

Early Childhood Australia Annual Report 2008–2009



Early Childhood Australia's mission, values and Code of Ethics provide the foundation and framework for its work. Together they ensure that the organisation is independent, focused, ethical, rigorous and courageous in the way it goes about that work.

ECA's mission

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

ECA's values

The rights of children, leadership, excellence, respect, courage, honesty, openness, collaboration, diversity, justice and the social inclusion of children.

The ECA Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics can be downloaded from the ECA Website.

The context

The period covered by this report has been shaped by an intense focus on the Commonwealth's early childhood reform agenda, Prime Minister Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations, the growing realisation of the challenges posed by the threats to the environment and of course, the Global Financial Crisis, and the efforts made to protect the Australian economy from its worst effects. As well as this the national policy agenda has focussed on some serious threats to children's wellbeing in the form the growing incidence of obesity and of children coping with mental health issues themselves and/or in their families.

This environment has offered the potential for real gains for children. Whether these are realised will be dependent on the will of governments to ensure that the evidence about quality is reflected in the implementation of programs. Equally it will be dependent on the will of the early childhood profession to set and respond to, its own quality standards including a practice standard which acknowledges the implicit obligations imposed on each of us, individually and as a profession by the Prime Minister's Apology.

There is potential in the planning for the implementation of the proposed early childhood quality reform agenda to fall into the trap of asserting the evidence but then proposing a way forward which does not take its implications fully into account. Doing this will short change children and the nation in the short and long term and miss a unique opportunity to refocus the system on quality and, as a result, children.

ECA believes that the intention and potential of these proposed early childhood reforms is to transform the early lives of young children and the future of this country. ECA has argued that this cannot be achieved in the short term however. To attempt to do so will be to squander the unique opportunity that has been created by a willingness to confront the implications of the evidence.

It is possible to persuade the community to accept a planned long term approach which will require a significant increase in private and public investment. However, ECA also believes that to do this it will be essential to be open about the limitations of the current system.

ECA understands that telling parents the truth about childcare quality, in particular, would be unpalatable. At the same time it defies logic to propose such a major change and not openly acknowledge the faults in current system. Parents want what is best for their children and leveraging this energy in partnership with them, in the context of evidence-based quality improvements has real potential to provide a way forward which properly informs parents at the same time as mitigating the potential negative fallout from this information.

Finally, responsibility for quality children's experience and the service system does not rest solely with Government. The early childhood profession is an equal partner in the quality endeavour and needs to be systematic in its efforts to realise the potential of this partnership.

ECA's mandate is for children from birth to eight years of age. Our commitment is to support all who have responsibility for young children to do this work well. This includes parents and the early childhood professionals in schools and early childhood services. It also includes, as it must, work with Government and its departments, with the media and the range of organisations which have a part to play in making a positive difference for young children.

ECA's Strategic Goals

- ECA will be a clear and credible advocate for the rights of young children
- ECA will be an advocate for programs and services that deliver high quality outcomes for young children
- ECA will be a strong, progressive and sustainable organisation that is future focused

Under each of these goals ECA has articulated a number of desired outcomes. This Annual Report is organised around these Strategic Goals and Desired Outcomes. It will cover the work of the organisation nationally and provide a detailed overview of aspects of the work of ECA's state and territory branches.

Desired Outcome—As an activist organisation—ECA raises critical issues with Government, Departments, other organisations and the early childhood profession

Committees, forums/panels on which the Early Childhood Australia national organisation and its branches participated in 2008-2009

Meetings and forums provide important means by which ECA at both state and national level engages in the policy development and implementation process. Across the nation Early Childhood Australia was represented in over one hundred and fifty (150) advisory groups, forums and project committees.

Nationally, ECA met with the Hon Maxine McKew and her advisors many times. ECA has also met with the Hon Kate Ellis who has replaced Ms McKew as the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth. ECA also met many times with officers in the Department of Employment Education Training and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) on the various elements of the Commonwealth's early childhood reform agenda. Similarly ECA has also met many times with the officers from the Department of Health and Ageing about the COAG Mental Health Initiative (Early Childhood Component) and the Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines. ECA's relationship with the Department of Defence is an important one. It is focused through the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) which is an organisation within the Department of Defence focused on supporting defence force families. This year ECA met regularly with officers within DCO. ECA collaborated as partner with the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) in the BigSteps Campaign and has an ongoing relationship with them.

Across the country ECA branches have similarly been meeting with key government Ministers, Departmental officers, organisations as part of their advocacy work for young children. The number and range of these meetings is testament to the commitment of ECA members to this organisation's mandate to speak out for young children.

ECA Tasmanian branch was represented on the Department of Education—Early Years Reference Group, Early Years Foundation—Learning and Development Committee, Department of Health & Human Services—Child & Family Centre Service Integration and Delivery Committee.

ECA New South Wales was represented on the Department of Community Services (DoCS) Regulation Review Reference Group—Review of current Children's Services Regulations, the DoCS Systems Advisory Group—Keep Them Safe—Child Protection Review, NSW ECEEN Early Childhood Environmental Education Network, Forum of Non Government Agencies (FONGA), NIFTeY NSW, NSW Children's Services Forum, NSW Department of Education and Training Early Childhood (DET EC) Reference Group, NSW Food Authority Children's Services Consultation, NSW Intervention Support Advisory Group, Preschool Growth Program Reference Group, and TAFE NSW Industry Reference Group.

In South Australia ECA was represented on the Children's Services Consultative Committee, DECS Early Years Literacy Program Stakeholder Forum, Ministerial Advisory Committee on Children with Disabilities, Margaret Trembath and de Lissa Scholarships Committees, UniSA Programs Advisory Group, National Excellence in Teaching Awards, Professional Support Coordinator Sector Advisory Group, Australian Education Development Index (AEDI), Legislative Reform Stakeholders Group, and the Roundtable on Early Childhood Education (Universal Preschool).

In Western Australia ECA was represented on the Child Care Liaison Forum (DEEWR), Children's Services Qualifications and Training Reference Group (ITAB), Early Childhood Teaching Association (ECTA) Early Years Education Service (EYES) liaison group and was invited to be part of the Legislative Council Extended Enquiry into Literacy learning.

ECA in Victoria was represented on the principle advisory group to Department of Early Education and Child Development Childhood Development Advisory Group, Office for Children and Early Childhood Development (OCECD) Sub-Advisory Group, Office for Children and Early Childhood Development (OCECD) Sub-Advisory Group—Learning and Development Group, Transition Pilot Project, Early Childhood Intervention Reform project committee, COAG funded Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (UAECE)—Special project, and the Victorian Parliament Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning.

In the Northern Territory ECA was represented on the NT Council of Social Services, the NT Government's Advisory Panel on the implementation of the new regulations in child care, and the NT Government's Community Reference group on the implementation of the Early Years Framework.

In the ACT ECA was represented on the Children's Services Forum, the ACT Children's Week Committee, the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, the Protective Behaviours Australia ACT Branch, the TAFE Reference Group, ACT Professional Support Coordinator (PSC) Advisory Group, ACT Playgroup and the ECA publications program national committee.

ECA Queensland was represented on the Queensland State Government Office for Early Childhood Education and Care Forum, Queensland State Kindergarten Implementation Reference Group, Queensland Children's Services Alliance, Queensland Health and Community Services Workforce Council, Queensland Health Early Years Initiative Reference Group and the Queensland Studies Authority Syllabus Advisory Group.

In some states ECA also auspices committees and organisations. The NSW branch auspices the NSW Health and Safety Committee and the Professional Experience Council and in Tasmania, ECA auspices the Australian Community Child Care Services, National Outside School Hours Services Association and the Children's Services Employers Association of Tasmania. Queensland ECA has for many years auspiced the Child Watch Group.

Submissions, consultations and delegations

This year ECA nationally and all branches have been actively engaged with the early childhood reform agenda and all ECA branches have been active in a range of state initiated events and enquiries associated with them. The national organisation as well as branches participated via submission or in the public hearings associated with the Senate Inquiry into the provision of childcare.

Nationally ECA wrote submissions in response to the national quality framework for early childhood education and care—initial paper, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), the review of the National Declaration on Goals for Schooling. ECA also contributed a background paper on setting up the early childhood national curriculum—early childhood education K-3—and responded to the Regulatory Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms. ECA also participated in the Senate Inquiry into the provision of child care.

ECA national was represented at invitational forums associated with the development of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and at a national Round Table on early childhood and the national curriculum. ECA was part of the National Curriculum Council forum on Stages of Schooling K-3 and in on the working groups associated with the development of the national curriculum. ECA participated in two COAG round tables on the early childhood reform agenda as well as in a range of consultations on paid parental leave, the implementation of paid maternity leave and a number of forums associated with children's mental health. ECA was represented on the Community Services and Health Industry Reference Group and participated in the consultation associated with the development of the child protection framework. ECA also facilitated national and state targeted consultations on the draft quality standard framework and managed targeted consultations with the sector around the Special Child Care Benefit.

At branch level activity and contributions were across an equally broad range of policy areas.

ECA Tasmania was represented at the following forums and consultations:

- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) symposium
- Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms consultations.

The branch responded to the Regulatory Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms, the Senate Inquiry into Child Care, Child Care Standards and, in collaboration with the Department of Education, worked towards development of OSHC introductory training course for unqualified staff.

ECA NSW participated in:

- NSW Department of Community Services—Regulations Review
- The Senate Inquiry into the Provision of Child Care and provided feedback for the Early Years Learning Framework—Belonging, Being & Becoming.
- The Advanced Early Childhood Teaching Standards.

And responded to:

- The Regulatory Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reform.

ECA NSW has met with Maxine McKew, Parliamentary Secretary for Child Care and Education, the NSW Minister for Community Services, the NSW Shadow Minister for Community Services and the Director of Children's Services (DoCS).

ECA South Australia made submissions to:

- Early Years Learning Framework
- The Regulatory Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reform
- The Legislative Reform Committee on regulations and registration
- Collaborated on submission on Paid Maternity Leave with NIFTEY
- The Australian Association for Infant Mental Health.

The branch met with the Executive Director of Early Childhood Services, Department of Education and Children's Services.

ECA WA contributed to:

- The National Quality Framework
- Early Years Learning Framework
- A WA Parliamentary Inquiry into the Adequacy of Services to meet the Development Needs of Children
- The Senate inquiry into the Provision of Child Care
- The Western Australian College of Teaching Review
- The Integrated Services Framework for Children and Families.

The branch participated in a range of forums including:

- The National Quality Framework RIS Perth Forum
- The National Early Years Learning Framework Forums
- Early Years WA Government Portfolio Consultation
- The CEDA NIFTeY Early Years Forum
- COAG Reform Agenda Information Forum
- A WA Dept of Premier and Cabinet COAG Briefing Session.

ECA Queensland has contributed to:

- The funding for kindergarten initiatives
- The Education Minister's Round Table
- The draft Physical Activities Guidelines
- Queensland Health Early Childhood Services and Health Promotion Research
- The Early Years Learning Framework Consultation the Childcare Regulations.

It has also had meetings with the Queensland Office for Early Childhood Education and Care and the Minister for Education.

Similarly, the ACT branch participated in:

- Forum on the Regulatory Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms.

In the NT, ECA has contributed to:

- The National Quality Framework
- Early Years Learning Framework
- The proposed new NT Regulations regarding Children Services
- National Planning Forum for Early Intervention across Australia.

In Victoria ECA responded to:

- The Regulatory Impact Statement for COAG Quality Agenda
- The Regulatory Impact Statement for Children's Services Regulations 2009
- The National Early Years Framework
- The Reducing Red Tape Project (DEECD) and participated in the Transition into school project (DEECD)
- The Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning
- Members gave interviews on the Early Childhood Reform Review
- The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

ECA has also spoken out nationally at a number of conferences and regularly in the national newsletter *ECA Voice*

Across the year the National President's message in *ECA Voice* has:

- Urged the Government to be brave and creative in building the future ... and take time to do this properly
- Said that the Apology is only meaningful if we seriously set about making a difference
- Argued that in this all too brief moment we ... need COAG to make quality reform real ...

ECA spoke out for children at the launch of Southern Cross University, Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) course, the Early Learning Forum in Darling Harbour, the Northern Territory Children's Services Conference, the Early Learning State Conferences in Sydney and Melbourne (co-sponsored with the Australian Council of Educational Research and the Lady Gowries in Melbourne and Sydney), at the Mobile and Country Children's Services Conference in Wagga Wagga, at a seminar organised by the ECA WA Branch, the Pakenham Children's Service Conference, the ACT Provocation to Practice Seminar series and to the media on many issues.

The central message in most of these speeches was that if we are serious about making real gains for young children then what we do must reflect the evidence about children's needs and about the nature of quality in early childhood services. That is that relationships, ratios and the qualifications of staff are essential to the quality equation. ECA has also been robust in arguing that improved wages, conditions and career pathways are the key to a quality early childhood services system. People currently in the early childhood field are paid five dollars less an hour than call centre workers and without

improvements including increased salaries across the sector; pay parity between teachers in ECEC services and those working in primary schools, and a career structure which provides for career progress, it is unlikely that the staff issues currently facing the sector will be solved. Unless these issues are resolved, the quality goal will remain out of reach.

As an activist organisation—ECA has prioritised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

ECA Strategic Directions ask the organisation to give particular priority in its work to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Nationally ECA has done this as has each branch. Branches are asked to report about action taken on this issue to each national Board of Directors meeting so that the organisation can build a way forward.

...symbolism is important but, unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history. **Prime Minister Kevin Rudd**—National Apology to the Stolen Generations, 13 February 2008.

Advancing the spirit of the Apology calls for honest attempts to change things in all we do . . . acknowledging the unique status, cultures, histories and situations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in 'up front' statements, looking for practical implications and responses, and weaving these through our thoughts, our work and our lives so that we become one. (Written by ECA's National President Margaret Young as part of an article for ECA's magazine *Every Child*.)

At the national level ECA has given voice to this commitment in the following ways by:

- Acknowledging the traditional owners at all meetings where it has a leadership role
- Asking how the work being done in all project and other meetings ECA attends will respond to a commitment to true reconciliation
- Addressing this issue in all speeches
- Having Karen Martin, a Noonuccal woman, as a keynote speaker at the ECA Conference
- Highlighting this issue in the responses listed previously, in all of its publications, and by raising this question with the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
- Ensuring ECA *Webwatch* has had a particular commitment to this issue
- Committing the Board of Directors to cultural awareness training

ECA has argued to Teaching Australia that all professional standards for highly accomplished teaching and for principals specifically reference the obligation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The second draft of the early childhood standards for highly accomplished teaching of children aged 3-8 years, to be released soon, will include a standard that reflect this commitment be creating the expectation that:

Highly accomplished early childhood teachers will:

Consciously reflect on and respond to the ways in which their personal and the nation's collective history, particularly in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, impacts on their teaching knowledge, practice, and exercise of leadership.

ECA argued, in its response to the Regulatory Impact Statement on Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms that:

'This focus is not just about services designated as Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services or those that are part of the Aboriginal preschools program. Nor is it important for other services only because 85% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in mainstream services. It is important because true reconciliation will require a cultural shift by the non-Aboriginal population which will see the term "us" redefined to become inclusive of these children and families.'

ECA branches have similarly committed to true reconciliation.

In Tasmania the Tasmanian Aboriginal Council has supported the branch to access appropriate personnel and information for welcome to country and acknowledgement of traditional owners. This is now part of the proceedings at all ECA Tasmanian branch events.

ECA NSW, Central and Far West Region has focused on building relationships with the wider community through attendance and consultation with local and broader communities of the region, with particular partnerships with organisations such as DET Western Region, CCSA, and CSU. The NSW ECA Council has met with the Child Youth and Family Strategy (ACYFS), Family Worker Training & Development which aims to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in providing early childhood education and care.

In South Australia ECA organised a PSC article by Tina Quitadamo—*Beyond Post Sorry: A Letter from an Indigenous Mother* and importantly, Eileen Wanganeen has joined the Conference Subcommittee.

ECA Victoria is an affiliate member of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTAR) Victoria has produced *Walking Respectfully Exploring Indigenous Culture and Reconciliation in Early Childhood Practice*, and has placed a statement acknowledging the traditional owners on ECA VIC branch website.

NT ECA, at the NT Children's Services Conferences which it auspices, actively encouraged Aboriginal early childhood educators to participate and share their stories. ECA NT also manages the Communities for Children Program on Tiwi Island's Development and Milestone Delay Project—The branch has ongoing commitment to work with the remote communities in the NT through the Inclusion Support Agency and Family Support Funding, using Strengths Based and Capacity Building approaches. ECA ACT acknowledges Ngunnawal people's custodianship of land and acknowledgement of elders past and present is made at every ECA meeting and function. Karen Martin's (2007) paper, *Marking Tracks and Reconceptualising Aboriginal Early Childhood Education: An Aboriginal Australian perspective*. Children's Issues. Vol. 11, No. 1., was provided for all delegates at the ECA AGM and Dr Affrica Taylor will deliver a provocation to practice seminar for members regarding Post-Colonial pedagogies during 2009/2010.

As an activist organisation—ECA supports the key role of parents in their children's wellbeing and early learning

Early Childhood Australia

- Spoke out in support of paid parental leave
- Applauded the paid maternity leave decision as an important first step
- Participated in paid maternity leave implementation consultations
- Recognised the importance of secure, stable and reciprocal relationships to children's wellbeing in its advocacy generally, and including in its publications program.

ECA published

- The *Every Day Learning Series* and *Your child's first year at school*
- Includes a parent page in *Every Child*
- Books, supporting defence force families including the *Sapper Pat* series.

Used Webwatch

- to promote breastfeeding and other information for parents

As an activist organisation—ECA uses its publications to raise critical issues

This year ECA has again published four editions of each of the *Everyday Learning Series*, the *Research in Practice Series*, the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC)*, *Every Child* ECA's flagship magazine and *ECA Voice*. All ECA publications focus on issues of significance to the early childhood profession and to children. *ECA Voice*, *ECA Webwatch*, *Every Child* and *AJEC* carry information and comment about the broad early childhood policy and practice agenda.

As well as this ECA has reprinted *Home is where the family is* which is distributed to defence force families. ECA has written and published the *Sapper Pat Series* for children of parents in the defence force. ECA has again reprinted *Your child's first year at school* and was a partner in the *Get up and Grow* project and took responsibility for the design of the publications produced as part of this project.

Your child's first year at school was distributed by school principals to 17,000 families. *Home is where the family is* is in its 6th reprint and has been distributed to 30,000 defence force families and 15,000 copies of the *Sapper Pat Series* have been distributed.

All of ECA's publications are quality assured through a range of peer review processes. These same criteria are applied to books from other publishers that are on-sold by ECA. This commitment to quality assurance reflects ECA's commitment to children.

ECA is indebted to all of the early childhood professionals whose work underwrites the ECA publications program. This is particularly the case for the members of the ECA Publications Committee who commit their time and their expertise to this work. The committee includes Marilyn Fleer; Margaret Sims (who replaced Marilyn Fleer), Margaret Young, Judy Radich and Carmel Richardson, Jenni Connors and Pam Linke, who is the chair of the committee.

ECA Webwatch, ECA's online newsletter, continues to be received well by the early childhood field. It is used to bring critical issues to the attention of the sector and to support for high quality early childhood programs and practice. *ECA Webwatch* has increased ECA's reach into the early childhood sector. This year nearly a quarter of a million copies of *ECA Webwatch* were distributed.

As an activist organisation—ECA builds collaborative alliances which extend its advocacy reach

Engaging with and building alliances and partnerships with other organisations is key way in which ECA extends the force and reach of its advocacy work. In 2008-2009 the partnership with the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) has again been important in giving momentum to efforts to get some real purchase with Government on acknowledging the potential for the current wages, conditions and lack of a career structure in the birth to five early childhood education and care sector to undermine the goals of the early childhood reform agenda.

This year ECA entered into a partnership with Teaching Australia to develop highly accomplished teaching standards for early childhood teachers working with 3-8 year olds. The partnerships with the Australian Primary Principals Association and the Defence Community Organisation are ongoing and of particular importance as they provide direct access to parents and allow ECA to provide information to and support for young children in schools and those whose parents are in the defence forces.

This year ECA partnered with the Royal Children's Hospital and the Centre for Community Child Health in the Commonwealth funded *Get up and Grow* project. The project developed resources for services to support the implementation of the Commonwealth's nutrition and physical activity guidelines. Similarly ECA is working with the Australian Psychological Society and *beyondblue* on the KidsMatter Early Childhood pilot project which focusses on mental health in early childhood and aims to create and trial a framework to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children aged birth to school age.

Cengage and OTEN continue to provide their students with ECA membership. The importance of this is that it links students into the profession and provides them with high quality information about practice and the issues facing the early childhood profession.

ECA continues to have strong relationships with Secretariat for Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, the Australian Mathematics Teachers Association, Australian Scholarships Group, HESTA, and Families Australia.

Importantly, ECA has ongoing relationships with a range of other organisations both state and national including McArthur Management Services who funded the McArthur ECA Travel Award.

The National Children's Services Forum (NCSF) continues to be an important forum for building relationships within the sector and for collaborative action. NCSF is auspiced and chaired by ECA and ECA is a member of the Forum. NCSF includes all of the national children's services peak organisations and continues to be an effective vehicle for generating agreement within the sector on issues facing children's services and raising these issues with Government and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). In 2009 the Forum held its Biennial Day of Advocacy where delegations spoke to over 50 politicians and the Minister for Early Childhood Education and Care, the Hon Kate Ellis. The issues raised with politicians from across Parliament included:

- The nexus between the achievement of the goals of the quality agenda and a skilled workforce
- The need for investment to support the workforce to understand and implement the early reform agenda
- The need for a more effective funding model for the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services that responds to the nature of these communities and to increase costs over time
- The need for services which support families and children in rural and remote areas to have a funding model which responds to cost increase and increased demand.

As an advocate for high quality services for children—ECA speaks out for evidence-based, reflective practice and a qualified, specialised and skilled workforce

In every submission, in every speech and in every forum ECA has done this. A primary goal of the ECA publications program, www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org, ECA *Webwatch* and the ECA Conference is to provide support for evidence-based reflective practice. Funded projects such as KidsMatter Early Childhood—an early childhood mental health initiative and *Get up and Grow*—Guidelines for nutrition and physical activity are focussed on supporting services to scrutinise and be reflective about their programs and practice.

ECA's strong support for a highly qualified workforce, lead by four-year degree-qualified, early childhood teachers, recognises the research which shows that services led by such people engage in more professional, reflective, conversations and that this is associated with a better experience and outcomes for children.

The relationships which have resulted in some RTOs providing their students with membership of ECA has, as one of their goals, that of encouraging students from the beginning to think about what they are doing and why, to commit to professional learning and to see themselves part of a profession which sees ongoing professional learning and conversation as essential. These habits underwrite reflective practice and are the hallmarks of a professional.

ECA's current work on the development process of the highly accomplished early childhood teaching standards is a significant process for the early childhood profession. The standards when completed will provide a framework for reflection and within which members of early childhood profession can chart their own professional learning. The standards are being developed by the profession for the profession. They will be both symbolic and real evidence of the profession's obligation to move in their practice beyond certainty to reflection as a means of making difference for children. This work is highly connected to ECA's commitment to its own Code of Ethics.

ECA hopes that this will be just the beginning of its work on highly accomplished standards for the early childhood profession.

Forums/Seminars/Conferences

These events are an increasingly important aspect of ECA's advocacy work. They provide opportunities for early childhood professionals to engage with current policy issues and with each other in significant and reflective professional conversations. These opportunities for professional learning are a central feature of any profession.

The ECA Conference 2008—*Children the Nation's Capital* was an outstanding success. Attended by approximately 1000 early childhood professionals it challenged the profession to reflect and take action around the environment, children's rights, its commitment to better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, the entitlements of workers, and provided support and input about the nature of high quality practice. The profession was affirmed and those who attended engaged with each other in professional conversation and importantly had fun. Thank you to the ACT branch for the work it did in making this conference a success.

ECA branches have long history in providing for professional forums this year: ECA NSW organised the a range of forums—the majority of these were focused on informing participation in the national early childhood reform agenda, Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms—responding the Regulation Impact Statement, Consultation forum on the draft standard for highly accomplished teacher of children aged 3-8 years. The branch collaborated with two other organisations to present an information session on the National Reform agenda and implications for NSW, *Belonging, Being and Becoming EYLF*. ECA Tasmania organises a Biennial Forum and it too, hosted two Advanced Teaching Standards Consultations in Tasmania. A collaboration including the SA branch sponsored an Integrated Services Forum, hosted the consultation on the highly accomplished standards for early childhood teachers and two forums related to Legislative Reform on combining regulations for childcare and preschool, and the registration of ECE services, and the launch of the NIFTeY Report, *Integration of early childhood education and care*. ECA WA similarly hosted the consultation on the highly accomplished standards for early childhood teachers and hosted a round table forum with Jane Bertrand, Professor at the School of Early Childhood at George Brown in Toronto, Canada. The ACT branch partnered in the organisation of the 2008 ECA Biennial Conference, presented the Inaugural Provocations to Practice Series workshop, with second workshops planned for October. The Provocation to Practice workshops are to be flagship events for ACT ECA. ECA

ACT also organised a Stakeholder Reception at the residence of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Canberra. As with all ECA branches the ACT ECA conducted the consultation forums on the draft standard for highly accomplished teaching of children aged 3-8 years. ECA Victoria has organised a joint Professional Development day with Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA), a joint two day conference with ECIA planned for later in the year, Ethics ECA members' forums, four open members meetings (two held in different parts of Victoria), focused on the National Early Years Learning Framework and one to discuss the draft Highly Accomplished Teaching Standards for Early Childhood Teachers Forum. ECA NT hosted the *NT Children's Services Conference 2008 Sustaining Childhood*—160 delegates from across the NT attended the three day Conference. NT ECA also held two forums in Alice Springs on the Early Years Quality Framework and also hosted a consultation forum on the draft standard for Highly Accomplished Teaching for Early Childhood Teachers. Queensland ECA sponsored presentations at two conferences, the inaugural *Australian Birth to Three Matters Conference* and Professor Carol Aubrey at the Round Table on *Sustaining Pedagogical Leadership in the Early Years* hosted by Child and Family Studies, Griffith University. The Queensland branch is also active in the Early Childhood Sustainability Network, formerly Queensland Early Childhood Environmental Network. ECA Queensland also annually undertakes the Statewide Under 8's week. This year the theme was *Creativity let it happen*. ECA Queensland also auspices Little Voices Big Noises Project Communities for Children Waterford West, Kingston, Loganlea—a significant feature of this project has been the Parent Diary. This diary reflects ECA commitments and priorities around sustainability, reconciliation and many other aspects of the ECA mission. The branch is also partnering with Queensland Family Planning for the development of the educational resource DVD, *Where do I start?*

Scholarships and Awards

ECA nationally and the branches play a variety of roles in sponsoring and administering scholarships. These scholarships honour excellence and advocacy, and in doing this celebrate the significance of the work of the early childhood profession. Branches which currently do not have awards are actively investigating doing so.

At the ECA Conference 2008 Pam Winter from the South Australian branch gave the Barbara Creaser Memorial address, Miriam Guigni from New South Wales received the inaugural ECA/McArthur Early Childhood Leadership Development Scholarship, Karen Schneider (Vic) received the ECA/McArthur Early Childhood Student Encouragement Award and Fay Hadley from NSW was the recipient of the ECA Doctoral Thesis Award. ECA was also a member of the selection panel for the Australian Family Children's Services Awards.

ECA South Australia awarded a Professional Development Scholarship for attendance at 2008 ECA Conference. ECA is also represented on the de Lissa Scholarship Committee which administers the Jean Denton Memorial Scholarship and the Early Childhood Education Graduate Award. ECA Tasmania administers the Department of Education Scholarship Program—funding provided to support current practitioners upgrade or gain an early childhood qualification. It also sponsors the following Awards:

- The two Polytechnic Children's Services Awards
- The University of Tasmania Early Childhood Award
- The ECA Advocacy Awards (Biennial) for Outstanding Advocate and Emerging Advocate Award.

ECA NSW awarded a number of Scholarships to enable regional members to attend the *ECA National Conference*. The NSW branch presents the New England Region Advocacy Award and work is being done with the University of Western Sydney to develop a student Advocacy Award. ECA Victoria is responsible for the Agnes Farrance Award and an Excellence in Early Childhood Award is offered to each Tertiary TAFE/University offering a Diploma or a Degree in

Early Childhood—the institute nominates a graduating student to be presented with an award which is one year Gold ECA membership. ECA NT give awards for the Charles Darwin University Early Childhood Teaching Graduate of the Year and the Early Childhood TAFE Graduate of the Year.

As a strong, progressive, sustainable, future–focussed organisation—ECA models high standards of governance and planning

ECA has a strong commitment to good governance and understands this as being fundamental to ECA's capacity to pursue its mandate for children in a systematic and transparent way. To this end ECA Council 2008 endorsed ECA's Strategic Directions for 2009-2011. This document was distributed to all members and made public more generally through its publication in *ECA Voice*. The three goals and the desired outcomes associated with them provided the framework for the development of an Operations Plan to support their achievement. This Annual Report sets out progress towards the achievement of those strategic goals.

The development and review of ECA governance policies is an ongoing process in which significant progress was made this year. Importantly the ECA Board of Directors this year gave in principle endorsement to the following as governance principles to underpin the operation and work of the Board of Directors:

Best interests of the organisation—directors act only in the best interests of the organisation, free of considerations of personal advantage or outside influence

Integrity and collegiality—directors govern ethically and in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect and support

Leadership—directors actively promote the values, mission statement and broad interests of the organisation through ECA's work and in dealing directly with members, stakeholders and the community

Responsibility—directors collectively are ultimately responsible for the organisation's effective performance in all areas, including the Board's own activities

Strategic focus—while they are responsible for ensuring congruence with ECA values and purposes and for overseeing the effective management and performance of the organisation, directors focus on strategic matters and delegate operational management

Compliance—directors ensure that the organisation meets all its legal, contractual and policy obligations

Accountability—directors are accountable to and ensure effective communication with the organisation's members, partners and other stakeholders

Partnership and delegation—directors work in open and constructive partnership with the Chief Executive Officer, and establish clear delegation for the management of the organisation.

Governance policies are a work in progress.

As a strong, progressive, sustainable, future–focussed organisation—ECA is financially independent and secure

ECA has continued over the past year to diversify its income base. As a result, although the sale of publications and subscriptions continues to provide a substantial contribution to ECA's income there is growing contribution to ECA income from funded projects such as KidsMatter; Early Childhood partnership based initiatives such as that with the Australian Primary Principals Association around *Your child's first year at school*, internet sources—39% of publications income came from this source in 2008-2009, ECA Studio, ECA's design and preproduction arm, and from student memberships which has underwritten the bulk offer of the *Everyday Learning Series* to children's services.

This year ECA has relocated to better premises.

As a strong, progressive, sustainable, future–focussed organisation—ECA membership base is broad and growing

ECA membership is growing particularly through student members. Nationally and in branches members are privileged in ECA work. ECA membership is a requirement for participation in the Teaching Standards project working groups, for ECA Awards and scholarships, and for ECA preferred provider status. Membership incentives are a feature of the ECA conferences, seminars and forums, nationally and in branches.

National ECA work profiles branches. This year branches organised the Teaching Standards consultation forums and the local profile of branches was enhanced by their use to source respondents to Special Child Care Benefit targeted consultation as well as for other smaller targeted consultations. ECA leadership of targeted consultation gave a local profile to ECA. As well as this the CEO and the President again met members in a number of states including SA, WA, Tasmania, ACT, Queensland and NSW.

Regional groups

Regional groups continue to thrive. They are a feature of a number of ECA branches and provide the chance for active participation by regional members in ECA's work. Many of these regional branches were active in organising consultation forums to respond to the draft standards for highly accomplished teaching of young children 3-8 years.

ECA Tasmania has two regional groups, the Northern Regional Group and the North West Region Group. ECA NSW has regional groups in the Central West and Far West, New England, Riverina, Far North Coast and is in the process of establishing a regional group in the Hunter. ECA Victoria has a Wodonga sub-branch and ECA Queensland has regional groups in the Peninsular and the Gold Coast.

The future

There are real challenges ahead if children are to reap the benefits of the good intentions of the Commonwealth Government's early childhood reform agenda. It is important in facing these challenges that ECA does not lose sight of the transformative potential of a profession which takes responsibility for its own quality standards. As an advocacy organisation for children ECA must also be an advocate for the profession and enable and support the profession to be the custodian of its own quality standards. Children will be the ultimate beneficiaries of this process.