The Federal Government recently announced a $300 million Early Years Quality Fund to support increased wages for educators in the early childhood sector.

This funding is a result of concerted advocacy by United Voice as part of the ‘Big Steps’ campaign and a response to concerns across the sector that wages are too low to attract and retain educators with appropriate qualifications and commitment to working with children. Employers that secure the funding will be able to increase educator wages by approximately $3 per hour from July 1, 2013 for two years.

ECA has welcomed the funding as one step towards professional wages in early childhood education. This is consistent with ECA’s position that outcomes for children are improved when educators are appropriately qualified and remunerated. Notwithstanding this support, we are aware that the fund provides only a temporary increase in wages and will reach only a fraction of educators.

It also creates a number of implementation challenges for the sector as a whole and for individual employers.

We acknowledge that the announcement has been met with some criticism from the sector on the basis that it is an unsustainable model that has the potential to divide educators into those that receive the increase and those that do not. There are also some industrial challenges in how the increase can be paid on a short term basis without creating difficulties in two years time.

One significant area of challenge is that the funding is dependent upon services having an Enterprise Agreement in place or being willing to enter into one. The rationale for this is to ensure that there is a legal basis for the wage increases—this means that funds must be spent on wages and not redirected to other business expenses, a problem that has occurred in other sectors. Only 10 per cent of employers in the early childhood sector currently have an Enterprise Agreement.

While the union is offering assistance with negotiating new agreements this may be contingent on union membership levels within the organisation. Access to funding is not contingent on union membership and there are alternative approaches to embarking on an Enterprise Agreement.

Some organisations have sought the assistance of an employer’s organisation, others the self-help resources available from the Fair Work Commission. It may be useful to note that agreements can be developed at the individual enterprise level or across groups or networks of employers; there are also some model agreements available.

CONTROVERSIAL $300 MILLION EARLY YEARS QUALITY FUND

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Continued p. 2 ...
Another area of concern is that funding is limited to Child Care Benefit approved long day care providers, which excludes many other important parts of the sector employing educators equally deserving of wage increases. While it is disappointing that the funding is not more comprehensive, the package also included a commitment to establish a Pay Equity Unit within the Fair Work Commission with an initial focus on early childhood education and care. This will allow a much broader wage case to be run on the basis of gender equity with the potential to provide a longer term adjustment to wage levels in the sector on a wider and more sustainable way.

There are still a number of implementation issues to be worked through. To be eligible for the funding employers must demonstrate a commitment to quality outcomes for children, including how their services will meet the National Quality Framework qualification requirements. They must also commit to fee restraint. How these commitments will be made and monitored is yet to be determined. ECA understands that an Advisory Group is being established by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and we look forward to working closely with that group.

Despite the issues that need to be worked through, ECA supports the fund as a commitment from the government to the importance of early childhood education and the National Quality Framework and believes that it will help build the case for more comprehensive wage increases in the future.

This announcement is not the end result, there is much more work ahead to ensure that all early childhood educators are appropriately remunerated, and ECA will be campaigning for this at every opportunity.

**USEFUL LINKS**

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Early Years Quality Fund:

Fair Work Commission
www.fwc.gov.au

United Voice
www.unitedvoice.org.au

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**‘Working towards’ is not failing**

With recent reports that half of Australia’s early childhood education and care services failed to meet the new quality standards, ECA hopes to dispel the myth that a service which receives a rating of ‘working towards’ equals ‘failed’.

Assessment visits under the National Quality Framework began in June 2012. Services are assessed on seven different Quality Areas, and a final overall rating is made public after their assessment.

There are five overall ratings that a service can receive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>Indicates that a service demonstrates excellence and is recognised as a sector leader.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXCEEDING NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD</td>
<td>Indicates that a service is exceeding the National Quality Standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEETING NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD</td>
<td>Indicates that a service is meeting the National Quality Standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKING TOWARDS NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD</td>
<td>Indicates that a service is working towards meeting the National Quality Standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED</td>
<td>Indicates that a service is not meeting the National Quality Standard and the regulator is working closely with the service to immediately improve its quality (otherwise the service’s approval to operate will be withdrawn).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ratings taken from www.acecqa.gov.au)

If a service receives an overall rating of ‘working towards’ it means the service has not met at least one of the 58 elements in the National Quality Standard. It may have a mix of higher and lower ratings across the seven Quality Areas.

This does not mean centres are providing poor service, ‘working towards’ means that the services need to improve practices in some of the Quality Areas. ‘Working towards’ does not mean that the service has failed to meet any of the requirements that pose a risk to safety, health or wellbeing of children.

It is unlikely that 100 per cent of services in any sector will meet the criteria within 12 months of new guidelines being implemented. With the help and support available to services to implement the new quality standards, many of the services currently assessed as ‘working towards’ will improve their rating over time.

To find out more, please see the guide to assessments and ratings for services at: http://acecqa.gov.au/resources-and-templates/assessment-and-rating-guides-and-instrument/#services

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Reggio Emilia Australia INFORMATION EXCHANGE proudly presents

**LANDSCAPES OF WONDER** Environments as Places of Research Conference

**Wonder of Learning Exhibition** The Hundred Languages of Children

Keynote Speakers from Reggio Emilia Italy, Optional Centre Tours & Activities

www.reggioaustralia.org.au

THURSDAY 4TH – SUNDAY 7TH JULY 2013
IPSWICH GIRLS’ GRAMMAR SCHOOL
The Australian Government is providing $11 million over five years for the new format check which will be used in eight regions over 2013 as the first phase of its staged introduction.

The Medicare-funded Healthy Kids Check was originally introduced in July 2008 to ensure a child’s readiness for school. The check is an assessment of physical health, general wellbeing and development.

Following an evaluation, it is anticipated that the expanded Healthy Kids Check will be rolled out nationally in 2014.

We’d love to hear from our community with opinions and thoughts about this advertisement.

Do you feel passionate about this?
Do you have something to say?
Join this and many other conversations about the sector on Facebook.

Voice 1: I love both. Education without care is pointless—a child is not going to learn effectively in an environment which does not support their emotional and social needs first. Security in the carer and/or care environment enables children to grow educationally—and an educator can bloom there too!

Voice 2: Great poster that’s what we should be called, educators, for those who see the work as much more than a carer I for one believe we do much more than change nappies and just sit there and watch the children. I know I provide a stimulating, learning and nurturing environment for the children I educate every day and this is evident through the careful and thoughtful programme I plan for weekly. Keeping in mind all children have different individual needs and interests so yes, I would rather than be ‘just’ a carer, I take pride in my position!

Voice 3: There is power in a word—I felt a bit pretentious using educator at first, but I have noticed a change in attitude in both educators and families since we’ve been using the term. But we need to educate the wider public!

Voice 4: I need someone to care for my two-year-old while I work—I would choose someone advertising themselves as a carer over someone calling themselves an educator every time.

Voice 5: I think it’s positive to use the word ‘educators’ not to remove the care aspect but to add in a consideration of the amount of work, documentation and professional training that actually goes into ‘child care’. It supports the campaign for early childhood educators to be paid like educators not like cheap babysitters. Anything that promotes that has my vote!
‘Grow me Safely’

Tips and hints for Kidsafe Gardening

‘Grow me Safely’ is a new website resource from Kidsafe NSW. It provides information related to gardening with children, plant lists for veggie gardens and sensory gardens, plants to avoid, and injury data information.

As part of Kidsafe NSW’s commitment to natural play environments this resource supports groups to plan for natural areas or develop vegetable gardens within their playspace. Gardening with children is promoted in the National Quality Framework (NQF) for education and care services, and the NSW Primary Syllabus.

The website resource was developed in response to enquiries that Kidsafe NSW received regarding suitable plants in children’s gardens and partly funded by the 2011 Young Horticulturist of the Year Award. Many agencies and organisations were involved to ensure the website tool is accurate, practical and promotes positive messages regarding gardening activities with children.

Please visit the Kidsafe NSW website and click on the ‘Grow me Safely’ sign at this link: www.kidsafensw.org/growmesafely/

Some of our most popular pins can be found in ‘Creative DIY ideas for educators, teachers and parents’ board. There’s bound to be something to inspire creativity and imagination.

You can also find us at ...

@EarlyChildAust /earlychildhoodaustralia

‘...What I really like is that METS will tailor the study & assessments to the individual needs of both our workplace and our staff...’

Accredited Training in Community and Children’s Services

METS provide training in Children’s Services & Disability Services; delivered as Traineeships, Self-Funded or Short Courses.

- Certificate III in Children’s Services CHC30712
- Diploma of Children’s Services CHC50608
- Certificate IV in Children’s Services (OSHC) CHC41212
- Diploma of Children’s Services (OSHC) CHC51008

Recognition of Prior Learning Available!
visit www.mets.org.au for more info

All full qualifications are Nationally Recognised & accredited by ASQA
As a parent it’s awful to hear your kids coughing or sneezing – especially late at night. Sometimes it feels as though the family just gets over one thing when the next sickness rolls in to the household to do its worst.

It’s long been recognised that front line early childhood workers have a very important role in helping to prevent the spread of coughs, colds and some diseases amongst the children in their care and into their families and the wider community.

That’s why parents everywhere are grateful for the work that staff do to minimise the spread of infection and so I am very happy to support a resource that provides practical advice and is backed by the latest scientific evidence.

The fifth edition of the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) *Staying Healthy – Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* is now available. It builds on advice from the previous edition, and includes scenarios and decision trees that provide more practical guidance on the ‘how to’ of procedures or situations. It also contains valuable information and advice on:

- concepts of infection control,
- monitoring illness in children,
- procedures such as hygienic nappy changing,
- issues for employers, educators and other staff,
- fact sheets on diseases common to education and care services, and
- forms, useful contacts and websites.

The 3 posters, *Changing a nappy without spreading germs*, *Hand washing and Recommended Minimum Exclusion Periods* have been updated for the 5th edition and 3 new posters have been developed that provide advice on:

- How to use alcohol-based hand rub,
- The role of hands in the spread of infection, and
- The chain of infection.

NHMRC is also developing information sheets for educators and other staff to give to parents about:

- What causes infections,
- How to break the chain of infection, and
- Exclusion periods.

These information sheets have the same messages that are in *Staying Healthy* so parents can be confident that what they are doing at home is the same as what is happening in the education and care service their child attends.

This new edition of *Staying Healthy* is a great resource, brimming with informative and practical advice to help educators and other staff to make the best decisions to limit the spread of disease in their service.

On behalf of parents everywhere, thanks for taking the time to get up to date and we very much support and appreciate the work that you do.

To obtain a copy of *Staying Healthy* for your service, please contact National Mailing and Marketing on 02 6269 1080.

*The Hon Tanya Plibersek*
RECOGNISED PRIOR LEARNING

The implementation of national regulations and the subsequent changes to minimum qualifications requirements has been a concern for many across the early childhood sector over the past couple of years.

With a profession that has close to 48 per cent without any formal qualification, it has been a huge task to find pathways to up-skill this workforce and ensure that we meet not only the national regulatory requirements but also meet the obligations and expectations we have set for early childhood and its potential to provide the best outcomes for children, families and the community.

Like many early childhood settings, we had four staff needing to upgrade to a recognised qualification if they wanted to stay with the service. These were somewhat reluctant candidates for training, suggesting it wasn’t really for them, ‘we’re too old’, ‘could learn nothing new’ and ‘that it was all too hard’.

Using Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) as a pathway was a preferred model and one that provided an opportunity for existing skills and knowledge to be recognised and mapped against the competencies of the Certificate III. We approached our local Registered Training provider (RTO), Riverina Institute of TAFE, Griffith Campus, and their child studies team were able to develop an approach that helped address the concerns of the employers around ensuring staff had the theoretical knowledge that supported best practice and the candidates (employees) training format enabled them to continue working, supported good study practice and didn’t add significantly to workloads.

The training model we ended up with provided the best outcomes for everyone. Our training provider developed a flexible delivery program that saw staff attend an evening study session every fortnight. Assignments and tasks were set through the process and these would be assessed in class but also in the workplace. TAFE staff would visit regularly and map the competencies against the requirements of the Certificate III.

By the end of the year (2011) all staff who participated had completed their qualification. Initial fears about study were quickly eliminated by the supportive program put in place by the RTO assessors, and the support they provided to the children’s services in ensuring that the program met the requirements we had discussed at the outset. As an organisation we were also in a position to provide additional study days if it was requested by our team to fulfill their obligations in the study program, though this opportunity wasn’t taken up by everyone.

In the end we had achieved our goal, four unqualified staff with a Certificate III qualification, one of those achieving student of the year recognition, others achieving high distinctions in their studies, and one of those reluctant candidates who enrolled this year in the Diploma in Child Studies, again through a flexible delivery method. Competencies effectively mapped through an RPL process and the theoretical underpinning to children’s learning and development met through a considered and comprehensive study program.

Neville Dwyer
Director of Griffith-based Dorothy Waide Centre for Early Learning

Neville was presented with an early childhood high achiever award at a seminar hosted by the Riverina branch of Early Childhood Australia. For more information please see: www.dailyadvertiser.com.au/story/1413692/fundamental-educator-recognised/?cs=148
Taking ECA’s Reconciliation Action Plan forward

For ECA, developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) symbolised a commitment to turn our words of commitment into ongoing action.

Through our plan we joined a growing number of Australian organisations who see Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader community as central to their work and the future wellbeing of our nation. Since our launch late last year, we have been focusing on the establishment of our Reconciliation Advisory Group whose task will be to support ECA in the implementation of our plan. The members of this group jointly chaired by Geraldine Atkinson and Catharine Hydon, are drawn from across Australia and are charged with the important task of monitoring and reporting on ECA’s progress against the key strategies identified in our RAP and informing the evolution of our actions into the future.

We recognise that each step moves us towards a stronger relationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait community and the securing of justice and equity.

We encourage our members to tune into our progress via our publications, through our website and the branches.

To view a copy of ECA’s Reconciliation Action Plan, please go to:

We’re as passionate about super as you are about children

We’ve been passionate about the super of early childhood educators for 25 years.

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WHAT’S ON ...

Calendar of events

MAY

12
Mother’s Day

15
International Day of Families

20–21
Marte Meo with the Territory Mob
Northern Territory, Museum & Art Gallery theatre, Darwin.

21–28
Mental Health Week

26
National Day of Healing

27–3 JUNE
National Reconciliation Week

JUNE

1
International Children’s Day

5
World Environment Day

10
Queen’s Birthday

12
World Day Against Child Labour

16–22
Refugee Week

28
Red Nose Day

Upcoming conferences

Positive Schools 2013
Mental Health and Wellbeing Conference
Western Australia 23–24 May 2013
Queensland 30–31 May 2013
Victoria 6–7 June 2013

For Our Children: Living and learning together—Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care National Conference
Cairns Convention Centre—4–6 June 2013

Australian Montessori Centenary Conference
Old Parliament House—8–9 June 2013

Happiness and its causes: Tools and techniques for a happier life
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
19–20 June 2013

Early Childhood Teachers’ Association Annual Conference
Sheldon Event Centre, Taylor Rd Sheldon
22 June 2013

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.

Our values are:

• The rights of children
• Leadership
• Excellence
• Respect
• Courage
• Honesty
• Openness
• Collaboration
• Diversity
• Justice
• Social inclusion of children.

Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

This edition of ECA Voice has been printed on environmentally friendly paper (60% recycled and 40% FSC® sustainable sources).