



Valuing Educators, Values Children

A Workforce Strategy for the
ACT Early Childhood Education
and Care Profession (2023–25)



ACT
Government

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Acknowledgement

The Education Directorate acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and custodians of the Canberra region. The region is also an important meeting place and significant to other Aboriginal groups.

We also acknowledge and pay respect to the Wreck Bay peoples as traditional owners and custodians of the land on which the Jervis Bay school is located.

We respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and their continuing culture, and contribution they make to the Canberra region and the life of our city.



Foreword

It is widely acknowledged that experienced, qualified and passionate educators are the single most important contributor to quality in early childhood education. Access to quality early learning experiences guided by qualified educators leaves an enduring positive mark on the lives of children. Through quality early learning experiences, children are set up for success on their educational journey and have a fair crack at happiness in life.

For many families, early childhood educators play an essential role in supporting their child's learning and development. Children learn and develop through interactions with people. Through interactions with their educators, children become confident communicators and are supported to reach important developmental milestones. Families remark upon the impact that educators have in supporting parents and carers in their role as their child's first teacher.

Investing in children's learning and development requires governments and the community to value and invest in educators. I am pleased to deliver *Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession (2023–25)*.

Through this strategy, the ACT Government will deliver a range of actions aimed at achieving our vision of ensuring educators and early childhood professionals in the ACT are well-supported, valued and respected by the community, and highly skilled. The actions in this strategy reflect the current challenges facing the workforce and are aligned to delivery of broader early childhood reforms.

If we value children, we simply must value educators.

The *Valuing Educators, Values Children Workforce Strategy* recognises this and provides the vehicle for making our vision for the early childhood profession a reality.

Yvette Berry MLA
Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development

About this strategy

Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession (2023–25) aims to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the ACT early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce.

The strategy is aligned to *Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success)* and the national workforce strategy, *Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce (2022–31)*.

In 2022, a consultation process was held to seek input from the ECEC sector, families, educators, unions and the wider community on the development of this strategy. The findings of this consultation process are reflected throughout this strategy and in its four focus areas:

- Sector supports
- Capability building
- Professional recognition
- Career pathways

“The workforce strategy will require intentional strategies to bridge the diverse range of operating structures within the ECEC sector across the jurisdiction.”

Consultation participant, 2022

The strategy will be delivered from 2023 to 2025, in line with Phase Two of *Set up for Success*. The strategy is underpinned by the ACT Government's commitment to universal access to quality early childhood education and care and the National Quality Framework (NQF). A sector reference group will be established to oversee the delivery of this strategy and ensure it meets the needs of the ECEC workforce.

While this strategy provides short-term actions aligned with Phase Two of *Set up for Success*, the ACT Government is committed to supporting the ECEC workforce over the longer term. Actions in this strategy will inform future workforce strategies under *Set up for Success*.

Ongoing collaboration and engagement with early childhood professionals from across the sector on the strategy's key initiatives will contribute to ensuring a well-supported, valued and highly skilled early childhood education workforce now and into the future.

“The ACT ECEC Workforce Strategy should take its cues from the national strategy (*Shaping our Future*), but should place particular emphasis on factors unique to the ACT.”

Consultation participant, 2022



Where are we now?

In the ACT, early childhood professionals work across a range of government and non-government settings including for-profit and not-for-profit centre-based service providers, public and private preschools and early learning centres, Koori Preschools, family daycare services and play schools. Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) also forms an integral part of the early learning profession in the ACT. Alongside these educational settings are a range of community and health services that support the development of children in their early years.

The 2021 *Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census* report (2021) provides a national overview of the early childhood education and care workforce. It identifies that:

- The ACT's ECEC workforce is overwhelmingly young women. The ACT has a higher number of staff in the 20-24 age range than the national average.
- In 2021, 73% of staff had three or less years' experience in the sector. 32% of staff had less than one year's experience in the sector.
- In 2021, nearly one third of the workforce were studying for a qualification while working.
- Compared to 2016, tertiary qualified staff grew by 1% and diploma qualified staff in long day care grew by 7%. At the same time, Certificate III and IV qualified staff declined by 7%.
- In 2021, 58% of ACT ECEC staff were paid above the award rate. Nationally, 35% of staff were paid above the award rate.

This strategy commits to an ACT workforce survey and review to further contribute to development of a 'current state' against which improvement and impact can be monitored over time.

Where do we want to be?

The ACT Government is working towards a future where:

- All children have access to high quality early childhood education, no matter the setting.
- The workforce is valued for their transformative contributions to children's lives and are supported to upskill, and continuously learn and develop as professionals.
- Passionate early childhood professionals are attracted, supported and retained over the long term.
- The whole community understands and prioritises the importance of early years learning and development.



"Early childhood educators and teachers often report feeling undervalued and underappreciated for the essential role they play in children's development. There is limited public understanding of the value of play-based learning for young children or how educators and teachers scaffold, structure and support early learning."

Consultation participant, 2022

Our vision: A well-supported, valued and highly skilled early childhood education and care workforce

Young children learn and develop through interactions with people. Early childhood educators bring special knowledge and skills to their interactions with children, supporting them to deepen and extend their thinking, problem-solving skills and language, as well as to build close and respectful relationships. Valuing children and investing in their learning and development requires governments and the community to value and invest in educators.

Focus areas:

Ensuring appropriate supports are in place for the profession at the sector level, and engaging with the Australian Government on issues affecting the sector beyond local control

Supporting professional development and ongoing learning to enhance professional knowledge and practice



Enhancing professional recognition and community perceptions of early childhood education and care

Creating career pathways, supporting career progression and enabling leadership at all levels



Ensuring appropriate supports are in place for the profession at the sector level, and engaging with the Australian Government on issues affecting the sector beyond local control

Effectively supporting affordable, accessible, equitable and high-quality ECEC, which reduces barriers to workforce participation and supports children’s learning and development, requires both local and national investment. Engaging in reform activities and advocating for the profession at a national level presents an opportunity to enhance and raise the profile of the sector more broadly.

Key outcomes:

- Delivery of cross-sector supports
- A clear understanding of the sector including workforce pressures and needs
- Ongoing engagement between the ACT and Australian governments on issues affecting the ECEC profession

	Actions	What will be done
ACT workforce strategy	Deliver and evaluate a cross-sector workforce strategy	Implement the actions outlined in this strategy and monitor and evaluate their effectiveness through the Set up for Success evaluation framework
	Identify workforce capacity and needs	Undertake a comprehensive survey and review of the ACT’s ECEC and OSHC workforce capacity allowing for enhanced understanding of workforce needs, pressures and areas for future focus
	Ongoing advocacy for the early childhood education and care profession	Advocacy for the profession that focuses on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national system that significantly reduces social and financial barriers to accessing quality ECEC and OSHC • A national system that delivers universal access to free quality early childhood education, for at least the two years before formal school • Professional recognition and remuneration of the education and care workforce • Balancing improved access with higher quality and the delivery of culturally safe and responsive early learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
National workforce strategy	Investigate options for improving workforce pay and conditions	Commission research to explore and identify the structural barriers to, and strategies for, improving pay and conditions in the sector
	Review and streamline existing application and approval processes for overseas trained educators and teachers	Review existing migration processes and opportunities for overseas trained entrants to the children’s education and care sector
	Investigate options for improved wellbeing supports	Consider the viability of a range of potential wellbeing supports, notably a base level employee assistance program for educators and teachers that currently do not have access to one
	Continue the ongoing focus on the quality of vocational education and training	Ensure that intergovernmental, education and training provider, and sector stakeholder representatives provide ongoing advice and feedback regarding vocational education and training reform, including the implementation of the revised children’s education and care national training package
	Undertake a national workforce census at least every three years	Review the implementation and outcomes of the 2021 workforce census and involve sector stakeholders throughout the future development and delivery cycles

Capability Building

Supporting professional development and ongoing learning to enhance professional knowledge and practice

As professionals, early childhood educators are significant influencers on the learning and development outcomes of children. A skilled workforce of educators who are equipped with the support, training and resources to most effectively facilitate learning and development is essential. Engagement and collaboration between educators at all levels fosters a supportive learning community and contributes to a culture of ongoing learning.

Key outcomes:

- A highly skilled, capable and sustainable workforce
- Enhanced professional learning and development opportunities
- Improved professional networks and collaboration across the profession

	Actions	What will be done
ACT workforce strategy	Establish a sector-wide workforce development program in inclusive educational practices	Deliver professional learning for educators to enhance educator capability through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upholding the NQF • Supporting children affected by trauma • Culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices • Play-based learning and intentional teaching practices • Respectful relationships and gender diversity • Enhanced coaching and mentoring supports
	Establish a professional learning network	Establish collaborative learning communities across services to enhance engagement across the sector and share professional expertise
	Establish a professional learning and resource portal for educators	Provide access for ECEC services to curated, quality professional learning and development resources through a learning and resource portal
	Develop a peer support, coaching and mentoring framework	Deliver a framework to enable the implementation of peer support, coaching and mentoring programs in ECEC services
National workforce strategy	Enhance mentoring and induction support for new teachers	Consider the appropriateness of national early career teacher mentoring and induction support, following a review of existing supports that are available at jurisdictional and local levels
	Improve access to core professional development for educators and teachers	Develop an evolving suite of eLearning modules, including an 'Induction to the NQF' training package, with new entrants to the sector identified as a primary audience
	Investigate options for a national professional practice network for educators and teachers	Consider the appropriateness of a national professional practice network, following a review of existing networks that are available at jurisdictional and local levels
	Promote wellbeing resources for educators and teachers	Continue to deliver the Be You initiative, with service providers committing to provide protected time for educators and teachers to access the initiative wherever possible

"Early childhood education and care has a central role in the community and for children. Therefore, it should be recognised that educators are providing an educational experience."

Consultation participant, 2022

Career Pathways

Creating career pathways, supporting career progression and enabling leadership at all levels

Creating clear career pathways and increasing further study opportunities for educators enhances the perception of ECEC as a rewarding long-term career. Career pathways assist educators and their managers to engage in meaningful performance discussions, set career and development goals, and enable the identification of current and future capability requirements. More broadly, career pathways contribute to the retention of employees and the creation of leadership pipelines.

Key outcomes:

- Clear career pathways and enhanced career progression opportunities
- Increased number of degree qualified educators
- Improved professional development processes

	Actions	What will be done
ACT workforce strategy	Develop educator professional standards	In consultation with unions and the ECEC sector, develop educator professional standards, initially for voluntary adoption, to be used as part of development or career planning discussions, as a tool for personal reflection, and to support coaching and mentoring
	Deliver the Early Childhood Degree Scholarships Program	Increase professional development opportunities to enhance the skills and capabilities of educators across the profession
	Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators	Deliver a scholarship program to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in Koori Preschools to increase their qualifications
	Establish ECEC sector and tertiary partnerships	Work in partnership with the sector and tertiary institutions to provide wrap-around support for individuals to undertake a Certificate III, Diploma or Degree qualification in early childhood education, inclusive of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study financial assistance and paid leave for participants • Employer support, including coaching and mentoring via the Australian Institute of Management • Group coaching workshops and ongoing supports for participants Subsidise the Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care through the Skilled Capital and User Choice (Australian Apprenticeships) programs.
National workforce strategy	Review and develop targeted programs to support studies and placements for specified groups of potential educators and teachers	Based on a review of existing and previous targeted programs, engage in strategic partnerships to support target students to enrol in and complete children’s education and care qualifications
	Develop an accessible suite of resources highlighting the careers and career pathways available within the children’s education and care sector	Develop dedicated resources regarding employment and career opportunities in the children’s education and care sector and its key component parts, and promote using existing Australian Government websites

“Upskilling Diploma-qualified educators to upgrade to [degree level] teaching qualifications is one of the most effective tools available to rapidly expand the pipeline of ECTs.”

Consultation participant, 2022

Professional Recognition

Enhancing professional recognition and community perceptions of early childhood education and care

Educators play a critical role in supporting the wellbeing, learning and development of children. Raising the profile of the early childhood profession is a critical enabler of the other focus areas of the strategy. Ensuring that the critical role of educators is formally recognised contributes to enhanced community perceptions of the value of the profession and promotes early childhood education as a rewarding career choice.

Key outcomes:

- A highly valued, respected workforce that is formally recognised
- Increased community understanding of the value of early childhood education

	Actions	What will be done
ACT workforce strategy	Amend the ACT teacher professional regulatory framework to include qualified early childhood teachers	Amend the legislation regulating the teaching profession to include qualified early childhood teachers, to further the professional recognition of early childhood educators
	Recognise early childhood education in ACT law	Amend the <i>Education Act 2004</i> to recognise that early childhood education and care has a central role in the realisation of the rights of the child and therefore must be universally available on an equity basis
	Develop an ECEC communications campaign	Promote the benefits of ECEC in the two years prior to formal schooling, and enhance community perceptions of educators and the value of early learning
National workforce strategy	Implement early childhood teacher registration in every state and territory	Review jurisdiction specific requirements to enable the registration of all early childhood teachers, including those working in non-school settings

“Recognition as part of the *Education Act 2004* will be an important symbolic step in ensuring that early education is properly viewed as part of the continuum of the formal education system in the ACT. This recognition will also support other aspects of [Set up for Success], including professional support and recognition for early childhood teachers and educators.”

Consultation participant, 2022

Measuring impact

Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession (2023–25) enables delivery of the workforce elements of Set up for Success. This strategy will be evaluated through the Set up for Success evaluation framework. Evaluation findings will help guide future policy and practice decisions that affect the ACT ECEC workforce and sector.

The impact of the strategy will be measured through:

- Increased professional recognition of the early childhood education and care workforce
- Increased access to learning and development opportunities
- Improved partnerships, information sharing and collaboration across the sector

Delivery and evaluation of the strategy, and the ACT's engagement in delivery of the actions outlined in the national workforce strategy, will realise the vision of **a well-supported, valued and highly skilled early childhood education and care profession.**

Acknowledgements

The ACT Government would like to thank the following organisations who contributed to the consultation and development of *Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Profession (2023–25)*. We will continue to work collaboratively with the sector on implementation of the strategy, including through the establishment of a sector reference group.

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

ACT Education Directorate

ACT Playgroups

Amazing Family Daycare

Anglicare

Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools

Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

Australian Education Union

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

Baringa Early Learning Centre

Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Children's Education and Care Alliance

Children First Alliance

Communities at Work

Community Health Programs, Canberra Health Services

Community Services #1

Coombs Early Learning

Curtin Primary School

Early Childhood Australia

Early Learning and Care Council of Australia

Goodstart Early Learning

Gowrie NSW Discovery House Early Education and Care (Early Childhood Educator)

Guardian Child Care and Education Heritage Early Childhood Centre

In Home Care Support Agency ACT – Marymead

Independent Education Union of Australia

Insight Early Learning Throsby

KU Braddon Children's Centre

Lillypilly Early Education Centre

Little Penguins Childcare

Manuka Occasional Child Care Association

Maribyrnong Primary School

Narrabundah Early Childhood School

Ngunnawal Primary School

Northside Community Service

Preschool Teachers Professional Association

Salem Children's Centre

Southern Cross Early Childhood School

St Nicholas Preschool and Childcare Centre

YMCA (The Y) Canberra

Throsby School

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