

Early Childhood Australia Election Scorecard

ECA Priorities	Coalition	Labor	Greens
<p>Implement the National Quality Reform Agenda in full and in line with current timelines. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving staff-to-child ratios • Improving staff qualifications 	<p>Support for high quality standards (unspecified) but will immediately review the National Quality Reform Agenda to assess cost and workforce impacts.</p> <p>No detailed commitments to improve staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications.</p>	<p>Committed to proceeding with the COAG endorsed National Quality Reform Agenda for improved staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications including the current timeline for implementation.</p>	<p>Support National Quality Reform Agenda including improved staff-to-child ratios, such as 1-to-3 for babies, and more highly qualified staff.</p>
<p>Commit to implementing the National Quality Rating System (National Quality Standards Framework) as part of the National Quality Reform Agenda – and providing this information to families.</p>	<p>Will not proceed with implementing the National Quality Rating System (National Quality Standards Framework).</p>	<p>Committed to implementing the National Quality Rating System (National Quality Standards Framework).</p>	<p>Committed to implementing the National Quality Rating System (National Quality Standards Framework).</p>
<p>Commit further investment to support ECEC staff</p>	<p>Workforce qualification upgrades in the childcare sector indicated in the proposed review will be adequately accounted for.</p> <p>Otherwise no specific commitments.</p>	<p>Will proceed with commitment of \$115 million over 4 years to remove TAFE fees for child care diplomas and advanced diplomas. In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,000 people are undertaking a Certificate III in Children’s Services in the Productivity Places Program • Supporting additional 1500 early childhood education university places to boost the supply of qualified teachers and waiving HECS-HELP debts for qualified early childhood teachers working in areas of disadvantage 	<p>Support improved professional development opportunities and professional standards for childcare workers.</p>
<p>Recognise any rises in childcare costs and commit to raising the Child Care Benefit as the quality reforms take effect.</p>	<p>Will re-introduce indexation of the Child Care Rebate to give additional \$300 pa (approx) to people receiving the maximum rebate of \$7,500 pa and pay the Childcare Rebate weekly in arrears.</p> <p>Will provide \$12.6 million for Occasional</p>	<p>From July 2011 will pay the rebate fortnightly in arrears.</p>	<p>Support paying the Child Care Rebate to parents fortnightly in arrears.</p>

	Care.		
Improve the standards of Registered Training Organisations (Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers).	No specific commitments	<p>Will establish a national vocational education and training (VET) regulator to assist in ensuring a high quality training system.</p> <p>Will establish a national ministerial standards council to advise on national standards for VET.</p> <p>From 2010 a \$130million performance based quality skills incentive program to improve VET qualifications and training.</p>	No specific commitments
Commit to services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to implement the early years learning framework.	<p>Special needs of Indigenous, remote and other minority families will be adequately accounted for.</p> <p>No specific commitments.</p>	<p>Will proceed with commitment of \$293 million over six years to deliver 38 Children and Family Centres in areas of high need as part of the National Partnership of Indigenous Early Childhood Development.</p> <p>Will continue commitment of \$59.4 million over four years to improve the quality of 140 Budget Based Funded early childhood services – the vast majority of which are in remote Indigenous communities.</p>	Support increasing the funding available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Early Childhood Australia's Response

As is indicated in our priorities, Early Childhood Australia strongly supports the National Quality Reform Agenda. ECA believes that neither children nor the nation can wait any longer for these reforms. We note that:

- The National Quality Reform Agenda was based on international evidence supported by the OECD. We cannot step away from improving the quality of the early education and care our children receive.
- The National Quality Reform Agenda was based on lengthy and extensive consultation, costing, planning and negotiation and agreement with State and Territory governments in the Council of Australian Governments and
- The agreed timeline for gradual implementation allows time to address workforce issues and to make some adjustment to cost increases.

Overall, our response to the policies of the three parties is:

Labor

ECA was pleased to hear the commitment of the Labor Party to continue the implementation of the National Quality Reform Agenda including improvements in staff-to-child ratios and the qualifications of staff.

A National Quality Rating System, like the one supported by Labor, is important for parents. Parents have the right to know how the quality of the service their child receives rates against an agreed national standard and other services.

The Coalition

ECA was also pleased to hear that the Coalition is committed to high quality standards in the sector but is concerned about a review of the National Quality Reform Agenda based on an assessment of the impacts on costs and workforce. Given the consultation and planning that went into the National Quality Reform Agenda and its endorsement by the Council of Australia Governments, further review flies in the face of already strong consensus on a clear way forward to improving quality in early childhood education and care. Further review will interfere with the agreed implementation timelines for quality improvements, and in the absence of specific commitments regarding staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications the focus on 'cost' and 'workforce' issues suggest restrictive parameters to any review.

Plans to abolish the COAG agreed National Quality Rating System are also worrying. At present parents have no way of assessing the quality of their child's service against an agreed standard and they are entitled to this information.

The Greens

Support from the Greens for the National Quality Framework is welcomed by ECA, as is their support for the National Quality Rating System.