

# Our future on the line

*Keeping the early childhood education and care reforms on track*

▣ A State of the Sector report  
by Early Childhood Australia



**Early Childhood  
Australia**

A voice for young children



# ▣ It's time to discard the name 'childcare'

During my time with Early Childhood Australia many things have changed. Twenty-three years ago there was a much stronger public feeling that 'care' and 'education' were separate – that childcare was a form of institutionalised 'babysitting' and education only began when children went to preschool or school.

I'm pleased to say that over time this has changed significantly. What many early childhood practitioners knew all along, that young children's social, emotional and cognitive growth go hand in hand, is becoming much more widely accepted.

We now have research-based evidence that care and learning are fundamentally entwined and a much better understanding of the importance of qualifications for early childhood teachers and other staff.

Australia's early childhood education and care sector is at the beginning of a vital reform process.

In the coming years, we have some important milestones to reach as we fully embrace the reforms to early childhood education, reforms which are the cornerstones of a stronger economy and a better society.

That's why I want to bring an end to 'childcare' and call it what it is, early childhood education and care.

Language is important – it shapes the way we understand things; old terms are discarded and new terms open new possibilities. For example a change as subtle as 'disabled' to 'people living with disabilities' opens up huge potential and empowers people to look at themselves – and others – differently.

In the same way, the early childhood education and care sector needs to be recognised for the quality education, nurturing and care it gives to children from birth to eight years of age.

Government ministries and departments at local, state, territory and federal levels must lead this change by renaming the jobs, departments and ministries that carry the responsibility for the national ECEC reform agenda with the language of education and care.

Of course, reform runs deeper than just name changes and that's why the National Quality Framework, a considerable overhaul of the sector, is quite simply a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to begin the process of reform and improvement.

Changes that are being implemented, such as the 1:4 staff-to-child ratio for children aged birth to 24 months in long day care, and changes for other age groups and service types, will allow educators working with very young children to have more time to develop warm and caring relationships with them. It is these relationships that underpin the development of confidence and self-esteem, providing the platform for all other learning. Improving the requirements for qualified staff is also a great beginning to raising quality.

Although there has been reluctance in some areas to adopt the reforms, with increased costs cited as a major obstacle, the fact is these reforms are overwhelmingly supported by the sector and the community at large.

What worries me most is that there might be some delays in implementing the reforms because in some quarters there is pressure to reset the timelines.

But now is not the time to stall.

The evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of high quality early childhood education and care. It's good for children, good for families and ultimately it will benefit our economy.

There is no doubt that investing in early childhood education and care will pay off – now and into the future.

Our children are too important for us to stop or delay these reforms. The next two years will be exciting ones for the sector and we are looking forward to working together with families and services to begin these groundbreaking reforms.

This is the first of a series of Early Childhood Education and Care sector reports as we shape one of the most important areas of Australia's economy and society.



**Pam Cahir, CEO**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pamela Cahir'.

**Early Childhood Australia**





## Early Childhood Education and Care

In Australia there has been a trend towards an increased use of formal early childhood education and care since 1991, according to figures from the Department for Employment and Workplace Relations.

Today, nearly 870,000 children are in some form of approved early childhood education and care. On average, those children are spending 17 hours each week in early childhood education and care. There are nearly 14,000 approved service providers offering formal early childhood education and care around Australia – a number that will continue to grow.

With so many children attending ECEC services it is important that these are of good quality. The problems that have beset ECEC services and act against quality have been well known for many years. They include inadequate and inconsistent standards and different views of what makes good practice, serious workforce issues and the need for a new quality assurance system.

Over the past three years the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, in consultation with professionals in the sector, have been working together through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to address these issues. In December 2009 COAG endorsed a plan for evidence-based quality reforms that will underwrite gradual improvement of the ECEC sector. That plan has realistic goals and achievable time frames.

Improving the quality of early childhood education and care in Australia certainly has its challenges but it will achieve good outcomes for children, families, the early childhood education and care workforce and the nation.

**17 hours** is the average amount of time children spend in early childhood education and care

**13,899 approved services** operate in Australia\*

**869,770 children** are in approved early childhood education and care.

Source: Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations and ABS Australian Social Trends

\*Long day care, family day care, in-home care, outside school hours care and occasional care services approved by the Australian Government to receive Child Care Benefit on behalf of families.

# Countdown to sector-wide reform

## The National Quality Framework

To improve the quality of early childhood education and care, the National Quality Framework is being introduced over a number of years with formal implementation beginning in January 2012.

The National Quality Framework will put in place compulsory national standards and a quality rating system to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia. A new national body will oversee the application of a National Quality Standard across the country and ensure services are meeting the requirements.

As part of the new system each service provider will receive an overall rating following an assessment by a qualified assessor. The rating system will provide information to parents and assure them that the service is meeting the National Quality Standard.

For the first time, families will be able to find out how their provider rates when it comes to quality early childhood education and care, and service providers will know where and how they can improve.

The National Quality Standard will also see the quality of early childhood education and care increase through the improvement of staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications.

These important changes, including the new Early Years Learning Framework, will assist services to provide quality early childhood education and care, and help families make informed choices about which service is best for their child.



## The Reforms in Action

### Improved staff-to-child ratios

A crucial component of the changes are the improved staff-to-child ratios, which will be nationally consistent for the first time. Research has shown that improving staff-to-child ratios makes a big difference in the quality of interactions with children. It is these interactions that underwrite children's learning and development.

Improved staff-to-child ratios have demonstrated improved health and safety, they allow children to learn more effectively, and even lower the risk of infection among young children.

| Age group               | New staff-to-child ratio* |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Birth to 24 months      | 1:4                       |
| 25 to 35 months         | 1:5                       |
| 36 months to school age | 1:11                      |

\*For long day care and pre school.

“For a number of years we have always staffed at higher than regulation staff child ratios, and qualifications, as not only does the research tell us that this is in young children’s best interests, we know from day to day practice that to form meaningful and trusting relationships with young children we had to have more qualified staff and fewer children. We welcome these changes so all young children have the best care and education experiences possible.”

Judy Radich,  
Manager Cooloon Children’s Centre Inc. NSW

## 2010 – 2020 Timeline for Introduction of National Quality Standards

| New quality indicator   | New standard   |
|---|--|
| National Rating System  | Selected services will begin a trial, and undergo assessment against the new standard  |
| National Rating System  | All services to be assessed against the new National Quality Standard  |
| Ratio for birth - 24 months   | 1:4 staff-to-child ratio   |
| <b>First review of progress towards meeting new qualification requirements</b>    |  |
| Ratio for mixed aged groups   | 1:7 staff-to-child ratio with a maximum of 4 children not yet at school.   |
| Certificate III   | Minimum Certificate III qualification (or be studying towards).  |
| Diploma Qualification   | 50% of all staff to hold (or be studying towards) a Diploma or above.  |
|   | Coordinators must have a diploma qualification or above  |
| Early Childhood Teacher   | An early childhood degree qualified teacher will need to be in attendance all the time for services provided to 25 children or more.       |
|   | An early childhood degree qualified teacher will need to be in attendance some of the time for services provided to less than 25 children. |
| <b>Second review of standards and effectiveness of National Quality Framework</b> |  |
| Ratio for 25 - 35 months  | 1:5 staff-to-child ratio   |
| Ratio for 36 months - school age  | 1:11 staff-to-child ratio  |
| <b>From 2019 onwards, reviews of progress every 5 years</b>                       |  |
| Early Childhood Teacher   | A second early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance all of the time for services provided to 80 children or more.               |
|   | A second early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance at least half of the time for services provided to 60 children or more.     |

“ I was a family day carer for four years before undertaking study for my Certificate III and it changed everything. In particular I learnt how to plan and program my day a whole lot better and how to make it run more smoothly. I learnt a great deal about four year olds and how to offer them more in order to prepare them for school.

I really resisted the idea of doing study, but I got so much out of it that I’m now doing my Advanced Diploma. I am a parent and an educator and if my children were in family day care, I’d want them to be more than just babysat.”

Jeanne Byrne,  
Family Day Carer, Queensland



## Staff Qualifications

Another important aspect of the reforms is the aim to see more qualified staff employed in early childhood education and care.

### By January 2014:

- half of all staff at every long day care centre or preschool must have (or be working towards) a diploma level early childhood qualification. The remaining staff will all be required to have (or be working towards) a Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification.
- an early childhood teacher will be required in long day-care and preschool services for 25 children or more. Additional early childhood teachers will be required for larger services by 2020.
- family day care coordinators will need to have a diploma level early childhood education and care qualification and family day carers must have (or be working towards) a Certificate III.

## Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is designed to enrich children’s learning and was developed after extensive consultation with educators and leaders in the sector.

Early childhood professionals across the country have welcomed the EYLF with enthusiasm as an inspiring and important initiative. Many are currently beginning to implement the EYLF, with children the ones who will benefit. The EYLF will help services with their curriculum decision making, planning and in evaluating what is happening for the children in their program.

In many services as the EYLF is implemented there will be changes to the way the programs for children are developed. Many parents will notice these changes in the way their service operates and in their children’s learning.

“ The National Quality Framework is a really exciting initiative that has excellent outcomes for children and families. It’s a reform that needs to occur and it allows for services to truly reflect the needs of the community and what is most appropriate for those families.”

Prue Warrilow,  
National Convenor,  
Australian Community  
Children’s Services



| Relevant Services                  | Starting Dates    |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Selected services                  | July 2010         |
| All services                       | January 2012      |
| Long Day Care & Preschool Services | January 2012      |
|                                    | <b>Early 2013</b> |
| Family Day Care                    | January 2014      |
| All services                       | January 2014      |
| Long Day Care & Preschool Services | January 2014      |
| Family Day Care                    | January 2014      |
| Long Day Care & Preschool Services | January 2014      |
| Long Day Care & Preschool Services | January 2014      |
|                                    | <b>2014</b>       |
| All services                       | January 2016      |
| All services                       | January 2016      |
|                                    | <b>2019</b>       |
| Long Day Care & Preschool Services | January 2020      |
| Long Day Care & Preschool Services | January 2020      |

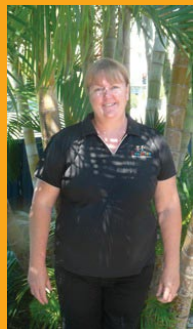
# How the States and Territories Rate

## State and Territory Governments progress towards reform

In a significant step to progress the agreement by COAG on the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care in December 2009, all states and territories have together developed the new Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. Each state and territory must enact this law in their own Parliament (WA will enact its own law) and by January 2012 this single national law will replace all current state and territory laws regarding long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschool services.

A key milestone in the implementation of the National Quality Framework was the passing of this national law by the Victorian Parliament in October 2010. New South Wales followed swiftly, adopting the legislation in November 2010.

Other state parliaments must now also adopt the Victorian legislation in order to have the bill passed as law in their own jurisdiction. Already a number of the states and territories yet to pass the national law adhere to certain elements of the National Quality Standard, and in some cases are doing much better than the reforms are demanding.



“The change to 1:4 ratios for birth to two year olds has given us more time to have quality interactions with all the children. We are able to support children with their social skills and provide emotional stability. The new ratio has enabled a true sense of belonging in our environment to happen, as the consistent enrolments have seen our birth to two year old room become a family with a diversity of ages.

Toileting routines are shorter with less children, thus other routines are relaxed and not hurried, allowing time for one-on-one intentional teaching moments.”

Jennifer Tranby-Hunter, Director  
Freckles Kindy and Learning Centre, NSW

## Countdown to reform: who's already doing what?

| Standard  | ACT | NSW            | NT           | QLD | SA              | TAS            | VIC            | WA             |
|---|-----|----------------|--------------|-----|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Adopted the new legislation   |     | ✓              |              |     |                 |                | ✓              |                |
| 1:4 ratio for birth to 24 months  |     | ✓              |              | ✓   |                 |                | ✓              | ✓              |
| 1:5 ratio for 25 to 35 months   | ✓   |                |              |     |                 |                | ✓ <sup>^</sup> | ✓              |
| 1:11 ratio for 36 months to school age                                    | ✓   | ✓ <sup>*</sup> | ✓            |     | ✓ <sup>**</sup> | ✓ <sup>*</sup> |                | ✓ <sup>*</sup> |
| Staff must have or be working towards a Certificate III                   |     |                |              | ✓   |                 |                |                |                |
| A qualified teacher, all of the time in services with 25 children or more |     |                | <sup>+</sup> |     |                 |                |                |                |

<sup>\*</sup>Demands a 1:10 ratio for children aged 36 months to school age

<sup>\*\*</sup>Demands a ratio between 1:8 and 1:10 depending on the number of children

<sup>^</sup>Demands a 1:4 ratio for 25 to 35 month old children instead of 1:5

<sup>+</sup>Requires a teacher for services with more than 29 children

## Community feedback

Parents, early childhood professionals and service providers are overwhelmingly supportive of the quality reforms.

In September 2010 a national poll commissioned by Early Childhood Australia found that 92 percent of people thought the quality of early childhood education and care was more important than the cost.

A survey of Early Childhood Australia members and supporters in October 2010 showed that there is significant support for the reforms succeeding.

The top three political issues for ECA were identified as:

1. Ensuring the Early Years Learning Framework is implemented effectively
2. Ensuring the Government's Quality Reform Agenda is implemented
3. Qualifications for early childhood education and care staff and the robustness of registered training organisations.

Support for higher quality early childhood education and care from the community and early childhood professionals is overwhelming and highlights that this is an important reform for children, families, professionals and the community, and one that service providers – and governments – need to embrace.





Amanda and Georgia Stevens

## ☑ A day in the life of Georgia's early childhood education and care

Georgia is 3 years old, she attends Clarendon Children's Centre.

Georgia loves to kick a soccer ball and ride her bike. She has a strong creative side and spends a lot of time making up stories which are written down by Mel, her early childhood teacher.

She also loves singing and dancing and on Tuesdays Emily – another staff member - comes to the centre to coordinate these activities. She does ballet on Saturday mornings. Her favourite food is spaghetti and meatballs.

### Amanda Stevens is Georgia's mother

“I've had both my children in this centre and talking with other people, I know that this is a high quality centre.

The educators have time to develop relationships with children in a nurturing environment.

I know that the centre already meets most of the requirements of the new standards and I feel comfortable knowing that my children are happy and thriving.”

### Linda Davison is the Coordinator at Clarendon Children's Centre

“I qualified as a kindergarten teacher in 1978 and have been at this centre for 23 years. We have the ratios in place and everyone working here is qualified, except for one person who is undertaking study for their Diploma.

The reforms are long overdue and I don't have much patience with the cost issue. If we really believe that our children are precious then we need to do the best we can in their early formative years.

A common response from parents, who have enrolled their children in other centres where the components of the National Quality Framework are not in place, is that they can see the difference where it most counts - in their children.

It's also important to value the work of early childhood educators, and attaining qualifications and rewarding them for their work is a crucial part of this reform.

We all want to be proud of what we do and there's nothing to be more proud of than working with young children.”





**Early Childhood  
Australia**

A voice for young children

Prepared by Early Childhood Australia, the peak body advocating to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)