



Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study

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Submitted to: Jobs and Skills Australia

The Independent Education Union of Australia

The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Jobs and Skills Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study.

The IEU is the federally registered union representing employees in faith-based schools, community colleges and post-secondary services in the non-government sector in all states and territories. Within the early childhood education sector, we represent teachers and assistants in a variety of workplace settings in early education and care services. While coverage varies based on the rules of our state Branches, IEU members variously work in preschools, kindergartens and long day care centres.

We are the only union with coverage of principals, educational leaders, teachers, school support staff and early childhood professionals.

Our union has won improvements in pay and conditions for employees in community-based centres and negotiated stand-alone agreements for members employed in individual services and larger organisations. At the time of lodging this submission, the IEU has approximately 74,800 members. Our submission to the Capacity Study is informed by the priorities and expertise of our membership.

We wish Jobs and Skills Australia well in its consideration of these important matters.

Introductory comments

For over twenty years, successive governments, educators, employers, and the community have increasingly understood the critical importance of early childhood education and care (ECEC). This understanding is based on the growing body of findings that the first five years of life are paramount for children's ongoing development and wellbeing.¹ Countless national and international studies have found that ECEC develops cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and a successful transition to primary school. The level of care and education from birth to five years is more determining of health and academic outcomes than later stages of a child's education. Investment in the formative years has net economic benefits and can save governments millions of dollars by reducing the need for later intervention programs.²

¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's (HREOC) Report Emerging Themes: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, 2000: <https://www.oecd.org/australia/1900259.pdf>.

² Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute, An Investment in Productivity and Inclusion: The Economic and Social Benefits of the TAFE System: <https://futurework.org.au/report/an-investment-in-productivity-and-inclusion>; Human Rights Commission (HRC), Rural and Remote Education Inquiry Briefing

Quality ECEC is especially important for children from First Nations, remote, and lower educational attainment backgrounds and can play a major role in reducing intergenerational disadvantage.³ In 2023, the Australian Education Research Organisation showed that most students who start behind or fall behind at school are unable to catch up and may suffer disadvantage for the rest of their lives.⁴ The 2023 NAPLAN report shows an overall increase of three per cent since 2022 of school students needing additional support to meet minimum literacy and numeracy standards.⁵ However, many more children from disadvantaged groups need additional support, including a third of First Nations children.⁶ Sufficient investment in ECEC and its workforce, including through improved wages, conditions, professional recognition and staff training, can play a crucial role in meeting [Closing the Gap](#) targets and supporting children at risk.

Despite wide understanding of the benefits of high-quality ECEC, the sector is increasingly hampered by staffing shortages. For every dollar invested in ECEC, two dollars can be received back through increased tax revenues, increased wages and productivity, and reduced welfare and criminal justice spending. Price Waterhouse Coopers comprehensive 2019 cost-benefit analysis of ECEC in Australia confirmed a benefit-cost ratio of \$2 in benefit generated for every \$1 spent.⁷

Yet governments have failed over the last decade to adequately invest in the existing workforce to meet the growing demand for qualified ECEC teachers and assistants.

Reliable, high-quality ECEC is based on the attraction and retention of an experienced and stable workforce working within a secure employment model. Staffing certainty benefits children, their families, and the worker themselves. The crisis in the attraction and retention of ECEC employees will only be resolved by substantial improvements in wages and conditions, and progressing measures that value the profession, including improved access to TAFE and university qualifications.

Paper School Education for Students with Special Needs, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rural-and-remote-education-inquiry-briefing-paper-11>.

³ Institute of Early Childhood Division of Early Childhood and Education, Macquarie University, OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Australian Background: <https://www.oecd.org/australia/1900259.pdf>

⁴ Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), Learning outcomes of students with early low NAPLAN performance, <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/aero-aip-2-learning-outcomes-early-low-naplan-performance-aa.pdf>.

⁵ ACARA, NAPLAN National Results: <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>.

⁶ ACARA, NAPLAN National Results: <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>.

⁷ Price Waterhouse Cooper, The Front Project: A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic Analysis of Universal Early Childhood Education in the Year Before School in Australia, 2019: <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>.

ECEC is a feminised and ethnically diverse workforce. Major improvements in wages and conditions are required to provide workers with a standard of living consistent with Australia's obligations as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁸

ECEC professionals should be treated on par with their primary school counterparts in key areas including pay parity and an enhanced professional standing.

Two key components of addressing ECEC staffing issues are Workload Impact Assessments and consultation with unions. The Federal Government should prioritise the introduction of mandatory [Workload Impact Assessments \(WIS\)](#) for ECEC workers (similar to the Workload Impact Assessment contained in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.⁹) IEU members have consistently highlighted the impact of workload on the ECEC workforce – unsustainable workloads are the key issue driving experienced staff from their preschools and kindergartens.

Further, reversing the ECEC workforce crisis will only be achieved by comprehensive consultation with employees through their unions. Millions of dollars in additional Federal Government subsidies to make ECEC more affordable, and decades of expert findings, have not stemmed the deterioration in ECEC accessibility.¹⁰ Inadequate consultation with ECEC workers through their unions will, as in other policy areas, fail to close the gap in wages, conditions, and therefore in quality of care.

The agenda for change, for substantially improved pay and conditions, is being driven by unions. ECEC workers access to fair bargaining opportunities was helped by the Federal Government's *Secure Jobs, Better Pay Act 2022*. The IEU, the United Workers Union, (UWU), and the Australian Education Union (AEU) are using the laws to progress a [joint multi-employer bargaining application](#), granted by the Fair Work Commission (FWC) in 2023. This application seeks to extend the benefits of collective bargaining to previously excluded early education workers. ECEC employers and the Federal Government must engage in this process to confirm significant wage increases and an adequate standard of living for the feminised and ethnically diverse ECEC workforce.

What are the challenges and opportunities facing the ECEC workforce? How do different ECEC service delivery types (e.g. centre based care, family day care, preschool) impact workforce challenges and opportunities?

The largest challenges facing the ECEC workforce are workloads, poor conditions, inadequate remuneration and the resulting staff shortages. Committed ECEC professionals are being forced from their jobs because “they simply can't afford to stay

⁸ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>.

⁹ <https://www.education.gov.au/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan>.

¹⁰ UWU, Crisis in Early Learning Centres 2023, [Centres-reveal-crisis-in-early-learning-National-Report-2023.pdf](#) (unitedworkers.org.au).

due to low wages, horrific workloads and a genuine concern that the well-being and safety of children is at risk due to the conditions in the sector.”¹¹

The need for the Federal Government to introduce a mandatory Workload Impact Assessment to better manage workloads and reduce compliance and administration tasks (similar to the NTWAP requirement)¹² is outlined in response to Question 5.

The government has said that it is addressing staff shortages and retention by increasing training and recruitment. After a decade of reduced government investment in TAFEs and universities, the IEU welcomes the *Future Made in Australia Skills Plan and Fee free TAFE*. The *National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy* and related work initiatives also contain programs to help address these issues. The growing demand for qualified ECEC staff underlines the need for continued Commonwealth investment in TAFE and university courses to support workforce supply.

However, even newly accredited teachers and educators intend to leave the sector because of concerns with workloads, low pay and status of the profession. The challenge of inadequate pay in the ECEC sector is demonstrated by the disparity between teachers in the vast majority of ECEC centres compared to primary school teachers. Long day care teachers are averaging 26% less per annum than primary school teachers. Long day care educators are earning between 25%-40% less than learning support assistants in primary schools.

The Federal Government has an opportunity to redress low pay in the ECEC sector by providing additional funding targeted at lifting pay and conditions above the award minimum for those employers who can demonstrate such wage outcomes. This includes pay parity for early childhood teachers with their colleagues in primary schools, in addition to paid leave and other core working conditions.

Further, tax incentives or annual bonuses should be available for employees who remain in the industry long-term. ECEC teachers and educators should also receive government reimbursement of 25% of the cost of their qualification for each year they remain in the industry up to four years. The IEU welcomes the paid practicum for ECEC teachers introduced in 2023.

Different ECEC service delivery types impact workforce challenges and opportunities in varying ways. For example, the conditions of long day care staff are not on par with ECEC teachers working in pre-schools or kindergartens. Long day care service teachers and educators are required to work throughout the year and to be with the children at all times during work hours. By contrast, teachers in pre-schools (and other schools) have semester breaks and paid work time outside the classroom to attend meetings and perform administrative and other duties. Long day care staff work 48 weeks

¹¹ UWU, Crisis in Early Learning Centres 2023, Centres-reveal-crisis-in-early-learning-National-Report-2023.pdf (unitedworkers.org.au).

¹² National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, <https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-and-school-leadership/resources/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan-publication>.

annually, or eight weeks more than pre-school teachers' annual 40 weeks of term-time. Preschool teachers often have a maximum seven hours face-to-face with children per day, whereas long day care teachers and educators spend up to 9 hours face to face with children.

There is an opportunity for the government to address this challenge by introducing scheduled time outside the classroom and semester breaks in the long day care system.

How well is the current system responding to workforce challenges?

There are serious problems in the way the current system is responding to workforce challenges. Our union supports the ACCC's 2023 finding that the market alone has not met community expectations nor delivered on government objectives for ECEC services and policy.¹³

The marketisation and privatisation of ECEC in Australia has created the conditions for the pursuit by some commercial operators for profit at the expense of reasonable wages and conditions.¹⁴ Insufficiently regulated privatisation on this scale of schools, and the listing of schools on the stock exchange, would rightly be rejected by the Australian community, yet such outcomes are accepted for our ECEC sector.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to ensure that commercial interests do not over-ride the economic dignity of ECEC professionals, nor impede progress on building an equitable, high quality, universal ECEC system.

Commercial operators have continued to pay workers on the minimum award rates, and to charge parents above the government capped rates, while delivering substantial profits for CEOs and shareholders. Average profit margins in the industry were 5.5 per cent in 2023, which is generally regarded as middle range financial performance on the stock exchange. However, because there is variability across the sector, higher profits were gained by some large commercial ECEC operators.¹⁵

The Australian Childcare Alliance proposes that increasing costs must be covered by a combination of increased Childcare Subsidies and increased parent fees, or otherwise operators will cease providing childcare. The number of centres charging above government caps leapt from 10% to 50% in five years.¹⁶ Australia already pays the

¹³ ACCC, September 2023 Interim Report for the Inquiry into Childcare Services: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023/september-2023-interim-report>.

¹⁴ Woodrow, C., & Press, F, The privatisation/marketisation of ECEC debate: social versus neoliberal models. In L. Miller, C. Cameron, C. Dalli, & N. Barbour (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Early Childhood Policy* (pp. 537-550), 2018: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uwsau/reader.action>.

¹⁵ ACCC, September 2023 Interim Report for the Inquiry into Childcare Services: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023/september-2023-interim-report>.

¹⁶ ACCC, September 2023 Interim Report for the Inquiry into Childcare Services: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023/september-2023-interim-report>.

highest government subsidy in the world relative to similar economies, yet the cost of childcare remains the highest in the OECD.¹⁷

One way for the Federal Government to improve how well the system responds to workforce challenges is to consider measures to better support the not-for-profit sector. In contrast to many commercial operators, not-for-profit centres use revenue (including government subsidies and parent fees) to deliver higher wages and improved conditions for their ECEC staff. Our work with ECEC members and employers has found that not-for-profit and commercial operators have broadly similar income from fees and subsidies. However, we have not-for-profit employers paying employees 30% above award rates. Consequently, the not-for-profit sector has a more stable and qualified workforce. High-quality education is expensive and requires qualified employees being paid contemporary salaries and conditions and higher staffing ratios.

The not-for-profit sector is committed to caring for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The sector is characterised by equitable educational access and resistance to increasing fees for fear of excluding children whose parents cannot afford higher costs. Increases in government funding to the not-for-profit sector would help build educational engagement with children from First Nations, regional and remote areas, lower educational attainment, and low socio-economic backgrounds.

The Federal Government should consider how they can better direct targeted funding to not-for-profits as a priority, given their more favourable response to workforce challenges. Commercial operators should also be supported to invest in staff remuneration and conditions, and to support training and professionalisation; however, the Federal Government should consider making any deliberate misdirection of targeted staff funding into profits a criminal offence.

What factors are driving or deterring workforce attraction, retention, and career progression in the ECEC sector? What factors are driving attrition?

In addition to excessive workloads and poor pay and conditions detailed above, poor workforce attraction and retention factors also includes limited career progression.

ECEC teachers have limited progression options to become educational leads, or in some cases centre Directors. The work expectations of Educational Leaders greatly exceed the minimal pay increase that comes with the position – deterring many from this career path. Educational Leaders earn around \$4000 per annum more than a teacher.

Additionally, there are limited Director positions available. ECEC teachers see their colleagues in schools having far more promotional opportunities for career progression and with better remuneration.

¹⁷ ACCC, September 2023 Interim Report for the Inquiry into Childcare Services: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023/september-2023-interim-report>.

Attrition is also driven by the limited professional development available for ECEC staff. In some jurisdictions, ECEC teachers have to complete up to 100 hours of professional development in their own time and pay for it themselves. However, in contrast, school-based employees receive employer provided professional development and access to regular student-free-days to attend training. The IEU would welcome seeing this approach applied in the ECEC sector.

The dire situation of ECEC pay rates is again highlighted by comparing ECEC teachers to their colleagues in schools. In NSW, for example, an ECEC graduate is paid \$67,000 per annum under the base award. This teacher will understandably compare this salary to the \$85,000 per annum being paid to new teacher graduates in NSW primary schools.

The Federal Government has posited that workforce attraction can, at least in part, be driven by diploma qualified ECEC staff upgrading to bachelor degree qualifications. However, we often find that ECEC staff who follow such a path and gain a bachelor degree, will then move jobs to work in schools where they can benefit from far better pay, working conditions and career paths.

We also know that more enrolments do not necessarily equate to more graduates - ECEC courses have a higher non-completion rate than school level teaching degrees. In the latest data available (2017) only 30% of enrolled students in ECEC courses completed their qualification. And of this small number of students graduating, only 29% went on to work in ECEC immediately upon gaining their degree. By contrast, 40.7% of students enrolled in all teacher education courses complete their courses, and 69% of those graduates go on to work in primary schools.

Upon entering the workforce, new ECEC graduates need extensive support, mentoring guidance and practical induction programs. Unfortunately, many ECEC employers fail in this critical area. It is often only union members who have access to such support through their union providing professional and wellbeing programs for their members.

5. How do current governance & regulatory settings impact the ECEC workforce?

Existing regulatory frameworks mandate the employment of qualified Teachers and Diploma and Certificate III Educators, in addition to mandating appropriate staffing ratios according to the ages of children enrolled in a service. It is appropriate to retain these requirements as highly qualified staff and ratios support positive outcomes for children and more viable working conditions.

The IEU recommends that the regulatory framework provides recognition for services that offer above-award wages and conditions.

For example, services that:

- pay minimum award rates and offer only working conditions specified by the relevant awards; and/or
- experience high staff turnover; and/or

- have waivers or staff classified as “taken to be” qualified (enrolled in a qualification)

should be rated “*Working Towards*” in Quality Area 4 Staffing Arrangements. Only services that offer significantly above-award pay and conditions, have low staff turnover and employ fully qualified staff should be rated as *Meeting in Quality Area 4*.

Our union recommends that the Federal Government provide targeted funding to employers to pay teachers and educators above-award rates of pay and conditions. Strong accountability and enforceability measures must accompany any such funding to guarantee that it is used for the intended purpose of lifting wages and conditions.

This includes pay parity for ECEC teachers and educators with their colleagues in primary schools (as outlined previously in this submission). In addition, tax incentives or annual bonuses should be directed at teachers and educators who remain in the industry long-term. The Federal Government should also reimburse early childhood teachers and educators 25% of the cost of their qualification for each year they remain in the industry up to four years.

The ECEC workforce is, like the school workforce, negatively impacted by excessive compliance tasks generated by regulatory requirements. Excessive paperwork significantly adds to teacher burnout, given the lack of time available to complete administrative tasks during reasonable work hours. Centre Accreditation was formerly a collaborative process under the NCAC (where centre quality was assessed by practitioners in the field). It has devolved into a punitive and tick-a-box exercise involving vast sums of documentation (ACECQA’s Self Assessment Tool is 78 pages and their Educational Leader Guide is 153 pages).

Teachers need more time to focus on teaching, which could be achieved by decreasing demands for compliance documentation. Planning and documenting student learning should be prioritised over: documenting family and community engagement; centre quality improvement goals; reflecting on the service philosophy; documenting how to support community members to become familiar with the Key Resources (National Law, National Regulations, Guide to the NQF, the EYLF and Quality Improvement Planning document); and reflection on service practice, policies, and procedures.

A reflective question in the Self-Assessment Tool (P.15), for example, is: “*How do we demonstrate that our practice is typical for our service?*” Such excessive self-assessment processes include: reflecting on the service philosophy; assessing practice against the National Law and Regulation and the 7 NQS quality areas; identifying strengths and areas for improvement; developing a quality improvement plan; reviewing and reflecting on the self-assessment process. Teachers are then required to repeat the process again in a cycle that detracts from the time and attention they can give to the children in their care. Our union questions whether excessive compliance documentation generated by regulatory requirements is necessary given its impacts on the workforce and the children in their care.

National Regulations require a range of policies and procedures to be developed by individual services. The time required to write policies, reference relevant research, and review them annually is onerous. These policies should instead be provided to services in a pro-forma manner that can be adapted by services as needed. Such pro-forma policies and procedures should be updated by ACECQA whenever there are changes to the National Regulations or new research.

Importantly, the absence of Workload Impact Assessments in regulatory frameworks has a detrimental consequence for the ECEC workforce. The IEU recommends that the Federal Government prioritise a Workload Impact Assessment for ECEC employees, separate from but comparable to the Workload Impact Assessment in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. Making a Workload Impact Assessment mandatory for assessing existing requirements and all proposed changes and new duties would help stem the tide of compliance paperwork and red tape.

The IEU also supports the possible expansion into other jurisdictions of the ACT's *Education (Early Childhood) Legislation Amendment ACT 2023*. The legislation makes the ACT the first Australian jurisdiction to enshrine in law access to two years of quality early childhood education prior to formal schooling and recognition in law that children start learning from birth. Such legislation would promote the importance of the ECEC profession and access to higher levels of formal qualifications.

What are the future needs for the ECEC sector and workforce, and what might influence these requirements? Are there any specific novel skills and capability requirements emerging in the ECEC sector? How have workforce requirements in ECEC changed over time?

The Federal Government's policy objective is to have high-quality and accessible universal ECEC. To achieve this objective there is a need to increase awareness and accessibility of higher levels of practice. The government and employers need to enable current and prospective staff to gain university qualifications in the field and to ensure they are paid appropriately on par with other teaching graduates. We would also like to register a general concern that there is no provision for Early Childhood Teachers to access Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher certification in Queensland.

Staff performing the same work deserve to be paid fairly. An example of the discrepancies and inequities that occur in the ECEC sector can be seen in several Catholic education systems. Catholic school teachers generally receive the same rate of pay as school teachers in the government system. Yet where Catholic education systems operate ECEC services, these services employ ECEC teachers on award rates up to \$30,000 less per annum than their school counterparts.

These Catholic education employers are denying a basic wage parity principle to their ECEC employees that is standard for their school staff.

An urgent need for the ECEC workforce, and the communities they serve, is the provision of affordable childcare in all remote and regional areas. The proportion of children from homes with less capacity to pay is higher in these areas. The fees charged by commercial ECEC providers have the potential to disenfranchise First Nations families and others who simply cannot afford to participate in early education in their area. The Federal Government should legislate for additional targeted funding for remote and regional ECEC centres.

A growing number of high needs children are entering the ECEC system. A current and future workforce need relates to the inclusion of these high needs children, and the need for more qualified staff to care and educate them. The Federal Government should increase the subsidy for the attendance of children with disabilities. Currently, the subsidy covers around 3 hours for staff with a Certificate III to be employed on casual rates, yet a child with disabilities may attend for up to 10 hours per day.

The gap between government funding and the cost of inclusion of children with high support needs means all parents at the service are in effect subsidising children with disabilities through higher fees. The inadequate level of government subsidies for children with disabilities imposes yet another burden on parents with less capacity to pay.

Children with complex behaviours, those from disadvantaged families and those with undiagnosed disabilities, including where parents refuse to have children assessed by a professional, attract funding for a maximum of 12 weeks. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on students with disability that applies in schools enables ongoing funding of students with complex needs in the absence of parental permission. To ensure parity between schools and early childhood centres, and to guarantee adequate and ongoing funding and support for students with complex needs, it's essential that similar long-term commitments apply in the early childhood sector.

How is the education and training system responding to the need for a skilled ECEC workforce? Where are the opportunities and challenges? Are there enablers and barriers in providing ECEC training (e.g., jurisdictional differences)?

The IEU welcomed the Federal Government and states and territories establishing the 12-month Skills Agreement to deliver 180,000 Fee-Free TAFE and vocational educational places during 2023 including for the ECEC sector. We note funding has been committed by the Federal Government to expand the program from 2024 through the 5-year National Skills Agreement currently being under negotiation.

The billions of dollars cut from TAFE for over a decade should be reinvested in full as part of training and employment strategies given the contribution that the TAFE system makes to our economy. Investment in the TAFE-trained workforce has a total annual benefit of \$92.5 billion, or about 4.5% of Australian GDP. It generates net community

and private labour market benefits estimated to exceed \$3 billion annually, including approximately \$2.3 billion in wages, salaries and other employment benefits.¹⁸

It's vital that equitable access to quality childcare is supported by a fully-funded fee-free TAFE system. ECEC workers paid on minimum award rates cannot afford to repay student loan schemes incurred during their studies.

What attracts students to ECEC training courses and workers to ECEC roles? What influences job mobility across roles and sectors?

People are attracted to ECEC training courses and roles because they love educating and caring for children. However, poor rates of pay and workload pressures are undermining the ability of dedicated ECEC professionals to commit to lengthy careers in the sector.

A factor in geographical mobility within the ECEC sector is that workers in low remuneration jurisdictions, such as South Australia, sometimes migrate to states such as Queensland and Victoria because they offer higher remuneration. Standardising rates of pay across jurisdictions would assist in a more even workforce distribution. Salary dissatisfaction can also be ameliorated to a degree by standardising pay regardless of which age group teachers and educators are working with.

What influences patterns of work in the ECEC sector, e.g. performing multiple roles or working in different services?

Some ECEC staff have reported that they undertake casual work, despite the attendant financial insecurity, because permanent roles require the completion of excessive compliance documentation and administrative tasks undertaken outside paid time. There is currently an abundance of short-term casual and supply work in the sector.

Are there any additional insights you would like to provide? Please provide details of any other information, relevant to the Terms of Reference of the ECEC Capacity Study, that could be considered.

Equitable access to high quality ECEC is a key determinant of the educational, social, and cultural resources and opportunities children will have in their lives. It directly impacts a person's capacity to contribute to society. It's also vital for paid workforce participation by women and the associated economic and employment benefits.

Access to reliable, high-quality early education needs a stable, experienced, qualified workforce to deliver it. We urge the Federal Government, employers and the broader community to recognise the direct interdependence of developing the best possible early childhood sector; staffed by qualified, specialist early childhood teachers and educators.

¹⁸ Australia Institute, Economic and Social Benefits of the TAFE System: https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/An_Investment_in_Productivity_and_Inclusion.pdf.

To begin to address the many issues in ECEC, the IEU recommends that ECEC professionals be afforded similar conditions and career incentives that are being implemented for their colleagues working in primary schools. Pay disparities within the ECEC sector must be removed. Workload Impact Assessments should be a priority measure to tackle workload concerns that undermine other efforts to improve attraction and retention.

Achieving these outcomes is vital for workers and children in the sector and requires consistent and comprehensive consultation by the Federal Government and employers with ECEC staff and their unions.