



Strategic Directions
January 2009 – December 2011

19 December 2008

Early Childhood Australia's mission is to 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 Branches and the National Organisation work to achieve this mission by acting consistently with *ECA Values (1)* to address and promote *ECA Principles (2)* and *ECA Positions (3)*. In doing this they are informed by the *ECA Code of Ethics (4)* and act in a way that is consistent with *ECA's Scope of Activities (5)* and *Governance Guidelines (6)*.

From this base, the *Strategic Directions and Desired Outcomes (7)* provide the current framework from which Branches and the National Organisation plan their work and measure their achievements through their own specific Key Performance Indicators and related Operational Plans.

Please note:

- Work on *ECA Values, Principles and Positions* is ongoing following Council 2008 and will be considered again at Council 2009.
- The term 'parents' as used here includes all adults, regardless of 'blood' relationships, who are primary carers of children and live in a family unit with them.

1. ECA Values

ECA Values are:

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

2. ECA Principles

ECA Principles are beliefs that inform and guide our positions. They are derived from our values.

The following discussion of *ECA Principles* was considered and accepted by Council 2008, and is presented here to support planning. Work on this area is ongoing:

'Some of these principles can be articulated now on the basis of past action and others will become apparent in the way ECA works through and responds to issues that affect children. What is clear though is that any action needs to be able to be justified by reference to ECA's fundamental values.'

The question then is: do ECA values provide a robust framework for articulating guiding principles? There is no doubt that in many cases they do. One helpful strategy for making this connection is to think about guiding principles that have emerged from our work because of certain values that ECA holds.

Value: The rights of the child

Because ECA values the rights of children, what guiding principles have emerged from our work? What practice/work has given voice to this principle? I would suggest that one such principle is **the recognition of children as citizens.**

The recognition of children as citizens is seen in ECA's response to the Government's consultation paper on a National Agenda for Children:

'...suggests that a further reason for the development of a national agenda for children arises from the recognition of children as citizens. As citizens children have a value as human beings in the here and now, not simply for what they might become. As citizens, they have an entitlement, independent of their parent's capacity to pay and shared by all other citizens, to the resources, that is policies, programs and funds necessary...'

What ECA practice or work has evidenced this commitment? The commitment to children as citizens was evidenced in a recent speech by ECA's CEO to an ACT Community consultation forum about 'Meaningful consultation with children: Raising children's voices':

'And finally I consider Penn's notion of children as competent witnesses to their own experience and ask each of us: do we believe this to be true?

'At what point do we believe that children are competent witnesses to their own experience? When children are infants and they cry? When we decide that they need to learn to go to sleep so we let them cry? When we decide that a cry is a call for help, and/or that they are telling us something and that we should respond?

'Children's right to participation and to be consulted begins at the beginning and we need to find ways—different ways—to make this a daily experience for the full diversity of children.'

And the same process again for Justice...

Value: Justice

The question is: because ECA values justice, what guiding principles have emerged from our work? This value is evidenced in ECA's **commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, which acknowledges obligations that result from past wrongdoings from which we all benefit.**

Given this principle, what practice or work has evidenced this commitment? One example is the acknowledgement of the traditional owners, which ECA as a national organisation now makes at all meetings in which it has a leadership role.

Some policies have emerged in response to the evidence via submissions, speeches etc. To what value and principles are they linked?

A commitment to **the view that children are entitled to culturally valued knowledges**, which will ensure that they are culturally strong and enable them to participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of mainstream society.

'If teaching is an active, complex, contextualised and intentional process, how can we teach if we do not understand what we are trying to teach? This view of teaching is entirely consistent with sociocultural theory and a view of children as capable resourceful learners, as it is with a respect for and knowledge of subject/discipline content. Such knowledge is culturally valued knowledge and brings with it educational, social and economic benefits (Cullen). Early childhood professionals cannot stand aside from subject/discipline knowledge. It is one of their core obligations to children and to families.'

—Excerpt from a speech made at Southern Cross University

The recognition of **the importance of the quality of early relationships**, which has expressed itself in advocacy for paid parental leave, higher staff-child ratios, specialist early childhood qualification, and a real career structure and proper remuneration for people working with young children in early childhood services. (See, for example, ECA's 2007 federal election agenda).

As we begin to make the link between these *ECA Positions* and *ECA Values*, what becomes clear is that the lack of definition about the values makes this task extremely difficult. What is also clear is that there is a coherence about ECA's positions that suggests that the values are agreed at a quite fundamental level.

3. ECA Positions

At Council 2005 it was decided to archive ECA Policies (as listed on the website), with a view to updating them. The outcome of this process was considered at Council 2008 (see *ECA Scope of Activities* below).

Current ECA positions include:

- The renewal of the ECA apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as an ECA Statement of Regret
- The ECA position on children in detention centres
- The ECA statement on environment and sustainability, and associated 'resource theme' on the ECA website
- Submissions to inquiries on parental leave, quality assurance, literacy, and the Agenda for Children, and the AEU preschool inquiry
- ECA's election agendas
- ECA's position on the implementation of Government commitments to 15 hours preschool
- ECA's commitment to four-year-degree-qualified early childhood teachers providing pedagogical leadership in childcare and preschool services
- ECA's commitment to a workforce strategy in early childhood services—because such a strategy underwrites stability and quality of staff, and therefore relationships with children and pay parity with primary school teachers.
- Reflections in speeches by ECA spokespeople about the nature of teaching, the characteristics of teachers, the nature of early childhood specialist teaching degrees, the place of content, what the EPPE, Galinsky and the NZ evidence synthesis means.

Information about these can be found on the ECA website.

4. ECA Code of Ethics

The *ECA Code of Ethics* is available at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code

5. ECA's Scope of Activities

The following material was developed from a broad consultation process for the ECA Strategic Plan 1996–2002 and more recently endorsed as ECA's Scoping Document. With some editing and updating of language, it was accepted by Council 2008 as a statement of ECA's *Scope of Activities*, and has now been modified to include the agreements at Council 2008 regarding *ECA Policies* and *Positions*.

- (i) Advocacy** – ECA promotes the interests and wellbeing of young children, their families and the people who work with them, as broadly and effectively as possible.

ECA's advocacy for young children is its main activity.

As an advocate, ECA critiques policy and programs of government and major organisations and committees; promotes a wide range of health, family and early education and care programs; and supports initiatives that enhance social justice and strengthen communities. In advocating to the community, ECA promotes its view through varied means, including publications and newsletters, the press, radio and television and the internet.

As part of its advocacy work, ECA talks with government, organisations and individuals, participates in the work of national committees, and makes submissions as appropriate. All these activities occur formally and informally at both the national and branch level. Advocacy is also carried out by individual ECA members in their professional and personal activities when they make and take opportunities to promote the wellbeing of children and ECA principles in general.

- (ii) Principles and positions** – ECA maintains and publicises a body of knowledge and informed views on issues to do with young children and their care and education in our community.

Over many years ECA's Council has held that ECA's views are important and useful and that ECA has the authority to develop and promote them. The knowledge and expertise of senior ECA staff, Branches and members around the country, gives ECA access to current information about a wide range of matters to do with early childhood. Discussion and negotiation between informed members, experts in particular fields, academics and practitioners from a range of settings—using ECA values and principles, their own practical knowledge

and evidence from the research—can generate agreed and wise organisation positions.

Council 2008 endorsed the view that this process leads to the development of views or positions that are expressed in many ways, including:

- *Formally endorsed and referenced statements resulting from extensive ECA consultation processes*
- *ECA responses and submissions to inquiries*
- *Speeches and statements by ECA spokespeople*

While ECA positions are often 'working positions', with thinking that is developing as dialogue continues and understanding grows, all are characterised by being current, responsive and based in ECA's strongly held beliefs, values and views of children.

- (iii) Education and information** – ECA promotes high standards of practice and understanding in those who care for and educate young children, and raises awareness of and stimulates informed debate about relevant issues in the community.

ECA is committed to continuing development and education for all people who work with or are interested in the wellbeing of young children, and to educating the general population about the significance of early childhood and related issues.

Through information and education activities using various strategies and media we present a range of resources designed to inform, challenge, stimulate and educate. An underlying aim is to encourage informed debate about practice, issues and ideas among people working in the field and in the wider community.

- (iv) Liaison and consultation** – ECA consults widely on relevant issues in the community and facilitates communication among associated interest groups at National and Branch level.

ECA believes that liaison and cooperation among all interested parties promote good results on behalf of children. ECA itself has a unique place and role as a promoter and facilitator of interaction among associated interest groups nationally and within states and territories. This has been formally recognised by the federal government in ECA's 'umbrella' function. It is also in keeping with ECA's own focus on the wellbeing of all young children and therefore extends beyond this government assigned role.

ECA consults and facilitates discussion as widely as is relevant and possible, both among organisations funded by the Commonwealth government and with other organisations and interest groups outside this forum.

- (v) Organisation development** – ECA protects and develops its ability to work to achieve its mission for young children and its vision for its own future.

This encompasses the management of the agreed long-term growth and development program of ECA.

For ECA to be successful into the future, it is important that we design and implement strategies that are consistent with our principles and policies, which will enable us to be:

- *strong and enthusiastic in all parts of our organisation, including Branches and the National Organisation, and Executive Committee/Board members and staff*
- *forward-looking and efficient in the way we attract and respond to members and clients in general*
- *strategic, effective and realistic in our work plans*
- *open and constructive in the relationships between all parts of the organisation*
- *as financially secure and as independent as possible.*

- (vi) Accountability** – ECA acts in a way that is consistent with the *ECA Mission* and *ECA Values*; that achieves efficiency, effectiveness and openness in all operations; and that demonstrates excellence and leadership to the field.

ECA is accountable to its constituency for all its activities, and this accountability is made explicit in the management of the organisation and its activities.

One of ECA's management challenges is to ensure that our constituency all around Australia and further afield receives a high level of service through all areas of organisational operation. The organisation must operate in a way that allows staff to operate efficiently and at a high level of skill and achievement, and that facilitates open communication and mutual support among people in all places and roles within ECA.

Accountability is also demonstrated in ECA's evaluation and reporting practices. These should provide continual monitoring and appraisal of performance, and full and clear reporting to committees, membership and to external agencies as appropriate. ECA should demonstrate excellence in all aspects of management practice, both to ensure its own organisational well being and as a model for the field.

The National Board and Branch Executive Committees have final responsibility for the effective operation of their respective incorporated bodies, and may delegate management responsibility to staff according to principles of sound governance.

6. ECA Governance Guidelines

Early Childhood Australia approved a new constitution in 2006.

The new constitution clarified the roles of the Council and the Board and the relationship between Directors and their nominating Branches. It reflects current legal requirements in regard to the role of Board and its members. This has flowed through to a clearer definition of the role of the Board as a strategic leader rather than manager of the organisation.

The role of the Council is set out in ECA Constitution 2006 in Section D Clause 1(c) Powers is to:

- i) approve organisations as Members (Branches) of Early Childhood Australia Inc according to Section C Clause 1
- ii) determine the annual affiliation fee payable by members (Branches) of the Association to the Association
- iii) approve criteria for cessation of membership of a member of a Branch of the Association
- iv) determine the membership structure, categories, voting rights and membership fees of members of Branches of the Association
- v) approve constitutional changes according to Section A Clause A of this Constitution
- vi) develop and determine positions statements of Early Childhood Australia Inc

- vii) consider and approve the Association's strategic direction
- viii) receive annually a report of the work of the Association
- ix) provide a forum for sharing information and debating issues of concern and developing a national overview of the organisations
- x) in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, establish such committees as are required to further the work of the Association
- xi) have the discretion to reduce or waive affiliation fees for Members (Branches) of the Association that do not have the financial resources to pay such affiliation fees.

In the relation to ECA's strategic directions, the Constitution requires only that Council consider and approve the ECA's strategic direction.

The ECA Board on the other hand is required by the ECA Constitution at Section F Clause 2 to, in a manner consistent with the Association's mission, values and objects and subject to the Act:

- i) control and manage the affairs of the Association, including responsibility for the strategic plan, the financial health of the Association including budget development and approval and all other aspects of governance
- ii) in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, establish such committees and coopt such current individual members of a Branch as are required to further the work of the Association
- iii) exercise all such functions other than those specified at Section D Clause 1(c) and those that are required by the Act to be exercised at the Annual General Meeting of the Association
- iv) perform all such acts and do all such things as are necessary and desirable for the proper management of the affairs of the Association.

This section of the constitution spells out the responsibility of the Board for the implementation of the strategic plan and the financial health of the Association.

These and the other powers of the Board encapsulate the legal requirement that members of the Board exercise their fiduciary obligations and act in good faith. These moral and legal obligations are imposed on Directors as individuals and require them to take decisions and act in

the best interests of the organisation as a whole. While Board members are obligated to make clear the position of their Branch on issues, they are legally required to make decisions that are in the best interests of Early Childhood Australia as a whole. What this means is that Board members cannot be mandated by their Branch to argue particular positions. Once a collective decision has been taken Board members (Directors) are required to support that decision.

The role of the Board of Directors is strategic governance rather than management. It ensures the delivery of the organisation's objects and purpose, and upholds its values with a focus on strategic leadership, direction and the achievement of strategic ends. To this end the Board approves the operations plan, including key performance indicators and budgets to achieve the strategic objectives of the organisation and monitors performance against them.

For the national organisation, the development of the operations plan including the specification of key performance indicators, its implementation and reporting against these plans is the work of the CEO.

7. Strategic Directions and Desired Outcomes, January 2009 – December 2011

Goal 1: ECA will be a clear and credible advocate for the rights of young children

Desired outcomes

ECA will be:

- an activist organisation that leads strongly through its advocacy work. ECA will be informed, articulate and forward-thinking in raising and responding to issues and campaigning for the wellbeing of children, giving particular priority to our obligation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- an organisation that recognises and supports the key role of parents in their children's wellbeing and early learning
- an organisation that strongly promotes agreed ECA values, principles, positions and Code of Ethics in advocating for young children
- an organisation that builds strategic and collaborative alliances that strengthen the early childhood sector and support the achievement of ECA's advocacy goals.

Goal 2: ECA will advocate for and support programs and services that deliver high-quality outcomes for young children

Desired outcomes

ECA will be:

- an organisation that campaigns for the development of an educated, specialised and skilled workforce that delivers high-quality early learning programs and good outcomes for children
- an organisation that speaks out for and supports high-quality, evidence-based, reflective practice in early education and care, and the development of professional standards for programs and services for young children
- an organisation that supports strategies by employees, employers, unions, peak groups and governments to achieve appropriate recognition, status and career paths for people who work with young children.

Goal 3: ECA will be a strong, progressive and sustainable organisation that is future-focused

Desired outcomes

ECA will be:

- an organisation that models high standards of governance, management and planning for the future
- an organisation that is financially independent and secure
- an organisation that has a broad, growing and committed membership base
- an organisation that is respected by other similar organisations.