs to be a specially legislated ratio of 1:5.

96.6% of participants agreed *the outcomes would be better for children if workers in Out of School Hours Care were qualified.* (7.1) However it needed to be remembered that this is a recreational setting and the qualification should reflect that. Participants expressed their understandings that one of the strong indicators for quality education and care is qualified staff and so showed concern that for some reason we don't think children aged 5 – 12 years are entitled to quality care and qualified staff. The funding needs to be reviewed and qualified staff be funded by government and not a fee increase for families.

Our final question was about *government facilitating access to ECEC training programs for culturally and linguistically diverse child care workers* (10.2) 93.3% agreed with this initiative and commented that it is important that we have qualified staff from a range of cultural backgrounds to support our children and provide them with a sense of belonging. There was a request that there be support for additional attention to English proficiency.

What follows is a more detailed document which provides examples of participant's responses. We hope you find these useful in the finalisation of your report.

Draft Recommendation	Surveyed ECA NSW Members responses
<p>3.1 To assist parents' decision making with respect to their choice of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for their children, governments should require ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information on service quality. Published information should be comprehensive, comparable across services, clearly explained and easy to access.</p>	<p>78% agreed and 21.5% disagreed</p> <p>The following are some of the comments received:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would depend on how and when the information was published. • Families need this information. • It would allow services to showcase what they offer and others an incentive to improve. • Don't support a name and shame system. • There needs to be strict guidelines • The quality of the assessor needs to be integral • Constructive criticism and advice would be more productive. • It allows those who are doing the right thing be recognised and celebrated. • Only statistics should be published. • It is important that all stakeholders are well informed. • Concerned that this may not support transparency but more superficial competitiveness based on tick-box gradings. • Needs to be in clear language free from jargon. • We need a strength based model to support the development of the industry and the quality. • Concerned that the lens that families in culturally diverse settings will not allow them to value play based learning. • Word of mouth is more powerful than information published on the internet. • We do not want to mirror the 'my schools' website as not a true indicator of quality.
<p>3.2 To achieve the goals of the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) ECEC reforms without disadvantaging low-income families through the</p>	<p>87.8% agreed that government should provide financial support to low income families so they can access a range of early childhood education and services which meet their needs. 2.2% disagreed.</p> <p>These are some of the comments made by participants:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are the families who benefit most from this service and are least likely to attend due to prohibitive costs.

<p>anticipated increase in fees, governments will need to ensure that there is adequate financial support for such families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschools need to be covered by CCB entitlement in NSW • I think government should provide free access to early childhood services for all families, regardless of income. • At reduced hours though, funding should match families work days (i.e. funding a stay at home mum for 5 days care is not fair) also families who are not trying to get ahead (again people with no drive to find a job etc.,) should not be supported to continue their cycle of laziness. • At times low income families are the families that most need support to assist children to have an opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people and access support. • There is an equity issue in a democracy – Access to ECEC is important for the futures of all children – its not just about child care for working families or ECEC for families than can afford to pay. • This already available to both families independently or through Centres apply for support funding. • I think services that are able to meet their needs should be able to access the funding and reduce their fees accordingly. Especially those who are single parents and are expected to get back into the workforce. • I would prefer policy to direct funding to supply not demand based. • Child Care has become a middle class option families on lower incomes no longer can afford this option.
<p>3.4 ECEC regulators should provide ongoing consultation with stakeholders and timely dissemination of best practice. Governments should ensure that all ECEC regulators initiate robusts evaluative processes so that regulatory impacts are minimised.</p>	<p>94.3% agreed and 5.7% disagreed. Some of the comments were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can only be done with appropriately qualified staff from the children’s services sector. • Our aim should be continuous improvement so robust evaluation is required. • Provided they understand exactly what it is they are asking from the Sector. • Any government framework forced on the sector MUST have a very thorough and independent evaluation of the framework. • Yes evaluation is important as we always need to see what works, what doesn’t and think about why this is so and also how we could adapt or change for the future. • Evaluation is extremely important to know whether your program is meeting the goals of the organisation and meeting the provision of high quality care. • Our children(and our future) deserve nothing less! • Governments should provide Regulatory staff with intensive training in evaluative procedures to

	<p>ensure consistent high quality outcomes. The quality levels should not be reduced just because the government will not employ sufficient regulatory staff to conduct annual assessments of services till they attain above "foundation" level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot needs to be considered here, location, staff qualifications, service type etc. I think that we need to be flexible and considerate of the individual differences in the sector. • It needs to make sure the evaluation, looks at the amount of paper work required, so that children come first, not paperwork. • Yes. In this way it will help ensure children are having a good head start in life as a result of good quality care offered across the board. • Transparent Evaluation data should be publically available. • As long as the robust nature of the assessment is related to the quality of care and education We have seen already too many times when the evaluative process has seemed to have little or no relationship to the actual care and education of children. • It has to work in practice not just statistically.
3.5 Where voluntary committees currently manage ECEC services, governments should ensure that professional management support (such as cluster management or other shared services) is readily available to assists with management and leadership.	<p>93.2% agreed and 6.8% disagreed</p> <p>Some of the comments received were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified staff within the centre can support voluntary committees – would not like family based committees to loose autonomy. • Turnover rate of families holding positions on committees is an issue. • This could assist boards to frame their decision making to meet required standards. • I believe that committees require professional training but we need to remember that they are volunteers. • Currently CCSA assists management committees. • We need the support to come to the service. • This is a desperate need. • Doesn't Community Child Care already offer this? • Essential that management committee members have training because of their huge level of responsibility. • Given the benefits (social capital, individual skill development, diversity and more) of being involved as a volunteer on a management committee training will have long term benefits to all.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be extremely helpful • Should not be at government expense • If they so wish this training.
3.6 In implementing the National Quality Standard, governments should ensure adequate resourcing for regulators to enable appropriate training of their staff in the new regulatory arrangement and their effective implementation, (including assessors)	<p>100% participants agreed with this recommendation.</p> <p>Some of the comments received were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential that early childhood settings are assessed by qualified and experienced university trained teacher. • Providing funding is given for training and there is consultation with Early Childhood bodies. • Remote areas often miss out on lots of in service. • “Appropriately trained’ can be viewed quite broadly. Need to be specific. • All parties need to be on the same page • We need more training options around the NQF particularly in regional areas. • Training essential for the success of the NQF implementation. • Absolutely – the sector will not respect nor respond to staff who have no knowledge of early childhood. X 4 • Everyone involved in the implementation of the NQF needs to have appropriate qualifications and training. X 5 • Assessors need to have an early childhood qualification and a qualification in training and assessment. • Why would you not have highly trained regulatory staff? • Services need to take responsibility for the training of their staff. • No brainer • We must ensure high quality in our provisions and this can’t be done by content-free assessors. • Staff need to have an early childhood degree and extensive experience in the provision of early childhood care and education needs to be essential. • Early Years Trained Teachers are the most appropriate assessors. • Assessors should have a four year qualification in early childhood. • Definitely and this training should be transparent to those in the sector.

<p>5.1 In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of early childhood teachers to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, salary and conditions offered by long day care centres will need to be competitive with those offered to primary teachers in the school sector. Community and privately managed preschools in New South Wales will also need to offer similarly competitive salaries and conditions for their teachers, which is already the case in other jurisdictions.</p>	<p>96.7% agreed with this finding and 3.3% disagreed.</p> <p>Some of the comments received were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only long day care but preschool settings as well. X 4 • Teachers in early childhood settings have many roles – e.g. director, manager, family support workers we deserve at least the pay and conditions of primary school teacher colleagues. • We support this • I have been in the sector for 30 years and because of pay and conditions feel devalued. • Very difficult to get teachers in early childhood – wages and conditions terrible. • Staff who have worked in this field for many years are becoming very discouraged and disillusioned with their career choice. • Early childhood teachers are teachers and educators and therefore deserve to have competitive salary and conditions equivalent to primary school teacher. • We still get applications from primary school teachers for early childhood positions – why is this so? • We love the early childhood sector but need to be paid and given the same level of respect as those from the school sector. • There needs to be improved funding for the sector that increased wages did not have a flow on effect to family fees. X4 • A teacher needs to be recognised as such – you don’t do four years of training to be treated as an assistant. All teachers no matter where they work should have similar conditions and wages. • Absolutely! They say the value of the early years, but they don’t put their money where their mouth is. • I believe that increased wages may not only attract more staff to the sector, but it will assist in retaining more staff throughout the sector. • After completing the same degree at uni to be paid a MUCH lower wage than teachers in schools, does nothing to entice graduates through the door to EC settings. There is over \$15000 a year difference in wages for me working in a school to an EC setting. • EC teachers are leaving in droves...families, however, cannot afford increased wages and conditions. Teachers should be employed through the government as as the Department of Education and placed in services as for primary teachers.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have recently returned to the workforce to find under the new award my wages has decreased by \$4 per hour – this will not keep me in the workforce. • To implement the National Quality Framework all staff should be trained, and early childhood teachers should be on par with primary teacher counterparts. If this does not happen, then the investment that the government has made in the training of the teachers will be lost. • Young children deserve trained early childhood teachers. The government needs to take responsibility for payment of all staff. • Conditions need to improve to ensure equity for all those with equivalent qualifications. • It takes a very dedicated and passionate person to choose to work in early childhood for 48 weeks a year for less money than in a school position where staff work for 41 weeks per year for significantly higher wages. • Wages for early childhood teachers in either schools or pre-schools used to be the same with long day care teachers actually getting a 4% loading – what has gone wrong? • Why would graduates join their colleagues in long day care when they have better conditions and rates of pay in the primary school system – with less accountability and simpler regulatory systems. • Statistics show that new graduates do not enter Long Day Care settings because of conditions and 20% lower wages. • Yes, yes, yes, reward the qualification, dedication, hard work and degree. But this needs to be in conjunction with an increase in funding or we will be in a dire financial predicament.
5.1 In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of workers with certificate III and diploma qualifications to achieve the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, wages for many workers will need to increase, particularly in long day care centres and community- and privately-managed preschools.	<p>92.1% members agreed and 7.9% disagreed.</p> <p>Participants comments included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal pay for equal skills. Yes Yes. Cleaners, check out operators earn more and the type of knowledge skills and responsibility does not compare. • Most could earn more working in a shop! Young children are our future and deserve better than this. • Definitely. Current wages do not reflect the level of professionalism or the level of responsibility. • Yes, perhaps then we could have good quality certificate III and diploma qualified staff. I believe that staff should commit to regular professional development, meet professional goals each year and contribute to the educational environment before an increase is made to their wage. Similar to teacher accreditation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this was to happen the centres would need government support to help pay for additional costs. • I also believe that wages for FDC staff need to be drastically reviewed for community based services. • Incremental steps should be ongoing – to induce staff to stay for the long term. • Wages do not currently reflect the level of expertise that is required to implement the EYLF and the NQF. • I have worked in community based children's services for 23 years and I realise that I give too much for the minimal wages on offer so I am leaving the sector based on low wages. • Wages are a disgrace! For the responsibility we have in providing quality education and care for children. The paperwork, the conditions, the fact that we are working in the critical years – the remuneration is inadequate. You can earn more by working in a shop. • It is not just the wages that will retain staff but also the selection of staff with appropriate interest in children. • Retaining staff in services has been shown to be linked to high quality care. Retention rates will improve when remuneration improves. • Yes but also reflect the huge responsibility that staff have when working with young children as well as valuing a commitment to high quality programs in the early years. • Yes! In Singapore much has been done over the years to advocate for an increase in wages in early childhood professionals in an effort to attract and retain good quality staff for the profession.
6.1 To achieve the National Quality Standards, contact worker-to-child ratios for children under school age will increase in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. These changes are likely to lead to cost increases for family day care services in those jurisdictions, which may result in fewer children attending...hence lowering the revenue for family	<p>88% agreed that the new Family Day Care worker to child ratios will be better for children under school age considering Family Day Care places may be reduced. 12% disagreed.</p> <p>Some of the comments were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality care is vital • The group is small and 1:5 and outcomes are generally very positive considering that there are mixed age grouping. • Children in small groups such as FDC will be better off than children in CBC. Some educators may only have children over the age of 2 years so this would not decrease the level of care for these children. • Research shows that the smaller the ratio the better the education and care for each child. • But how do you ensure that Family Day Care providers can maintain their business viability?

<p>day care schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FDC educators work with a small group environment allows for quality care and education with 5 children under school age (current numbers). FDC can never be compared to centre-based services where there may be up to 90 children in the service. This current small group allows the educator and family to develop great partnerships and allows the educator to gain a great understanding of each child - their interests, skills and development. To lessen the number to 4 will mean a loss of approximately 5000 places in NSW thus removing the option of FDC for many families. The social group may also change - currently the mixed age group generally consists of 2 under 2 years and 3 children over 2 years who are able to socialise, play and learn together. The main advantages of Family Day Care are: • One consistent educator, chosen by the child's parents • A small mixed-age group of children allowing true partnerships in learning between educator, family, children and their peers • A total of only five children under school age on the premises at a time • An environment that is safe for all children • An environment and ratio that allows ease of supervision as well as great opportunities for interaction and promotes shared learning experiences The current ratio works - don't change this. I believe a ratio change will have a hugely negative effect on FDC in NSW. • I think it vital that the family day care workers remain in the industry and reducing the number in their care will force many out. There are many ordinary families as well as carers who have 5 children. Put FDC in a regulation of their own. • I worry that it will become unviable for FDC to keep working with only 4 children per day. I worry this will lead them to leave FDC and move into other EC care environments or out of the EC environment altogether and this will mean less amount of FDCs out there which is a very important form of care. • The family day care centres I have seen are being beautifully run with their current ratios. With huge waiting lists, many children are going to miss out on care, and parents will be unable to work. • This will hit FDC hard. It is difficult enough to get carers now we just have to find more??? • It is reasonable that family day care workers have similar staff to child ratios as those in services. In fact an argument could be made that their ratios should be less because there is only one carer available at any one time. • Other states have the 1:4 ratio in FDC, so why can't we do this for the children of NSW? • I think that FDC in NSW (1:5) especially, has demonstrated through the Accreditation process that they operate at a high level and reducing the ratio will only cause fees to rise dramatically and also result in lack of FDC positions for children. FDC have a mixed age group generally with no more than 2 children less than 2 years – do not feel it is a positive policy idea.
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	I think that all children deserve a consistent standard of high quality care and education in whatever setting families choose to suit their family situation.
7.1 Given the focus of outside school hours care on non-cognitive development through constructive play and socialisation, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements on outside school hours care workers.	<p>96.6% of participants agreed that outcomes would be better for school aged children if workers in Out of School Hours Care were qualified.</p> <p>The comments included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obviously • Yes qualified staff should be able to always direct better outcomes, however, any qualifications should be relevant to the service type and what it offers. • Training is not the answer to everything but it would give the worker more options/skills. • Psychology should form part of their training and qualification. Children are now in the care of strangers and not their families when they come home from school and bullying in takes various forms these days with technology being such an important part of our lives including primary school children. A long time ago children would come home to the security and comfort of their own homes after a long day at school. Now most of them go into an out of school hours care environment and we are not providing qualified staff to meet their emotional needs. • In my experience training helps everyone who works with children so why would we not consider that this age group do not require trained staff? • This age bracketed is just as entitled to high quality care as other ages of children and we all know that staff qualifications are one of the most important indicators of quality. • I think it is essential to have at least one qualified member of staff on premises at all times for Out of School Hours Care. This sector is severely lacking in professionalism and educational benefits for children. Motivation to ensure these programs are of good quality is left to the individual. • Children need to be children at these times of day are for rest and recreation they should not be structured. Children require appropriate supervision at OSHC from responsible adults and this does not necessarily mean qualified persons. • Only one third of the children even attend OSHC, there should be one or two qualified supervisors who are ultimately responsible for their staff. • I believe that everybody working with children should have a qualification. • It is not easy to look after school aged children in a group. Not having qualifications is likely to be

	<p>linked to having poorer outcomes for all children in the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training needs to emphasise the recreational and social needs of children who have been in school all day. Staff need to be able to recognise and respond to signs of individual needs. • Most definitely. How has it happened that children from 5 to 12 years do not deserve or require educated staff during these vital years. Often the hours children attend OSCHC are when they are tired or stressed and therefore require expert support. • I believe all people who work with any group of children should be suitably qualified. Lets finally lift the standard of the people that work with children. • Qualifications at a high level assist staff to make quality decisions! • I would recommend at least one worker who held a qualification who could assist other staff in implementing programs and environments.
10.2 Governments should facilitate access to VET by developing ECEC training programs targeted at contact workers from culturally and linguistically diverse background (including English language programs delivered in conjunction with ECEC training).	<p>93.3% agreed and 6.7% disagreed.</p> <p>Some of the comments received were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that we have qualified staff from a range of cultural backgrounds to support our children. • Staff with familiar language and culture can assist services to provide a sense of belonging. • If you are talking 'facilitate' rather than fund, having advisers to help with courses etc. this is fine but these workers need to fund their own training just like everyone else has had to do. Any additional 'funding' needs to be going directly to families who are struggling with the higher fees now associated with Child Care. • Equity \of access for all is desirable. Low SES communities as well as CALD and ATSI • This is already available through RTOs at many levels and diverse study options. • I believe that this training should be available for all contact workers. • Support additional attention to English proficiency should be included.