



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

Pre-Budget Submission 2019-20

Department of Treasury, Commonwealth Government

Early Childhood Australia

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About us:

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is a not-for-profit organisation that has been a voice for children since 1938. We have a federated structure with branches in every state and territory in Australia; our National Office is in Canberra.

Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school.

Our work builds the capacity of our society and the early childhood sector to realise the potential of every child during the critical early years from birth to the age of eight. ECA specifically acknowledges the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the past and current injustices and realities for them around Australia.

Find our more at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

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Executive Summary

The evidence is clear – when children are provided with high quality early learning experiences in the first years of life, they experience a lasting impact across their lifespan. They also are more likely to transition more smoothly to school, stay engaged with education and experience improved social and emotional wellbeing in their adult life. They are less likely to intersect with the criminal justice system or experience persistent disadvantage. Quality early education can also support families to engage or re-engage with the workforce, delivering economic and social benefits not only to their household, but to Australian society as a whole. Early learning builds a solid foundation for children starting school, irrespective of their background or family circumstances. Importantly, the benefits also deliver economic value to society through a more capable, productive and inclusive society, and by reducing costs in later years by intervening with vulnerable children.

Compared to international standards, Australia’s performance on providing positive and high quality early learning to all Australian children is moderate. ECA believes that the Australian Government should invest in delivering high quality early learning for at least 18 hours per week (over two or three days) to all Australian children from the end of paid parental leave until school. In particular, the Government must support efforts to improve the participation of children who are most at risk of educational disadvantage and therefore vulnerable to poor educational outcomes.

ECA has identified 13 recommendations that would strengthen the early education and care system in Australia to ensure that all Australian children have the best start in life.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Increase Australia’s investment in early education to 1 per cent of GDP over the next five years to:

- lift participation rates of three year olds in high quality early education
- boost participation and improve access for disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ECEC
- invest in the Australian ECEC workforce to improve remuneration, lift qualification levels and improve outcomes for children

Recommendation 2: Develop an outcomes framework for the early childhood education and care system to better measure the impact of higher quality programs at the individual and system level.

Recommendation 3: Fund and implement the recommendations of the Productivity Commission’s 2016 Education Evidence Base report to strengthen and extend data gathering, data systems and research and analysis.



Recommendation 4: Secure a long term funding agreement to deliver up to 18 hours of high quality early education to all Australian children in the two years before school, with up to 30 hours for disadvantaged children.

Recommendation 5: Align to the Commonwealth Child Care subsidy to grant a base entitlement of at least 18 hours per week of subsidised early education and care each week irrespective of parents' activity, with a higher entitlement for children who are experiencing disadvantage.

Recommendation 6: Establish new early childhood development targets to close the gap in the AEDC domains by 2030; and an accompanying strategy—through the Closing the Gap refresh.

Recommendation 7: Commit to funding universal access to high-quality early education for three- and four-year-olds, including additional funding to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get access to a minimum of three days per week—determined by children's needs— of high-quality preschool.

Recommendation 8: Amend the Activity Test within the Child Care Subsidy to provide up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, without parents having to meet any work or study requirements.

Recommendation 9: Invest in quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early years services, through a specific early education program, with clear targets to increase coverage in areas of high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and high levels of disadvantage.

Recommendation 10: That the Government reinstate funding cut from the National Quality Agenda in last year's Budget and reconsider increasing the investment in quality as per the recommendations contained in the report on the efficient cost of regulation that was tabled at Education Council in 2018.

Recommendation 11: That the government develop a new national Early Childhood Workforce Strategy that addresses:

- building on quality improvements for ECEC services
- workforce shortages which impact the supply of early education
- training and professional development needs that underpin continuous quality improvement
- higher remuneration for educators.

Recommendation 12: Commission resources to guide early educators to support the appropriate use of digital technologies in early education and care settings by young children, and to enable early educators to support families in their management of digital technologies at home.

Recommendation 13: Commission guidance for teachers and school leaders on early years' pedagogy and intentional teaching for learning outcomes in the early years.



The benefits of increasing Australia's investment in early education to the OECD average

The first five years are when children develop important skills for lifelong learning, including the underlying cognitive skills required for later literacy and numeracy development, as well as social and emotional skills, such as participate in groups, cooperate and negotiate, and regulate their emotions. Early childhood educators and teachers utilise intentional teaching strategies and play-based pedagogy in rich learning environments. Early educators have a unique opportunity to identify early signs of developmental delay or social-emotional problems in order to trigger timely assessment and early intervention, ensuring that children are given the best possible opportunities for their individual needs well before they commence primary school.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2016 showed that in 2015, one in five Australian children were starting school developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains of child development. Disturbingly, this number is two in five children for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as it is for disadvantaged children. In addition, the performance of Australia's school students against international standards is falling, as indicated by results of assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).

A quality early education system for Australia is crucial to ensure that Australia's young children develop to their full potential and to thrive in our society. Participation in high quality early learning has become increasingly important as research now points to the importance of early brain development on future academic and social emotional outcomes for children. The OECD finds consistent links between participation in pre-primary education and success in the PISA in mathematics, literacy and science; a child with no pre-primary education is 1.9 times more likely to perform poorly in education than a student who has attended more than a year of pre-primary education, even after controlling for socioeconomic status.¹ Investing in quality early learning is one of the most valuable investments a country can make.

Australia continues to lag OECD countries in terms of participation of three and four year olds in early education and care, and in particular with regard to three year olds who have access to a high quality preschool program.² The OECD recommended in its 2016 "Going for Growth" report on Australia noted that:

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2016) Education at a glance 2016, Paris, France: OECD Publishing at 80.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2016) Education at a glance 2016, Paris, France: OECD Publishing



“Improving all levels of education will be crucial to boosting the long-term productive and innovative capacity of the economy. Reform should be geared towards increasing the supply and quality of early childhood education as well as towards improving outcomes at the primary and secondary levels.”³

Australia is the fifth lowest of all the OECD countries in terms of its investment in early education and care, contributing around 0.5% of GDP into education and care prior attended by children prior to starting school.⁴ In addition, Australia is unusual amongst OECD countries as we have a disproportionate level of funding coming from private sources as compared to most OECD countries, with 28% of funding for preschool education coming from private sources, and 37% for early childhood education and care.⁵ Australia has relatively high funding on a per child basis, but overall funding is lower due to the part-time nature of children’s participation in preschool and ECEC.

The PWC report ‘*Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia*’ (2014) found that the benefits to GDP from children participating in quality early learning stood at more than \$10 billion cumulative to 2050⁶. Additionally, the benefits of increased participation of vulnerable children are estimated to be \$13.3 billion cumulative to 2050.

Increased investment in early education would help to deliver both higher quality education and care, and increased participation in early learning, and place Australia in a stronger position with regards to long term outcomes for children.

Recommendation 1: Increase Australia’s investment in early education to 1 per cent of GDP over the next five years to:

- **lift participation rates of three year olds in high quality early education**
- **boost participation and improve access for disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ECEC**
- **invest in the Australian ECEC workforce to improve remuneration, lift qualification levels and improve outcomes for children**

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2016). *Going for Growth 2016: Australia*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/eco/growth/going-for-growth-2016-australia.htm>

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2017) *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD indicators on early childhood education and care*. Retrieved from http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/starting-strong-2017_9789264276116-en#page92

⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2017) *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators, Australia - Country Note*, Retrieved from http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/9617041ec038.pdf?expires=1513736372&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=D81E2D1200479A131E1C94B3A70A30A1_3.

⁶ PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). (2014). *Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia*. Australia: PwC.



Measure the Benefits of Early Learning Investment

It is well understood that quality early childhood education can make a significant contribution to children’s long-term educational outcomes. Evidence, based on AEDC data, shows that early learning delivers significant educational, social and emotional benefits for the children who participate, and that children who attend early education and care services are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable across all five developmental domains (Goldfeld, S., O’Connor, E., O’Connor, M., Sayers, M., Moore, T., Kvalsvig, A., & Brinkman, S. A. (2016).

Participation in quality early childhood education has also demonstrated a positive impact on children’s education achievements as measured by NAPLAN test results (Warren & Haisken-DeNew, 2013). The OECD finds a consistent link between participation in pre-primary education and success in the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) in mathematics, literacy and science. A child with no pre-primary education is 1.9 times more likely to perform poorly in education than a student who has attended more than a year of pre-primary education, even after controlling for socio-economic status (OECD, 2016, p 80). School engagement is also enhanced: children who participate in high-quality early childhood education are more likely to complete Year 12 and are less likely to repeat grades or require additional support (Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, & Siraj, 2015). High-quality early childhood education also has broader social impacts: it is linked with higher levels of employment, income and financial security, improved health outcomes and reduced crime (Schweinhart et al., 2005; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga & White, 2011).

The OECD identifies that children who attend high quality ECEC have better outcomes later in life, and that disadvantaged children can benefit the most from attending.⁷ Indeed the research indicates that interventions for disadvantaged children are more effective when children are in their “development window”, and that intervening later is less efficient.⁸ For the benefit of Australia’s children, their families, and the community as a whole, we need to continue to put in place policies and programs that will support the development of our young children.

⁷ OECD (2017) at 146

⁸ OECD (2017) at 146



However, the Productivity Commission's report into the National Education Evidence⁹ base identified that "there is a growing body of international evidence on the benefits of quality ECEC, but there is limited evidence for the Australian context." They identify that linked data could be used to advantage to explore issues such as:

- how ECEC attendance (in terms of both hours and days) affect children's outcomes, including subsequent school achievement, and;
- how ECEC programs benefit different groups of children and families.

It is critical to improving our education system and developing effective government policies to have more extensive Australian education data, including about the relative effectiveness of different service models, pedagogies and approaches to promoting access and supporting families, and information that tracks a child's journey through early learning to school. There is the potential to develop future measures on outcomes such as student progression, retention/completion, subject choices and social/emotional wellbeing – all of which have major long term impacts on Australia's future productivity, workforce readiness and population health. Large data collections that could be incorporated include the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and the National Assessment Program encompassing Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing, PIRLS, TIMMS and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing.

In addition to the extent to which ECEC contributes to educational outcomes, it would also be useful to measure associated impacts such as addressing Australia future workforce skills such as creativity & collaboration, reducing disadvantage and vulnerability, supporting families to participate in the workforce and balance both work and family responsibilities, and the contribution of the ECEC sector to Australia's economy.

Recommendation 2: Develop an outcomes framework for the early childhood education and care system to better measure the impact of higher quality programs at the individual and system level.

Recommendation 3: Fund and implement the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's 2016 Education Evidence Base report to strengthen and extend data gathering, data systems and research and analysis.

⁹ Productivity Commission. (2016). *National Education Evidence Base*: productivity commission Inquiry Report Vol 1, No 80. Canberra, ACT. Commonwealth of Australia.



Fund two years of high quality early education for Australia's young children

Australia's performance in the delivery of quality early childhood education and care needs improvement. Currently, one in five Australian children present as vulnerable in one or more domains of social, emotional or cognitive development when they commence school.¹⁰ This number is two in five children for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Quality early learning is vital for all children, and its greatest benefits accrue to disadvantaged children.¹¹ In its 2016 report, *Preschool - Two Years are Better Than One*, the Mitchell Institute says:

Access to a high-quality preschool program is one of the few proven strategies for lifting outcomes for all children. Evidence shows that two years of preschool has more impact than one, especially for the children most likely to be developmentally vulnerable. It is time for Australia to pursue a national commitment to ensuring all 3 year olds have access to high-quality early education by offering a second year of preschool.

OECD data indicates that only 64 per cent of three-year-olds in Australia attended early education and care in 2016, putting Australia in the bottom-third of OECD countries and well behind the OECD average of 76 per cent (OECD, 2018). The Report on Government Services 2019 indicated that in 2018, 62.5 per cent of three year olds were attending government–subsidised early education and care services; however, many programs currently accessed by three-year-old children are not delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher (SCRGSP, 2019).

The National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education has successfully increased children's participation in high-quality, teacher-led early education in the year before school from 12 per cent in 2008 to 90.1 per cent in 2017 (SCRGSP, 2019). The current National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (NPA) supports 15 hours per week of preschool delivered by a degree qualified educator, to children in the year before school.

ECA calls on governments to ensure that a new National Partnership Agreement increases targets for enrolment and attendance at high-quality early education to **achieve full participation in the two years prior to school**. ECA believes that all children should have access to at least 18 hours of high-quality

¹⁰ Australian Government (2016) *Australian Early Development Census 2015*, Retrieved from <https://www.aedc.gov.au/about-the-aedc/aedc-news/article/2016/03/08/2015-summary-findings>

¹¹ Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016) *Preschool – Two Years are better than one: Developing a preschool program for Australian three year olds – Evidence, policy and implementation* (Mitchell Institute Policy Paper no 3/2016). Melbourne, Vic.: Mitchell Institute.



early learning each week in the two years before compulsory school commences, and that these hours should be spread over at least two days a week, if not three. Children with higher needs, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, **should have access to up to 30 hours a week**. A new National Partnership Agreement should be **at least five years in length** to reduce uncertainty in the sector and facilitate the development of high-quality programs.

In addition, to align the objectives of a National Partnership Agreement with the Child Care Subsidy Scheme, children in the two years before school should be granted a base entitlement of **at least 18 hours of subsidised early education and care each week**, irrespective of their parents' activity, to facilitate participation in the two years before school. Under the current Child Care Subsidy Scheme, parents are required to meet an Activity Test to prove eligibility for subsidised early education and care service. This means that some children are missing out on early education because of the activity of their parents. ECA supports all children having a base entitlement to subsidised early education and care, irrespective of their parents' activities. That entitlement should be higher for children who are at risk or experiencing disadvantage.

Recommendation 4: Secure a long term funding agreement to deliver up to 18 hours of high quality early education to all Australian children in the two years before school, with up to 30 hours for disadvantaged children.

Recommendation 5: Align to the Commonwealth Child Care subsidy to grant a base entitlement of at least 18 hours per week of subsidised early education and care each week irrespective of parents' activity, with a higher entitlement for children who are experiencing disadvantage.



Better outcomes for First Nations children

While so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are thriving, the evidence indicates that they are twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to start school developmentally vulnerable in one or more of the domains reviewed in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). Irrespective of rising preschool enrolment levels for four year olds, policy makers must be focussed on **measuring outcomes** for children, and to this end, ECA advocates that new close the gap targets focus on the AEDC domains.

Two key opportunities have been identified to lift outcomes: the provision on integrated family-focussed programs that support families in meaningful ways across a range of areas (e.g. health, parenting support) to build engagement with families over the longer term; and participation in high quality early education, for up to thirty hours a week of high-quality early education (“preschool”) in the two years before school. This is a substantially higher level of participation than is supported by current policy, and higher than what is being achieved in terms of attendance. In 2018, only 68 per cent of Indigenous children are attending for the 600 hours of preschool in the year before school, and children’s attendance was found to be lower when they live in rural and remote areas.

Barriers faced by First Nations children accessing early childhood services can exist at a number of levels: they can be individual, and involve the number of children in a family, employment, income, discrimination and housing; they can be service level barriers, which include issues such as service quality, and cultural competency; social and neighbourhood barriers that include how transient a community is, their living conditions and the level of social and geographical isolation; and importantly cultural barriers, such as a lack of trust in services or difficulty culturally engaging. Understanding these barriers must drive appropriate policy responses.

Endorsed by more than forty leading child welfare, education and research organisations, ECA and SNAICC – Voice for Our Children released a joint position paper called *Working Together to Ensure Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years*. (Further policy information is available in the accompanying discussion paper: *Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years*).

Recommendation 6: Establish new early childhood development targets to close the gap in the AEDC domains by 2030; and an accompanying strategy—through the Closing the Gap refresh.

Recommendation 7: Commit to funding universal access to high-quality early education for three- and four-year-olds, including additional funding to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get access to a minimum of three days per week—determined by children’s needs— of high-quality preschool.

Recommendation 8: Amend the Activity Test within the Child Care Subsidy to provide up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, without parents having to meet any work or study requirements.

Recommendation 9: Invest in quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early years services, through a specific early education program, with clear targets to increase coverage in areas of high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and high levels of disadvantage.



Support ongoing high quality early education services for Australian children

ECA supports and upholds the *National Quality Framework* (NQF), and evidence shows that the standard of early education in Australia has significantly improved since its implementation in 2012 (ACECQA, 2013; ACECQA, 2018). High-quality early education programs should be led by an ACECQA-approved, appropriately qualified early childhood teacher. Research shows that the qualification levels of educators, and the quality of the program, are significant indicators to success of early education programs (Tayler, 2016; Torii, Fox, & Cloney, 2017). However, in 2016, only 25 per cent of staff delivering preschool programs were degree-qualified or above (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

ECA supports all early education and care services and programs being in scope of the NQF. Currently, some services sit outside the scope of the NQF, including the government preschool sectors in Western Australia and Tasmania, though elements of the *National Quality Standard* (NQS) do apply in the Western Australian school system. ECA believes that all governments must ensure that they play their role in ensuring that the early education provided to Australian children is of a consistently high quality through regulation, monitoring and continuous improvement. This requires the National Quality Framework to be well-resourced, and supported by all governments

In the 2018-19 Federal Budget, funding to support the *National Partnership on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* was discontinued and replaced by direct funding of Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) of \$14.5 million over two years. The Federal Government withdrew from the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) under which the NQF was commenced and progressed nearly ten years ago. ECA believes that the loss of the national governance framework through the National Partnership Agreement is significant and puts the unified national approach to quality regulation at risk.

Australia's NQF provides a uniform national system by which Australian ECEC services are measured against standards, so as to ensure children's safety, health and wellbeing, and deliver educational and developmental benefits for children. The NQF is consistently supported by the sector and service providers. In surveys completed by service providers, ACECQA reports that the support of the sector for the *National Quality Framework* has remained consistently high (97% in the 2017 survey). It has delivered benefits to families and children through improved educator-child ratios, improved educator skills and qualifications, better support for learning through approved learning frameworks, and providing consistent and transparent information about service providers. From the commencement of the NQF in January 2012 through the end of December 2018, 15, 787 services had been assessed and 94% of all services had a quality rating. At this time, 79% of services have been



rated as ‘meeting’ or ‘exceeding the standard’¹². However, this means that 21% of services are not meeting the standard and are either rated ‘working towards’ or even lower. This reinforces the need for an ongoing system that drives ongoing improvement.

The *National Quality Framework* must be maintained as the primary mechanism for ensuring the social, emotional, physical and developmental wellbeing of young children in ECEC settings. ECA does not support any reduction of regulation that would compromise the quality of services provided to children. For Government, the independent assessment and ratings process is an important assurance that children are in a safe environment, with programs that support children’s learning and development outcomes. The independent process ensures that taxpayers are getting a return on investment in terms of a minimum quality standard for all children attending approved care, no matter where they live.

At a time when the sector requires increased investment through the *National Partnership on the National Quality Agenda for Early Education and Care* to enable assessments and reviews to be undertaken in a timely way, that offers confidence to Australian families, ECA has been concerned to see investment dropping.

Recommendation 10: That the Government reinstate funding cut from the National Quality Agenda in last year’s Budget and reconsider increasing the investment in quality as per the recommendations contained in the report on the efficient cost of regulation that was tabled at Education Council in 2018.

¹² NQF Snapshot Q4. (2018). A quarterly report from the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority. Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-02/NQFSnapshot_Q42018.pdf



A new early childhood workforce strategy

Studies show that educators' qualification levels have the greatest impact on the quality of early education received by young children (Goodfellow, 2007). The Australian early childhood education workforce is currently undergoing a period of rapid professionalisation, with the percentage of qualified staff in the sector gradually increasing. The 2016 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census (Department of Education and Training, 2017) reported that 85.2 per cent of paid contact staff had an early childhood education and care (ECEC)-related qualification. This figure is up from 69.8 per cent in 2010 (DEEWR, 2011), with the biggest increases in the percentage of educators who hold Diplomas and Certificate qualifications. In 2016, of those who have ECEC-related qualifications, 11.9 per cent were degree-qualified, 34 per cent had an advanced diploma and 38 per cent held a Certificate III/IV (Department of Education and Training, 2017). Of those paid staff that held qualifications below a Certificate III level, 84 per cent were identified as up-skilling, mostly to Certificate III.

However, while the evidence shows the sector is continuing to up-skill, many professionals—particularly those working in rural and regional areas—still have difficulty accessing professional development and other opportunities to improve their skills and qualification levels. With the cessation of the Long Day Care Professional Support Programme and the Early Years Quality Fund in June 2017, there is no ongoing funding available to help the ECEC workforce access appropriate professional development. ECA is calling on the Government to identify where future professional development funding would be best utilised to maximise the overall performance of the sector and ensure the best educational outcomes for children.

Improving wages and conditions in the early childhood sector would go a long way to addressing workforce challenges. A stable, skilled and professional labour force is widely acknowledged as vital to ensuring the delivery of high-quality early childhood education, but educators continue to be poorly paid for the work they do. While some employers are able to offer above-award wages and conditions, most educators' wages are significantly lower than the national average. Certificate III-qualified educators earn only \$21–\$22 per hour; around half the average workforce wage (Fair Work Commission, 2017). Low wages reduce living standards and reinforce the low status of early childhood educators. In addition, low wages result in high levels of staff attrition and employees leaving the sector. According to the 2016 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census, the average length of experience in the early childhood education sectors for paid contract staff was 6.6 years; only 17 per cent of staff with an ECEC-related qualification stayed in the workforce for more than six years; of those without an ECEC-related qualification, only 4.9 per cent stay longer than six years and 87 per cent leave the sector in less than four years (Department of Education and Training, 2017).



Addressing pay is crucial in improving the quality of teaching within ECEC services, and ensuring the future viability of the sector that supports Australian families and children. There is a need for Government to invest in the early childhood workforce so educators can receive adequate remuneration and recognition for the work they do, and the support they need to develop their careers and deliver the highest standard of education and care to young children.

The Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC, 2012) reached the end of its life in 2016, and ECA is calling for the development of a new workforce strategy to address the ever-changing characteristics of the early childhood workforce as matter of priority for the Government.

Recommendation 11: That the government develop a new national Early Childhood Workforce Strategy that addresses:

- **building on quality improvements for ECEC services**
- **workforce shortages which impact the supply of early education**
- **training and professional development needs that underpin continuous quality improvement**
- **higher remuneration for educators.**



Young children and digital technologies

In 2018, ECA released a Statement on young children and digital technologies, developed in response to an identified need for guidance for early childhood professionals on the role and optimal use of digital technologies with, by and for young children in early childhood education and care settings. ECA established and worked in consultation with an advisory Digital Policy Group, which comprised representatives of Australian-based organisations and academics with an interest and expertise in young children and digital technologies. The Statement was co-authored by Professor Susan Edwards, Australian Catholic University and Professor Leon, Straker, Curtin University, and is informed by sector consultation, published research and expert advice from within Australia and internationally. It provides an overview of existing research about young children and digital technologies in four known areas of importance in early childhood education: Relationships; Health and wellbeing; Citizenship; and Play and Pedagogy.

Each area is accompanied by a guiding principle and ‘practice advice’ intended to facilitate professional reflection on the role and optimal use of digital technologies with, by and for young children. Instead of working towards ‘one-size-fits-all’ advice, a contextual approach recognises that educators are skilled at working in partnership with children and families in the best interests of the child. Young children are now growing up in digital environments, using and seeing others use smartphones, tablets, computers, internet-connected toys and apps. Many Educators are keen to include technologies in their early childhood classrooms and have asked for guidance. They are also being asked by families for advice about how to manage digital technologies at home. Early childhood educators are uniquely placed to make informed decisions about digital technology use in the best interests of children, based on their professional knowledge of how young children play, learn and develop, and can work in partnership with families to model appropriate use of digital technology. They can also raise issues about digital citizenship, which considers children’s right to access technology and the internet, as well as their right to online privacy and safety.

ECA would propose that the Statement provides a solid basis on which to build engagement with the ECEC sector about the use of digital technologies with, for and by young children. However, there is a need to develop supportive resources that accompany the Statement such that educators are able to consider and implement best practice within their own services, and to support families in how to manage the use of digital technologies at home, in the best interests of their children

Recommendation 12: Commission resources to guide early educators to support the appropriate use of digital technologies in early education and care settings by young children, and to enable early educators to support families in their management of digital technologies at home.



Intentional teaching and play-based pedagogy

The education of young children is a continuum of educational and care outcomes from birth through to the school years. As Australia moves towards extending high quality educational programs into the early years, early educators understand that it is important to maintain age appropriate and play based pedagogical practices. Indeed, play-based learning benefits children throughout the early childhood years, and extending into the early years of school.

However, with a growing focus on the educational benefits of early learning, and improving outcomes for children in literacy, numeracy and science in the later years of school, early educators could benefit from further guidance through an early years curriculum as to how to deliver the learning outcomes in the years birth to eight years using age appropriate teaching practices, and in particular, through play. As children move into the school settings, and engage with the Australian curriculum, play-based pedagogies are sometimes misunderstood or inadequately implemented, resulting in a 'push down' curriculum. Currently there is limited guidance to teachers working with both the Early Years learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum.

ECA is well positioned to initiate a consultation and research process into the development of guidance for teachers and school leaders on integrating intentional teaching and play based pedagogies in early education (from birth to 8 years), referencing the Early Years Learning Framework, the Australian curriculum and contemporary research on best practice pedagogy across early learning settings and the early years of school.

Recommendation 13: Commission guidance for teachers and school leaders on early years' pedagogy and intentional teaching for learning outcomes in the early years.