



**Early Childhood
Australia**

A voice for young children



Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia

**A DISCUSSION PAPER – prepared for the European
Union-Australia Policy Dialogue, 11–15 April 2011**



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Abbreviations

AC	Australian Curriculum for Schools
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
CCB	Child Care Benefit
CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health
CCR	Child Care Rebate
CFC	Children and Family Centre
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Australian Government)
ECA	Early Childhood Australia
ECD Strategy	National Early Childhood Development Strategy
ECEC	early childhood education and care
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (Project)
EU	European Union
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FDC	family day care
LDC	long day care
MACS	Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services
Mobiles	Mobile Children's Services
NPA	National Partnership Agreement
NP ECE	National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education
NP IECD	National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
NQA	National Quality Agenda
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECECC	Office of Early Childhood and Child Care
RoGS	Report on Government Services
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	vocational education and training

Preamble—About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been contracted by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to provide this discussion paper for delegates at the European Union (EU) Policy Dialogue meeting. ECA will also attend the meeting and produce a follow-up report.

ECA¹ is an Australia-wide advocacy and information broking early childhood organisation. It is a peak body that has worked in the interests of children aged from birth to eight years of age since 1938, with a particular focus on the wellbeing of young children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. Our focus in thinking about ECEC services is on their capacity to deliver quality outcomes for children and the factors involved in this.

We work with governments, opposition parties, government departments and service and special-interest peak organisations, including through the National Children's Services Forum², and we have a constituency of members from around Australia, organised into the state-based branches of our organisation.

In the positions that underpin our advocacy work, we draw on our own body of values and principles and information from our stakeholders. A key feature of our work is our belief that progress in complex matters often needs to be incremental to be effective. We also recognise the significance and impact of political and contextual realities in the task of making and implementing policy.

Disclaimer

Factual information about government policy and programs was drawn from information provided by DEEWR or from government publications or websites, which was up to date at the time of writing. For more recent updates on ECEC policies and the implementation of reforms, please refer to www.deewr.gov.au and www.acecqa.gov.au.

The commentary contained in the paper has been discussed with DEEWR and, in some places, modified as a result. Otherwise the commentary is from ECA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Commonwealth.

Acknowledgement

'The Australian Government provides financial support for the Informing the European Union – Australia Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Dialogue Project'.

1 www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

2 A forum of national peak children's services organisations see www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/about_us/national_childrens_services_forum.html

1 Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia — A Discussion Paper



1.1 About the paper

The aim of this discussion paper is to provide an overview of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia and some commentary from Early Childhood Australia (ECA) on key issues for ECEC that arise from the Australian Government's Reform Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care:

The Australian Government's agenda for early childhood education and child care focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated³ early childhood education and child care. The agenda has a strong emphasis on connecting with schools to ensure all Australian children are fully prepared for learning and life. Investing in the health, education, development and care of our children benefits children and their families, our communities and the economy, and is critical to lifting workforce participation and delivering the government's productivity agenda.⁴

This is a complex and demanding agenda, and the topics canvassed in the discussion paper are central to its success—taken together, they address the benefits for all participating children of high-quality ECEC services, the particular benefits of these services to 'vulnerable' children, and the necessary characteristics of the services meeting these needs. The topics are:

1. Early childhood education and care services—accessibility and affordability
2. Universal and targeted services—key issues and challenges
3. The National Quality Agenda and associated workforce issues (COAG, 2009a)
4. Pedagogical frameworks—the Early Years Learning Framework
5. Promoting integrated services in Australia
6. Meeting the needs of vulnerable children through early childhood services.

These broad issues arise in most western societies, as is shown in discussions in the relevant literature (OECD, 2006).

The introduction provides some contextual information, including the governance context in which ECEC policies and programs must be developed and delivered in Australia.

This is followed by an overview of 'the Agenda'—Australia's Early Childhood Reform Agenda and the broader National Early Childhood Development Strategy (ECD Strategy), particularly those elements that interact with ECEC services.

The paper then addresses the topics listed above, noting the interdependences between and among topics, providing commentary and asking questions to facilitate further dialogue.

The paper concludes by outlining the process of discussion, agreement and reporting that will progress the outcomes of the Policy Dialogue.

³ Refers to the integration of child care and preschool

⁴ www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy_agenda/Pages/home.aspx

The paper has been informed by public documents and websites, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Thematic review of early childhood education and care policy* (Press & Hayes, 2000) and *Starting strong II* (OECD, 2006) reports, documents published by the Australian Government, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and government departments, other published works, and by ECA's own experience, understandings and observations, including from discussion with stakeholders. References are listed at the end and links to relevant publications and websites are provided throughout.

1.2 Terminology

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Indigenous, Indigenous Australians—The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care⁵ requests that the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/s' is used, and ECA does this. However, the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Indigenous Australians' are widely used, including by governments, to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples. Because of the sources of the material, both terminologies are used in this paper.

Child care, preschool, 'universal access'—The terms 'child care' and 'preschool' are still very widely used and carry the implications of the historic but unfortunate division between 'care' and 'education' which includes the implication that real learning commences only when children go to school. 'Pre-school' is a particularly confusing term, variously used in Australia to denote a service type for children in a particular age range and/or an educational program generally available to children in the year before starting school. In addition to this, sessional 'preschool' education programs for three- to five-year-old children are found in most states and territories but they have a variety of names (e.g. preschool, kinder, three-year-old program, three year old kinder) and funding arrangements.

The term 'child care' currently includes programs that are led and/or delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers supported by other staff (with vocational qualifications or who are unqualified), as well as programs that have no qualified teacher and perhaps few staff with vocational qualifications. It is also important to note, given the contribution of the research findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-School

Education (EPPE) Project to thinking about quality programs in early childhood services, that 'pre-school' in Great Britain is the descriptor for all ECEC programs for children aged from birth to five years.

In Australia, the term 'universal access' is now often used to refer to the commitment by the Commonwealth and states and territories to ensure that every child in Australia has access to a quality early childhood education program delivered by a four-year university qualified early childhood teacher for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks a year in the year before full-time schooling. More information about this program is provided elsewhere in the paper.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)—

While the term 'early childhood education and care' (ECEC) is used as a broad descriptor in this paper and is now the preferred language of governments, it is by no means as yet used universally in the wider Australian community or even consistently in the ECEC sector and governments.

'ECEC' covers all early education and care service types, but this can lead to some confusion, as will be discussed in the paper. There is more information about the different service types, including their funding sources, at Appendix 1.

Parents, families, service users—It is recognised that there are many different structures in Australian families, including grandparents, other members of extended families and foster parents as primary family caregivers to young children. Wherever the term 'parent' is used in this paper, it is intended to cover this range; it is used for convenience of expression.

Note: When interpreting information and statistics it is important to bear in mind the possibility of different meanings to common terms. As far as possible, issues with terminology in the ECEC sector and governments are identified and discussed in the paper as they arise.

1.3 A snapshot of the Australian scene

1.3.1 Australia's population

Australia is a continent 7.6 million square kilometres in size with a population of about 22 million people, most of whom reside in the major cities, particularly on the east coast. The rest of the population is spread throughout regional and remote areas. The availability of services in rural and remote areas can cause significant difficulties because of the expense and challenge of

⁵ www.snaicc.asn.au

attracting qualified and committed people into these areas, affecting the ongoing sustainability of services. A state-by-state breakdown of population is at Appendix 3.

There is an Indigenous population of almost 530 000 people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (ABS, 2008). Appendix 3 also indicates the state-by-state distribution of this population group.

Australia is also an immigrant country, with approximately 22% (ABS, 2007) of the population born overseas and 15% speaking a language other than English at home (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2008).

Some statistical information about the participation in ECEC services of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children of cultural and linguistic diversity is included in the paper under *Accessibility and affordability*.

Detailed information about Australia's population and its distribution is available at the website of the Australian Bureau of Statistics⁶, and an overview of young children's health and development in Australia, along with some demographic information, is available in the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI).⁷

1.3.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children

To understand the obligation of Australia to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is helpful to consider the history:

*There are no accurate estimates of the population of Australia before European settlement. Estimates range between a minimum pre-1788 population of 315 000 to over 1 million people. Whatever the size of the Indigenous population before European settlement, it declined dramatically under the impact of new diseases, repressive and often brutal treatment, dispossession, and social and cultural disruption and disintegration ... The decline of the Indigenous population continued well into the 20th century ...*⁸

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians—adults and children—continue to experience health issues and life situations that make them very much more disadvantaged than Australians in the non-Indigenous population.

Areas of concern include health, life expectancy, infant mortality, education, housing, income levels and employment. Some overall statistics are summarised at Appendix 4.

In 2008, the then Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP delivered a National Apology to the Stolen Generations, which also addressed all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and all non-Indigenous Australians and clearly set the challenge of reconciliation⁹, including:

*... For us, 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. Today's apology ... is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—a bridge based on a real respect ...*¹⁰

In the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NP IECD) (COAG, 2009b) Australia's governments recognised that:

Indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of children in Australia and disparities with non-Indigenous children in some outcomes have widened in recent years. To reduce the gap in developmental outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, COAG has set targets to:

- a) *halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade*
- b) *halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade*
- c) *ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years.*

⁶ www.abs.gov.au

⁷ www.rch.org.au/aedi/media/Snapshot_of_Early_Childhood_DevelopmentinAustralia_AEDI_National_Report.pdf

⁸ From the Australian Bureau of Statistics, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/0/68AE74ED632E17A6CA2573D200110075?opendocument

⁹ Reconciliation involves building mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and other Australians that allow us to work together to solve problems and generate success that is in everyone's best interests. Achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of Indigenous history and culture, changing attitudes that are often based on myths and misunderstandings, and encouraging action where everyone plays their part in building a better relationship between us as fellow Australians. <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-resources/what-is-reconciliation>

¹⁰ The full National Apology can be accessed at <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/national-apology-to-the-stolen-generation-video>

The specific strategies of the NP IECD are described elsewhere in the paper. They are supported by the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)¹¹, which encompasses goals in early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities and governance and leadership.

1.3.3 Governance¹²

Australia has a federated system of government consisting of a national government, variously referred to as the Australian, Commonwealth or national government, and eight state and territory governments.

The Australian Constitution delineates areas of responsibility and authority between the Commonwealth and state/territory governments. The boundaries drawn around this division of powers are not immutable and for various reasons have been weakened over time.

Historically, policy and funding responsibility for early childhood education and the licensing of education and care providers has resided with state and territory governments. They have continued to make substantial investment in the early childhood sector, including in providing or funding preschools/kindergartens, early childhood intervention services, child and maternal health services and family support services.

The Commonwealth Government first became financially involved in child care with the *Child Care Act 1972*. Over the years, it also has invested substantially in the early childhood sector. This has included a national system of subsidies for families using long day care services, and supports to and an accreditation system for these services; health (e.g. nutrition programs); and family support (e.g. Family Tax Benefit, and more recently Paid Parental Leave, parenting programs and community development initiatives).

Over time, efforts have been made to develop more deliberate national approaches to policy issues. The division of responsibilities between the Commonwealth and states/territories is partly a result of constitutional factors and partly due to broad agreements around funding arrangements. Local government authorities also have significant responsibilities in terms of local planning regulation and, in some instances (most notably in the state of Victoria), delivery of early education and care and/or preschool services.

The Australian Government's Productivity Agenda, including the ECEC Reform Agenda, is an example of this.

National level

The Commonwealth Government created the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) on 3 December 2007, bringing together elements of the former departments of Education, Science and Training; and Employment and Workplace Relations and the youth and early childhood functions from the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

As part of the formation of the new Department, the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care (OECECC) was established, bringing together at the national level responsibility for early childhood education and child care policy and funding. In doing so, the functions of child care, children's policy, early education policy, financial assistance to schools, improving educational outcomes for school students, developing policies and administering programs for schools and transitions from school to further education, training or work were brought together within the one ministry.

Due to the federal structure of government in Australia, this should not be taken as denoting that Australia has a centralised system, as state and territory governments retain significant policy, funding, delivery and regulatory roles in early childhood services, especially in early childhood education. Appendix 2 outlines responsibilities for early childhood education in each jurisdiction.

National responsibility for policies and programs relating to parent support and child protection resides with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). Additionally, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) has a key role in developing national health-related policy and, in some cases, programs for early childhood.

State level

At the state and territory level, a majority of governments have combined some or all of the child care functions with early childhood education. 'Early movers' in this regard have included South Australia and Victoria. More recently, the Queensland and Northern Territory governments have also moved to combine some or all elements of their ECEC functions within the relevant education portfolio. The main exception to this trend is New South Wales (Australia's largest state), where child care and community preschools are

11 At www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf

12 Section 1.3.3 provided by DEEWR

the responsibility of the Department of Community Services, while public school-based preschools are overseen by the Department of Education and Training. Early childhood education and child care functions are also in separate portfolios in Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

Under Australia's federal system of government, state and territory governments currently have responsibility for ensuring the provision of preschool/ kindergarten programs and for licensing and regulation of early childhood education and care services. The Commonwealth Government is currently responsible for quality accreditation, which is administered on its behalf by the National Childcare and Accreditation Council (NCAC). Current arrangements will be replaced by new nationally consistent arrangements that will apply from 1 January 2012 (see further detail below).

State and territory governments also have prime responsibility for:

- family support and child welfare
- funding (and in some states, provision of) children's services which fall outside the Commonwealth Government's Child Care Support Program, for example, preschools, some occasional child care and some programs for preschool children
- administering capital funding and supervising construction of jointly funded services
- legislating in areas such as occupational health and safety and anti-discrimination legislation
- administering corporations law.

1.3.4 Focus of Australian governments on early childhood

Over the past decade or so, the attention of Australia's governments, both Commonwealth and state/territory, increasingly focused on young children.

This arose because of the clear evidence of the profound significance of the early years of a child's life for their future wellbeing;¹³ increases in poor outcomes for some children in key developmental areas and growing inequalities in outcomes among groups of children; impacts on family functioning from social changes and difficulties for children's and family support services in meeting needs; and the increasing reliance of families on early childhood services to enable parents to participate

in employment. Considerations such as children's value and vulnerability as children, the quality and value of their future contribution to society, including their future impact on Australia's ability to compete in a global society in the face of an ageing population, and Australia's commitments to its children as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child were also important (COAG, 2009a, pp. 6–7).

There was a mounting climate for change, and the November 2007 federal election brought a new Australian Government with specific promises to fulfil and a strong commitment to ECEC reform. For example, see the Australian Labor Party's response to ECA's Election Agenda (ECA, 2007).

1.3.5 Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

COAG is the key vehicle for achieving policy coordination and consistency across state and territory governments and with the Commonwealth Government. With regard to ECEC, since the November 2007 federal election, COAG has been very successful in obtaining high-level (i.e. head of government) agreement and in the establishment of frameworks for advancing a range of reforms in a 'whole-of-government' manner.

In December 2007, COAG agreed to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development to deliver significant improvements in human capital outcomes for all Australians.¹⁴

Given the importance of ECEC services for both young children and their parents, and the fact that the problems with Australia's ECEC system had been well known for many years (including fragmentation of policy, funding programs and service delivery systems; inadequate and inconsistent standards and different views of what makes good practice; a division between 'care' and 'education' entrenched in many jurisdictions; serious workforce issues; and the need for a new and improved quality assurance system¹⁵), COAG resolved to undertake a broad agenda of reform.

¹³ The evidence has been reviewed many times—one summary is provided in Section 3.1 (Elliott, 2006).

¹⁴ COAG, 20 December 2007 Communiqué, Council of Australian Governments' Meeting, available at www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2007-12-20/index.cfm

¹⁵ OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Australian Background Report at www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/29B670F0-407C-4A38-8FF5-55C82FD4804D/1539/oecd.pdf

2 Australia's Early Childhood Reform Agenda and the National Early Childhood Development Strategy



2.1 Overview¹⁶

The COAG Reform Agenda for ECEC reflects changing patterns in workforce participation by Australian parents and a breaking down of the traditional distinctions between early childhood education and child care. The ECEC reforms currently being implemented have involved building of stronger links between different elements of public policy, better integration of the policy and funding and delivery elements of services across sectors. Of particular note are developments in the areas of health, education and social services, where integration has increased to better address the needs of the child, from birth until when they begin school.

The Commonwealth Government's agenda for early childhood education and child care focuses on providing families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and care. This vision for Australia's children is shared by all jurisdictions. The Commonwealth Government is working with the states and territories through COAG to build a nationally consistent early childhood education and care system in Australia through the following initiatives:

- the National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy
- the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
- universal access to early childhood education programs

- a greater focus on Indigenous early childhood development, including the establishment of 38 Children and Family Centres
- establishment of 38 Early Learning and Care Centres
- workforce initiatives to attract, recruit and retain a diverse ECEC workforce and improve the supply and quality of ECEC workers.

2.1.1 The National Early Childhood Development Strategy

While governance arrangements have historically developed independently across the states and territories and the Commonwealth Government, there is an increasing alignment via COAG, through a range of national agreements, particularly under the National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy.

The National ECD Strategy, *Investing in the Early Years*, was endorsed by COAG in July 2009. Implementing the Strategy involves a collaborative effort between all Australian governments to achieve the Strategy's vision that, by 2020, all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and the nation. The Strategy focuses on how Australia's early childhood development system should evolve to better meet the needs of children and families. It specifies seven key outcomes for children and families:

- children are born and remain healthy
- children's environments are nurturing, culturally appropriate and safe
- children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning

¹⁶ Section 2.1 has been provided by DEEWR

- children benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children
- children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities
- families are confident and have the capabilities to support their children's development
- quality early childhood development services that support the workforce participation choices of families.

A copy of the National ECD Strategy is available at:

www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Pages/EarlyChildhoodDevelopmentStrategy.aspx

The National ECD Strategy is the broad 'umbrella' for the COAG's Reform Agenda, but there are several key initiatives which fall under this agenda, such as National Partnership Agreements between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

2.1.2 The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education

The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (NP ECE) gives effect to the Commonwealth Government's goal of universal access to preschool education by 2013 ('universal access'). This commitment will ensure that every child in Australia has access to a quality early childhood education program. The program is to be delivered by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks a year in the year before full time schooling (often referred to as 'preschool' or 'kindergarten'). The program is to be offered across a diversity of settings, in a form that meets the needs of parents and at a cost that does not present a barrier to participation.

In addition, children living in remote Indigenous communities have been identified as a specific focus for universal access, so that by 2013 every Indigenous four year old in a remote community will be enrolled and attending a preschool program. This reflects the significant under-representation of Indigenous children in preschool programs.

A copy of the NP ECE, together with implementation plans detailed in Bilateral Agreements with each state and territory, is available at:

www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_partnership_agreements

2.1.3 The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development

Indigenous children and their families have a unique culture and the Commonwealth Government is committed to improving access to integrated, inclusive services that are relevant to their lives. There are significant differences in life experiences and outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and 'Closing the Gap' in outcomes is a priority for all Australian governments. Through the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NP IECD), all governments have agreed on a shared commitment to improvements in Indigenous child mortality, better access to antenatal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services, child and maternal health services and integrated child and family services which focus on quality early learning, child care and parent and family support. The NP IECD has three distinct elements:

- integration of early childhood services through the establishment of 38 Children and Family Centres (CFCs)
- increased access to antenatal care, pre-pregnancy and teenage sexual and reproductive health
- increased access to and use of maternal and child health services by Indigenous families.

Further information on the NP IECD is available at:

www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/IECD/Pages/home.aspx

2.1.4 Early Learning and Care Centres

The Commonwealth Government also committed to establish 38 Early Learning and Care Centres (ELCCs). These centres, including six autism-specific centres, will provide integrated early learning and care in a long day care setting that takes into account the specific requirements of the local community. Where possible, the ELCCs are located on school grounds, TAFE, university or other community land. The six autism-specific centres provide dedicated early learning and care programs for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Further information is available at:

www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Pages/AdditionalEarlyLearningandCareCentres.aspx

2.1.5 National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care

One of the major areas of reform agreed under COAG is the National Quality Agenda (NQA) for Early Childhood Education and Care. The NQA encompasses the National Quality Framework (NQF), the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the establishment of a new national body to oversee the new system. Further information on the NQA is available at:

www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/home.aspx

As part of the NQA, a single national regulatory system is being put in place across all states and territories for long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten and outside school hours care services. The new regulatory system is being implemented through new national legislation and regulations, from 1 January 2012, utilising a national applied laws approach. One jurisdiction (the 'host' state) enacts the enabling legislation which is then adopted by other states and territories. Victoria is the 'host' jurisdiction for the national legislation, with other states and territories adopting the legislation by reference to the Victorian Act, except for Western Australia which will enact corresponding legislation.

National Quality Framework and National Quality Standard

For the first time, the same quality and regulatory framework, the National Quality Framework (NQF), will apply to both traditional and stand-alone preschools/early education services, as well as long day care and other types of child care services. The NQF will deliver a higher standard of care for children in the critical areas of education, health and safety and will provide clearer, comprehensive information for families so they can choose the best services for their child. It includes a compulsory National Quality Standard (NQS), comprising improved educator-to-child ratios, new qualification requirements for all early childhood education and care workers and a national quality rating system.

Early Years Learning Framework

A significant component of the NQS is the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) which provides parents, carers and educators with an overarching guide to learning and development in the years from birth to age five. Under the NQS, early childhood education and care providers will need to provide evidence of their use of

the EYLF in designing and delivering their early learning programs. A framework is currently under development to support services offering care for school-age children, providing opportunities for children to engage in leisure and play-based experiences.

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority

A new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), will be operational from 2012 and the existing National Childcare Accreditation Council will be wound up. ACECQA will oversee how the new NQS is being applied across the country and ensure that services are meeting the new requirements. There will be one organisation within each state and territory that will assess services, with oversight from the national body. This replaces the current situation where many services have to deal with multiple regulators.

2.1.6 Links with other Commonwealth Government initiatives

In addition to the National Quality Agenda and key National Partnership Agreements on ECE and IECD, the National ECD Strategy also links with other Commonwealth Government initiatives:

- a six-year National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health, with a focus on strategies to prevent chronic diseases that commence in early childhood
- national workforce initiatives to improve the quality and supply of the early childhood education and care workforce
- the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- a National Family Support Program, which brings together eight Commonwealth programs for children, families and parenting
- Paid Parental Leave arrangements
- the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children
- development of an Early Intervention and Prevention Framework under the National Disability Agreement
- the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, with a focus on intervening early for children and their families at risk of homelessness
- the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters
- the Australian Early Development Index.

Information about service types and funding is at Appendix 1.

2.2 Commentary regarding Australia's Early Childhood Reform Agenda

As can be seen in the overview, the ECD Strategy and the ECEC Reform Agenda encompass broad and challenging goals, a diversity of policy areas and a very wide range of strategies and services that involve long-established practice in different jurisdictions. In some cases, the reforms make progress on intractable and difficult issues, and implementation will take place in an ever-changing political landscape. In this situation, both the vision and the negotiations and agreements were a remarkable achievement by all nine governments working together in COAG.

Given the inspiring and ambitious nature of the goals of both the ECD Strategy and the ECEC Reform Agenda, the commentary in this section is confined to some 'high level' issues. Later sections of the paper provide more detailed discussion of specific issues.

2.2.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the Reform Agenda

As can be seen from the comments and description of the NP IECD in the Overview (Section 2.1), all jurisdictions emphasise the importance of addressing issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and 'closing the gap' in their life experiences and outcomes.

Integrated policy and program approach

The challenges of 'closing the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be intractable in many communities. Problems including health, housing, and inter-generational poverty directly impact on families and their children and necessarily affect children's ability to thrive, participate in and benefit from ECEC programs. Through the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, COAG is implementing the NP IECD in a way that also contributes to COAG's social inclusion, early childhood development, education, health, housing and safety agendas. It does this by identifying reforms and models of service delivery that will improve outcomes for Indigenous children. Only a very broad and integrated approach across jurisdictions, policy and program areas, such as this is, can address the disadvantage.

Implications of urbanisation

Much of the attention of the general population, and of policy and program developers, tends to focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote and very remote Australia. In fact, however, 75% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in urban and regional areas (ABS 2008a).

In this situation, a key challenge is to ensure that mainstream, or 'universal', ECEC services are welcoming, culturally appropriate and culturally safe for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who may choose to use them. Limited work has been done on how to achieve this in the context of the urban child care industry in Australia, so that this is seen as an obligation of services as well as the individual responsibility of particular ECEC staff members.

It is acknowledged that the NP ECE will have a primary role in closing the gap. However, given the scope and extent of supports needed to achieve this, it will be important to also meet the needs of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families who cannot access the enhanced and integrated services of the new Children and Family Centres. This need may be particularly acute in some urban areas.

2.2.2 Broadening the vision

ECEC services have a great potential to contribute to broader social agendas. As they stand, the ECD Strategy and the ECEC Reform Agenda have the long-term vision of life benefits to individual children and productivity gains for the whole of society.

The possibility of the translation of other social agendas into ECEC reform policy areas is a particularly poignant issue for the ECEC sector. For many of these broad agendas, the ultimate achievement of their goals will depend on the effectiveness of the work done with young children today, because in many cases these broad agendas seek to have ongoing effects across future generations. Examples of this are reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, environmental sustainability and the mental health agenda (particularly young children's mental health) which could be translated into specific policy reform commitments such as the ECEC Reform Agenda.

The world that will be inherited by future generations of young children is constructed in a present that is determined by the policy decisions of adult citizens today. Building a commitment to the future must be a core obligation of early childhood educators. This is because the children of today are the citizens of tomorrow, who will in turn be responsible for the inheritance of future generations¹⁷.

2.2.3 Maintaining the momentum for reform

Implementation of the Reform Agenda will be a complex process in a complex environment. Progress will almost certainly be uneven as the reform implementation schedule is over an eight-year period with the final reform due in 2020, and there are variations in readiness across jurisdictions. It can be expected that the overall performance base will be lifted but outcomes will be uneven across the country. In addition to this, and notwithstanding the commitments to the reforms in COAG and in the sector, there ARE possible challenges to implementation—and there are possible strategies to support maintaining the momentum for reform.

Potential challenges

There are a number of potential challenges that may impact on the timely implementation of the Reform Agenda. These include the:

- complexity of implementation with variation in readiness across jurisdictions and the time lines necessarily stretching to 2020, combined with the need to make good progress to protect the Reform Agenda's integrity
- link between better quality services and a qualified workforce—although there is a range of initiatives in place to support a more qualified workforce, workforce demands will not be resolved in the near future and this, of itself, poses challenges which will be referred to later in this paper
- financial pressures that are now a reality in national budgets following the global financial crisis
- need to deal across Commonwealth, state and territory governments over a sustained period of time which will cross electoral cycles.

In the face of these challenges, it is wise to consider how to maintain the commitment to reform around Australia.

Research

It is important to remember that the momentum for reform was driven, in part, by the strong evidence built by international organisations such as the OECD (2006) and international research within the fields of early childhood, science and economics (referred to in many publications, including in *Early childhood education—Pathways to quality and equity for all children*, Section 3 (Elliott, 2006). The weight of the evidence was such that it was clear to governments and policy-makers how to improve life outcomes for all, but particularly for those in society who are vulnerable.

Governments and program developers need good local evidence to inform policy development and planning. Current progress in building the base of Australian evidence includes the AEDI¹⁸ (providing information about children as they enter formal schooling), the E4Kids study (a longitudinal study assessing the impact of participation in a range of early childhood education programs, as well as outcomes for children who do not attend programs)¹⁹ and a National Information Agreement on Early Childhood and Care²⁰ under which the Commonwealth, states and territories and national data agencies are moving to improve the quality of ECEC and early childhood development data gathering, sharing and reporting.

Constituency for quality

Another element in the maintenance of the momentum for reform must be the building of awareness within service users and the community of the importance of ECEC reforms, particularly relating to quality.

Increasing parents' understanding about the nature of quality in ECEC services and the significance of this for their children's learning and development is an important goal in its own right, and also has the potential to underwrite the reform process.

The current reforms have been government led rather than responding to demands of the users of services. This is not unusual, especially in the area of community services. The fact remains, however, that the commitment to these reforms would be ensured if there was a strong public constituency for quality amongst parents and in the community. We need to engage parents in conversations about quality to support this.

¹⁷ Some relevant points are discussed by Moss (2010) at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2010.11.1.8>

¹⁸ www.rch.org.au/aedi/index.cfm

¹⁹ www.e4kids.org.au/about

²⁰ www.mychild.gov.au/pages/news_070510_agreement.aspx

The staff qualifications and staff-to-child ratio provisions which underline the NQF pose a potential challenge to support for the reform agenda. Many services will need to improve staff qualifications and staff–child ratios before they achieve the NQS rating and this will take time. This is in contrast to the current system, where a very high proportion of the same services received a high-quality rating.²¹ Services will need support to manage these changes and fostering a better understanding of what quality looks like in practice, as part of the building of a parent constituency for quality, will be an important strategy in doing this. This is not a task which should be left to the service provider but rather is a legitimate activity for government. The potential outcomes include parents becoming better informed consumers of ECEC services and public advocates for the quality reforms that are being implemented—a big step forward.

2.3 Some questions

- » What strategies could be used to enhance the commitment of jurisdictions to working both internally and with COAG partners to achieve more even outcomes?
- » How can the momentum for reform be maintained?
- » How can the focus, strength and relevance of the research evidence and its purchase in the ongoing reform process be maintained?
- » If governments are to adopt this approach of building a constituency for quality, then they will need new and more effective strategies for engaging with parents. Given the success and reach of the new social media, is there scope to make use of these media in educating parents in this way?

21 For example, at July 2010, 87% of the long day care centres completing the five steps of the accreditation process were rated High Quality in all seven quality areas:
www.ncac.gov.au/report_documents/qias-quality-trends-july-2010.pdf, p. 3.

3 TOPIC 1

Early Childhood Education and Care—Accessibility and Affordability



3.1 Overview

In Australia, accessibility to ECEC services for families and children is determined by the availability of a vacancy in a service of the chosen type, at a level of quality that is acceptable to the parent/s, and with a convenient location and hours. For services that charge fees (e.g. a vast proportion of ECEC services, whether centre or home based), it is also of vital importance that the service is affordable.

Some information from government sources is provided below. This is a complex area, however, and although governments²² and researchers²³ are working to improve information gathering, the comment (Elliott, 2006) that ‘gaining an accurate overall picture of early education and care is difficult ... as there are no centralised or national processes to measure or record supply and capacity, children’s attendance patterns, staffing and quality, or education and developmental inputs or outcomes’ (p. 8) across populations and service types still applies.²⁴

22 For example, see *Improving the quality of data on early childhood education—Phase two*, at [http://au.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=yhs-avg&type=yahoo_avg_hs2-tb_web_au&p=Improving%20the%20quality%20of%20data%20on%20earlychildhood%20education%20%E2%80%93Phase%20Two\(IQDECE2\)](http://au.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=yhs-avg&type=yahoo_avg_hs2-tb_web_au&p=Improving%20the%20quality%20of%20data%20on%20earlychildhood%20education%20%E2%80%93Phase%20Two(IQDECE2))

23 For example, see *Families at the centre: Negotiating Australia’s mixed market in early education and care*, looking at how local ECEC markets function and how low-income families make decisions about the use or non-use of child care services: www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/research-areas-and-strengths/families-at-the-centre-negotiating-australia-s-mixed-market-in-early-education-and-care-218.html

24 Notwithstanding that there are ongoing government-led improvements in data collection, Elliott’s 2006 discussion (pp. 8–9) provides a summary overview of complexities; Productivity Commission (2011) is another source for this information, and there is a comprehensive picture in *Phase 1—Improving the quality of data on early childhood education* included in the website given at footnote 22.

3.1.1 Accessibility

In its publication *State of child care in Australia* (OECECC, 2010), the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) gives an overview of accessibility of child care which compares the September 2005 and September 2009 quarters and looks at:

- the number of children using approved child care
- the number of families using approved child care
- the number of long day care services (centre based, family day care, outside school hours care, vacation care and occasional care)
- ownership structure
- vacancies and utilisation.

Overall, the proportion of available child care hours being used was 75% in September 2009, compared to 77% in September 2005. The report concludes that the evidence suggests that ‘nationally there is childcare available, and supply is largely meeting demand. However, in some circumstances families may experience difficulties in finding the type of care that suits their needs’ (p. 12).

The Commonwealth’s Report on Government Services (RoGS) 2011 (Productivity Commission, 2011) looks at both child care AND preschools (separately) in more detail. National 2010 utilisation rates reported were 64.9% for centre-based long day care and 56.0% for family day care. The RoGS also provides ‘Participation rates for special needs groups’ in child care and (for three-to five-year-old children) in preschool compared to the same group’s representation in the community, as follows:

- Children from a non-English-speaking background were represented in child care at a lower rate (13.7% compared to 18.8%); and, for jurisdictions able to provide data, in preschools at a lower rate (10.6% compared with 18.7% nationally).
- Indigenous children were represented in child care at a lower rate (1.9% compared to 4.4%); and in preschool at a higher rate (5.3% compared with 4.5%—variations across jurisdictions).
- Children from low-income families participated in child care at a similar rate (23.9% compared to (23.2%) but at a higher rate in the birth to five years age range.
- Children with a disability participated in child care at a lower rate (2.6% compared with 7.7%); and in preschool at a lower rate (6.1% compared with 8.0%).
- Children from regional areas participated in child care at a lower rate (28% compared with 33%); and in preschool at a lower rate (28.9% compared with 32.3%—variations across jurisdictions).
- Children from remote areas participated in child care at a lower rate (0.9% compared with 3.0%); and in preschools at a higher rate (4.0% compared to 3.2%—variations across jurisdictions).

Appendix 2 provides ‘at a glance’ information about preschools and long day care centres, focusing on four-year-old children and their participation in ‘early education’ programs. A central feature of preschools is an early education program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher. With the exception of New South Wales, where long day care centres with a capacity of more than 29 children are required to have a degree-qualified early childhood teacher on staff, child care centres do not routinely provide this. Appendix 1 indicates that 34% of long day care services (1,656 services) stated that they offered an in-house pre-school program conducted by a qualified early childhood teacher.

3.1.2 Affordability

Australian governments are keen to promote participation in ECEC services, and recognise the importance of these services being affordable to families. Governments at both the Commonwealth and state/territory levels invest in ECEC.

Government investment in ECEC

Total national expenditure by governments in 2009–10 was \$4.7 billion, and this had increased by 54% from 2005–06. In 2009–10 Australian Government expenditure was 80.7% of the total, at \$3.8 billion (Productivity Commission, 2011). This is expected to increase to \$4.4 billion in 2012–13 (OECECC, 2010).

The Australian Government is largely a demand-side funder of child care services, indirectly impacting on the child care market and directly reducing families’ out-of-pocket expenses through subsidies and rebates to parents. In 2008–09 this accounted for \$3.3 billion of the Commonwealth’s expenditure (OECECC, 2010). In 2009–10 across all children’s service models, the provision of pre-school programs accounted for the largest proportion of expenditure by state/territory governments at 83.9% or \$762.1 million (Productivity Commission, 2011).

In addition, both the Australian Government and state and territory governments make other investments, including in supporting the inclusion of children with additional needs and other early childhood intervention and prevention strategies; professional development activities; providing capital or sustainability funding for mainstream services; funding particular services to particular population groups—for example, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) and Mobile Children’s Services²⁵; and, in recent years, the provision of integrated services in some jurisdictions²⁶. Notwithstanding that in ‘child care’ services the fee is set by the service operator, all government investments can have the effect of either reducing or eliminating fees payable by families.

Affordability results

The Commonwealth invests significant funds to address affordability of approved childcare services, and Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR) combined can substantially reduce families’ out-of-pocket expenditure. Because fees and subsidy levels vary with family income, family structure, among service types and among individual services, it is very difficult to make meaningful comparisons. However, the *Child care update* report indicates that out-of-pocket costs, after subsidies, for a family earning \$55,000 a year, and with one child in long day care, fell from 13% of

25 MACS and Mobiles are described in Appendix 1. Some photos from Mobiles in remote locations can be seen at <http://www.nationalmobiles.org.au/docs/VisualDiary.pdf>

26 For example, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria—Topic 5

disposable income in 2004 to approximately 7% in 2010. For a family earning \$115,000 a year, the proportion declined from 11% in 2004 to 7% in 2010 (OECECC, 2011).

Parent fees for pre-school programs vary considerably among the states and territories and sometimes also within jurisdictions. With regard to 'government' preschools, Appendix 2 indicates that New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland are the only jurisdictions where fees apply for four-year-old children, with government preschools in the other states and territories being fee free with a notional financial contribution by parents. In all jurisdictions fees are charged for long day care and non-government preschools. The RoGS (Productivity Commission, 2011) indicates the complexity of this area, noting variations among jurisdictions in the number of hours and sessions provided per child and the provision of targeted fee assistance, the mix of service providers, higher costs in major cities, and children attending multiple services or service types (pp. 3.35–3.36).

The Commonwealth and states/territories are committed to providing universal access to a quality early childhood education program for all children delivered by a university-trained early childhood teacher for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling. As part of this they are committed to reducing cost as a barrier to access 'but it is up to states, territories and providers to determine what cost, if any, will be passed on to parents for this program.'²⁷

3.1.3 Government and supply

Government investment not only impacts on affordability but directly or indirectly impacts on the market and affects the supply of ECEC places. CCB and CCR subsidies to families are indirect interventions and leave the market service model to develop and deliver the vast bulk of long day ECEC services. Funding to develop and/or deliver sessional preschool/ kindergarten programs by some states and the inclusion of four-year-old programs in schools in others, the MACS and Mobiles, the EC 'service hubs'²⁸ in some states and the new Early Learning and Care Centres and Child and Family Centres are direct interventions.

The Australian Government also intervened directly in the market when the stock exchange-listed company ABC Learning collapsed. ABC Learning was by far the biggest operator of child care services in Australia at the time. In view of the potentially substantial disruption

to the market of large-scale closure of ABC Learning services, the government provided support, including support to the receivers to keep the centres operating during a transitional period, and a fully repayable loan of \$15 million to Goodstart, the consortium of not-for-profit organisations, to assist their purchase of the bulk of the centres (OECECC, 2010).

3.2 Commentary regarding accessibility and affordability

This is a complex area with impacts from a wide range of contextual and legacy factors. A number of issues which have no easy solution are raised in the following comments.

3.2.1 Demand-side funding and the market service model

The commitment to the delivery of the bulk of long day ECEC services through a market service model is a significant aspect of the Australian ECEC system. This impacts on accessibility and affordability because under this model, whether they are profit-making or not-for-profit operations, services must operate as viable commercial enterprises and make decisions about location, costs and fees accordingly.

The model does have attractions for private investors, many of whom see demand-side funding through government fee subsidies to parents as a source of guaranteed income not available in other commercial undertakings. Indeed, since the inclusion of the for-profit sector in the early 1990s, the ECEC sector has grown from a sector with 4100 services in 1991, the majority of which were community not-for-profit services, to a sector with 13 638 services 20 years later (OECECC, 2010). Most of this growth was in the private sector, with minimal capital investment by government.

The model can have consequences, potentially including:

The number and location of services established—supply. Over the past two decades it has been unusual for government to intervene in the market in a direct way, and indeed Australia has been through periods of significant oversupply in some areas and undersupply in others. This will be an ongoing issue. In the demand-side funding model, this is inevitable as demand in particular areas changes.

²⁷ www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_partnership_agreements

²⁸ For example, 'one-stop shop' integrated services

Accessibility for families depends upon services having vacancies and being able to meet demand (Productivity Commission, 2011). For high-quality services, however, low/very low vacancy levels can underpin viability. Services achieving high levels of utilisation have few available spaces; often only single days or 'unattractive' combinations of days. Budgeting to carry vacancies necessarily increases fees and carrying vacancies brings pressure to operate with lower costs, which most often means lower quality.

It can be difficult to operate viable high-quality services in low socioeconomic areas. The increased fees that are a consequence of high-quality services will flow on to parents in the form of an increased gap fee, creating a disincentive to participation and affecting service viability. The RoGS (Productivity Commission, 2011) reports that children aged birth to five years from low-income families participated in ECEC services at a higher rate than their representation in the community does not take account of the quality of services and accordingly should be treated with caution. (It should also be noted that until the new national Quality Rating System is in place, matching information on the accreditation status of services against participation would not be useful because of problems with the current accreditation system.) Nevertheless, this question of quality is key in considering the long-term impact of participation in ECEC services on productivity gains.

In this situation, it is useful to consider the practical experience of KU Children's Services, an organisation that is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit providers of ECEC services and is committed to the delivery of high-quality programs. In its words:

But most importantly, financial sustainability is what will enable us to continue finding the balance between the cost of providing high-quality early childhood education and care, and affordability. The only way to do this sustainably is to cross subsidise between our 'giver' centres and our 'receiver' centres. As many of you know, this means that in centres where our competitors are more expensive, we too can set our fees within that range and make a surplus. Without this surplus generated by our 'giver' centres we would not be able to fund our Affordable Fees Program and the fees at our centres in the most disadvantaged areas, where children perhaps need KU most, would be unaffordable for families.²⁹

A pattern of provision that includes many smaller, isolated services. In market terms, this is perhaps irrelevant, but it does have impacts in a number of areas that are significant to current issues in the sector. One example is that without intervention to promote a broader sense of professional identity, there is a professionally isolated workforce which limits the sense of being a professional and professional growth, which ultimately impact on quality.

A pattern of provision that allows the aggregation of services. The market-based approach also leaves the way for services to be aggregated in very large (or small) numbers under a single management or ownership umbrella. The downside of this can be seen in the collapse of ABC learning (OECECC, 2010). The aggregation of services can also have benefits, including the professional support and development of staff and career path opportunities. In KU Children's Services, the organisation quoted above this extends to a platform from which to provides support for vulnerable children, a model which may well be worthy of further consideration. This will be further discussed in the following section on equity .

Movement of the school sector into the ECEC market. Emerging issues reported by stakeholders are the potential impact on the market of the increasing interest from the school sector in providing programs for four-year-old children, as is now happening in the school systems in Tasmania and Western Australia, and evidence of a growing trend towards the provision of programs for children as young as three years of age in the private school system.³⁰ There has been little public discussion of these matters, but the potential impact on the market is real if a whole cohort of children move out of the ECEC services sector.

In some jurisdictions, enhancement of the preschool sector to the detriment of the long day care sector. While some state and territory governments³¹ are directing the 'universal access' funds to both long day care and sessional preschool settings, others have tended to use the funds to enhance their existing preschool provisions rather than also supporting access to the program through long day care centres.³² This is not the Commonwealth's intention in the ECEC Reform Agenda, which sees the key feature as the delivery of the

30 Reported by ECA Board Directors from around Australia. Also, RoGS (Productivity Commission, 2011) gives information on the percentage of private schools now delivering preschool programs in some jurisdictions.

31 New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia

32 Reported at the March 2011 meeting of the National Children's Services Forum. See also Appendix 5

high-quality education program by a four year degree qualified early childhood teacher, regardless of the setting. Whether intentional or not, where it happens, the direction of the 'universal access' funds to discrete preschools and not into long day care centres reinforces the perception in the community that preschools are superior in providing early education programs. This also has the potential for a real, if unintended, impact on the long day care market.

3.2.2 Affordability and the Reform Agenda

While it is noted that the Commonwealth's CCR provides a 50% rebate for increased fees up to \$7,500 a year, it is inevitable that there will be an upward pressure on costs of service delivery, and ECEC fees, as the ECEC National Quality Agenda reforms are implemented. This is because the two significant drivers for cost in these reforms are improved staff qualifications and more staff to deliver improved staff-child ratios.

Given that the time frame for the implementation of these reforms is from 2012 to 2020, cost/fee increases will occur gradually in many services. In addition to the cost of quality improvement, however, there is a continuing need for higher salaries for staff, and this will impact on costs and fees in the long run. Fee increases will be much better accepted if families are convinced that these reforms will mean both a better experience and better outcomes for their child, and this underlines the need for building a parent constituency for quality.

3.2.3 Accessibility

As already suggested, much of the research into accessibility considers a range of issues, especially focusing on utilisation and vacancy rates (Productivity Commission, 2011). There is also survey research that asks parents about their needs for additional ECEC service. As already mentioned, the general conclusion reached by researchers who consider demand and utilisation rates as prime indicators of accessibility in Australia is that supply is keeping pace with demand (Davidoff, 2007; OECECC, 2010) although, as already noted, there is a caveat that aggregation of results can hide other factors, some of which indicate the need for more complex research questions in the Australian context, including around parent choice.

Waiting lists

Conventional wisdom, often supported by articles in the press, has it that it can be difficult for parents to get child care when and where they need it. Reports of people

putting their names on waiting lists as soon as they know they are pregnant, and finally getting a place in the service of their choice sometimes two or three years later, are not unusual. Perhaps unintentionally, but in support of this, Davidoff (2007) refers to the unsuitability of waiting lists in providing reliable evidence about shortages because parents 'often list their child on the waiting list at a number of centres simultaneously'. A common reason for this practice, of course, is that parents cannot be sure of accessing a place in the service of their first, or even second or third, choice.

Parent choice

While aggregated information reported by the Commonwealth³³ continues to suggest that there are vacancies in services in all regions, ideally this should be analysed further. For example, Davidoff (2007) identifies the possibility that 'unmet consumer preferences represent more of a problem for parents than access itself' (p. 74). Unmet preferences can result from a wide range of factors, and legitimately include all of those mentioned at the beginning of this section—service and program type, level of quality, location and hours.

Significantly, the OECD's discussion (OECD, 2006) (OECD, 2006, Chapter 4) stresses the importance of seeing accessibility as a multifaceted concept that necessarily and simultaneously includes a whole range of attributes (OECD, 2006). Utilisation and vacancies alone give a restricted and inaccurate view of accessibility.

Also relevant to this discussion, and noted in other sections of the paper, is the need for a clearer understanding, acknowledgement and explanation of the different purposes and capabilities of different service types.

Accessibility and vulnerable children

The statistics in Section 3.1 above indicate that, in aggregate, for the birth to twelve years age group, children with disabilities, children from a non-English-speaking background and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children access ECEC services at a rate lower than their representation in the community. The higher participation rate for children aged birth to five years from low-income families has already been noted and discussed. The placement of the Early Learning and Care Centres in areas indicated by the AEDI population measures is a step forward here.

33 See www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Resources/Documents/VacancyReportSep2010.pdf

In the absence of more detailed statistical information it is difficult to comment further on the experience of these children at present, except to say that the previous discussion about quality is equally relevant to them. This, and other matters to do with the challenges of engaging vulnerable families and meeting the needs of their children, are discussed in later sections of the paper.

Another way of thinking about accessibility

An alternative and broader view of accessibility considers the percentage of young children in the birth to five years old cohort who are actually using ECEC services. On OECD comparisons, Australia is low on this measure (OECD, 2006; OECD, 2010). Considering this, Tayler³⁴ related the lower demand in Australia to conservative community attitudes to women and their role, and ignorance of the scientific evidence of the significance of the early years.

The RoGS statistics on the participation of 'children with special needs' in ECEC services, (summarised above) are also informative and suggest the question of how best to deal with a gap between market demand/provision and government policy regarding early intervention for some groups.

This view of accessibility accepts that participation in ECEC services is in and of itself a 'good thing', and this of course implies that the services being accessed are of high quality (EC Europa, 2008).

3.2.4 Equity principles

Most of the major funding programs of both the Commonwealth and states and territories meet equity principles in that they are either uncapped and available to all who apply (CCB), or are aiming to deliver services that are spread throughout the community (e.g. state-funded sessional preschools) (Productivity Commission, 2011). It is important to recognise that the Commonwealth's child care assistance supports the workforce participation of parents and families.

Given the necessarily case-by-case nature of earlier decision making in the face of the lack of a national framework, and the complexity of data gathering to inform decision making, it is not surprising that some inconsistencies and anomalies have arisen.

Vertical equity and some challenges

In theory, as a means of supporting workforce participation, universal access to Commonwealth funding is achieved because the funding subsidies are uncapped. The principle of 'vertical equity'—*more to those who need most*—gives a higher percentage of the CCB fee subsidy to families on the lowest income and so potentially underwrites accessibility for these families.

However, there are anomalies which include:

CCR delivers 50% of the gap fee, up to \$7500 per annum, to all families, regardless of need. While CCB does deliver higher benefits to lower income families, CCR itself tends to give a higher financial return to those who have a higher gap fee—generally associated with higher income.

The funding of family day care provides CCB at the same rate as it is provided to families using long day care, and access to CCR. It also provides an operational subsidy to support the family day care coordination units. Families using family day care receive an additional fee subsidy to the extent of the contribution to the cost of the coordination units. Family day care is a significant provider of child care, with almost 103 000 children enrolled (FDCA, 2010).

Commonwealth funding compared with state/territory funding. As is shown at Appendix 2, many states and territories provide preschool programs free to children in the year before school. On the other hand, parents of children who are accessing preschool education through a long day care centre pay the usual fees reduced by the amount of their eligibility for Commonwealth and, where they exist, state/territory subsidies. As the states and territories implement the 'universal access' program, there will also be opportunities to achieve a more nationally consistent approach in this area.

Services that meet the needs of specific population groups

MACS and Mobiles—These services are among those (see Appendix 1) that are funded under the Budget Based Funding model. They are funded differently to other ECEC services because their utilisation rates are inherently so variable that a CCB model would be difficult. Further, Mobile services do not meet the eligibility criteria for CCB (open 50 hours per week etc.).

34 Professor Collette Tayler in an address, *Early childhood education and care*, at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 23 July 2007

Peak organisations report that the combination of indexation and ‘efficiency dividends’³⁵ over many years in this funding, combined with salaries necessarily increasing well above the rate of inflation, has meant that services have budget shortfalls. It is also reported that because of affordability concerns, it has been impossible for many services to increase fees to the level necessary to achieve break-even results, and the only option for many has been to reduce service levels.³⁶ It should be noted that DEEWR advises that this view is not necessarily supported by Commonwealth data.

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) representative to the National Children’s Services Forum reports that the Children and Family Centres (CFCs) being developed under the NP IECF are receiving both capital and operational funding at a substantially higher level than the MACS.

Funding for specified disabilities—Funding support through the Commonwealth’s Better Start initiative is available only to children with specified disabilities. Currently, this applies to children with autism and still excludes many children, although it is soon to be extended to children with sight and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and fragile X syndrome. Under a separate Commonwealth program, the medical diagnosis/assessment requirements of the Inclusion Support Program can also be restrictive.

3.2.5 Cross-subsidy models

Is there more widespread potential in the variance on a ‘community service obligation’ model described earlier? In the specific case described, a larger community-based service provider cross-subsidises to allow the maintenance of high-quality standards (including good staff–child ratios and qualified staff in services in disadvantaged areas).

While the model is appealing and effective in the context of the organisation in which it has been applied, it could be interpreted as a response to the failure of public funding systems to adequately meet the needs of lower income families. In considering its application in the wider community, it does raise the question of the equity of some families subsidising others within a ‘closed’ system such as an ECEC organisation, and the desirability of having decisions about levels of cross-subsidy made by individual organisations.

Overall, the delivery system for ECEC services which are, for the most part, small business entities, acts against a service-wide approach of this kind. At the same time, it is worth noting that school systems, government and catholic, have from time to time chosen to implement similar policies where more resources were delivered to schools serving low socioeconomic communities.

3.2.6 Potential impacts on children

The ‘upside’ of good accessibility is that families and children have ready access to high-quality services that meet their needs and are affordable, with all the benefits that this can bring. On the other hand, the market is not always well suited to deliver this type of coverage, and this can have negative impacts on children, as can be seen from the following discussion.

‘Too many services’—when services become unviable

Although from the perspective of a market-based approach services becoming unviable may not be perceived as a bad thing, it is a serious problem for families and children. It is almost inevitable that quality will be compromised if a service is under a viability threat. Apart from this, the closure of a service impacts significantly on both parents and children, both emotionally and in the practical demands it makes on them, including the need to locate a new service and settle in. As has already been noted, the Commonwealth did intervene to ensure that the collapse of ABC Learning did not have this sort of impact. However, for families and children a viability threat to, or closure of, any service is a serious matter, and this usually happens without intervention or support.

Consistency

Ready availability of/access to the ECEC service of their choice allows parents to arrange the service that they actually want for their child. For young children this can have the important benefit of bringing consistency to their ECEC experience, as well as allowing participation in a program that can meet their developmental and early learning needs. In the absence of access to a suitable place, parents often make a patchwork of care arrangements, exposing even very young children to multiple carers and peers during the course of a week (Bowes et al., 2003; FaHCSIA, 2009; Qu & Wise, 2004; Wise et al., 2005).

35 This effectively gave a dividend to the funding body and reduced the funding to the service.

36 This has been reported and discussed over many years at the National Children’s Services Forum.

This is not to argue against parents choosing complementary care arrangements with family members or others close to children—it is, however, asking that the ECEC system is able to properly support the needs of families and young children and not drive them to unsuitable arrangements.

‘Schoolification’

This refers to programs and pedagogy that are a downward extension of the school system rather than being specifically designed for young children. Given the trend for schools to become involved in the provision of ECEC services, noted above, it is important that these programs are clearly identified and required to operate under the NQF.

3.3 Some questions

- » Given the differences among the jurisdictions involved in ECEC service funding and delivery, is it desirable, necessary or possible to develop consistent and transparent principles for government intervention in the ECEC market?
- » Can we address the questions of equity to achieve a more transparent and fair system of government subsidies, across and within jurisdictions?
- » What is the place of population group specific services: what is their purpose and how is the funding best managed?
- » In a market service model with large scale demand-side funding by government, are there strategies to allow more effective management of the model?
- » Does the ‘community services obligation’ model have merit for wider application? How would governments guide, support and monitor this sort of development?
- » The issue of building family support for reform has been raised again in this section. Is this an area where joint work across the EU and Australia is possible and worthwhile?

4 TOPIC 2

Universal and Targeted Services—Key Issues and Challenges



As has already been indicated, COAG's aspirational and inspiring National Early Childhood Development Strategy (ECD Strategy) includes an established range of ECEC services, the reform of which is itself part of the strategy. It is important to bear this in mind in considering many of the topics being discussed in this paper.

4.1 Overview

In reforming the delivery of services for young children and their families, making decisions about universal and targeted services is one of the key responsibilities of government.

In supporting young children and their families, we need to use the available resources in ways that are both effective (that achieve the outcomes we are seeking) and efficient (that do so with least amount of effort and cost). Among other things, this involves knowing what combination and balance of universal and additional or targeted services are needed and how these should be deployed. This statement by Moore (2008b) at the beginning of an extensive literature review and analysis neatly sums up the question for governments with regard to universal and targeted services.

4.1.1 Universal AND targeted

Investing in the Early Years—a National Early Childhood Development Strategy proposes a model of universal services, with embedded targeted and intensive services (COAG, 2009a). The diagrammatic representation at p. 19 of that document demonstrates this and gives Australian examples of:

- universal services that are aimed at the general population and are accessible to all
- targeted services and supports that are aimed at children/families/communities with a higher need or higher risk than the general population
- intensive services and supports that are individually tailored responses to a particular child and family situation that is highly stressful and may be ongoing.

Australian governments generally regard ECEC services as 'universal' services, with some targeted enhancements³⁷ to support the inclusion of children with particular needs in 'mainstream' or 'universal' services and particular services provided for designated groups.³⁸ Many of these children would also be receiving some form of 'intensive service' on an individual basis. While there are some national targeted services and supports under the general heading of 'early intervention', there is also a range of state and territory approaches, with considerable variation among them. General information about relevant programs and services is at Appendix 6, along with links to some websites which provide additional information.

³⁷ For example, the Commonwealth's Inclusion Support Program, the Better Start program, the various early childhood intervention strategies funded by the state/territories—see Appendix 6.

³⁸ For example, MACS, Mobiles, autism-specific Early Learning and Care services.

In addition to the widely recognised centre and home-based ECEC services, Australian governments also give some funding to promote community playgroups and to deliver supported playgroups in many communities.³⁹ 'Community playgroups' provide an opportunity for young children and their caring adults to come together in an informal environment to socialise and join in activities. 'Supported playgroups' are resourced by a qualified staff person and provide opportunities for parents and children who would not normally access a playgroup to enhance their relationship in a supportive environment, increase their skills and confidence, and to develop valuable social and family support networks.

4.1.2 Need for 'responsive' services

Australia's ECD Strategy recognises that the right mix of universal and targeted services can help to provide additional assistance in a timely way and provide a non-stigmatised entry point to more intensive support. It also clearly sets its discussion of universal/targeted services in the context of 'responsive' early childhood development services. Responsive in this context means: 'high-quality programs in services; active service outreach into the community; a strong focus on promotion and prevention; engaging and empowering parents and communities in early childhood development and services; and responding to issues for children and families that arise' (COAG, 2009a, p.17). (COAG, 2009a).

Many issues in this section about universal/targeted services are similar to, or overlap, issues in the later sections on 'promoting integrated services' and 'meeting the needs of vulnerable children'. Because of this, each will focus on different aspects of questions. There are also some crossovers into the more general areas of accessibility and affordability, the NQF and workforce issues and the EYLF which are identified as they arise.

4.2 Commentary and questions regarding universal and targeted services

4.2.1 ECEC services as universal services

In the sense that the various ECEC services are used by parents across the whole population to meet needs and desires for child care and/or early education for their young children, the logic of regarding them as universal services is clear. Added to this is the fact that the potential of ECEC services to benefit all children has been widely recognised (CCCH, 2007; NESSE, 2009).

However, despite the inherent appeal of viewing ECEC services as part of Australia's suite of universal services, there are challenges to seeing them as full participants in the model described in the ECD Strategy.

Purpose and capabilities of different service types—

There is a range of service types covered by the term 'ECEC services' (Appendix 1). In fact the different ECEC service types have different purposes, staffing patterns, programs and resourcing—they are not all delivering the same thing—and certainly no single type is universally available. We need to be clear about what it is that we want included in our 'universal ECEC services' and to know more about the capabilities of, and potential outcomes for children from, them—and explain this to parents and the community.

*Views of early childhood education—*The commonly held view of 'early childhood education' is relevant here. Professional understanding, for example, as described in a major review of the profession (Watson, 2006) and the evidence, for example, EPPE (Sylvia K Melhuish E Sammons P Sarij Blatchford I Taggart B, 2008), (Sylvia, Melhuish, Sammons, Sarij Blatchford, & Taggart, 2008) agree that children in high-quality ECEC services benefit from appropriate early education programs delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers from infancy onwards. However, Australia's ECEC services do not universally provide access to this level of qualified staff, and even after the implementation of the NQF only long day care centres and preschools will be required to do this.

³⁹ See www.playgroupaustralia.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=944CDC9D-E7F2-2F96-3A3AD7270350FF7D for information about both playgroups and supported playgroups

4.2.2 Capacity to deliver 'responsiveness'

It is also important to think about the requirement for 'responsiveness' from the ECD Strategy description referred to above. In the sense meant in the ECD Strategy, this level of 'responsiveness' is describing the capacity of a service to participate in the delivery of an integrated universal, targeted and intensive service system. This will be discussed in more detail in a later section. For the present, we will focus on the general question of the ability of ECEC services to deliver 'responsiveness' as described.

This is related to the key proposition that to be effective, universal services in a model of universal/targeted/intensive services need to be of high quality (Moore, 2008b)—and indeed, high quality is a characteristic of those ECEC services that benefit all children, referred to above.

Implications of the Reform Agenda—Where does Australia stand with regard to 'universal quality'? The COAG Reform Agenda recognises the serious need for improvements in quality in Australia's ECEC services (COAG, 2009c), and is implementing the NQF to raise the level of quality in a nationally consistent way.

The NQS and Rating System sets out levels of achievement in relation to the quality of the early education and care across seven quality areas, against which services will be rated. There are five rating levels currently named unsatisfactory, foundation, national quality standard (which is aspirational rather than basic), advanced and excellent. The EYLF is integral to the NQS and is embedded in the standards across all of the quality areas. To achieve a rating of 'national quality standard' it is proposed that all elements of all standards must be met.

Services may then work to achieve higher ratings. The majority of services will then have achieved that part of the ECD's Strategy's definition of 'responsiveness' that relates to *high-quality programs and responding to issues for children and families that arise* as mentioned in the ECD Strategy (COAG, 2009a). It should also mean that these services are in a good position to effectively work with resource people, such as Inclusion Support Facilitators and Early Childhood Intervention Workers, to support the inclusion of eligible children in universal programs.

The other components of 'responsiveness' identified in the ECD Strategy are *active service outreach into the community; a strong focus on promotion and prevention; and engaging and empowering parents and communities*

in early childhood development and services. It is important to recognise that these generally require additional resourcing to which the majority of ECEC services do not have access.

'Out of scope' services—There are several service types which are not yet covered by the NQS and therefore quality improvement in them remains outside the umbrella of the COAG reforms. The implications of this for the ECD Strategy model of universal/targeted services need particular consideration.

4.2.3 Does 'universal service' imply 'universal supply'?

As has already been described, for its long day care centres and, to some extent, family day care, Australia depends on a market model to supply and locate services. No ECEC services are 'universal services' in the sense that schools are, for example, although the 'universal access' program will deliver access to a specified amount of early childhood education to all children in the year before they start school.

As indicated in Topic 2, several studies indicate that supply of ECEC services in Australia is keeping pace with demand, but the difficulties of interpreting results in this area are also acknowledged. It is a fact that waiting lists for ECEC services of choice are not unusual. The questions of government intervention in the market and the equity principles of the provision of population-based services are also considered at Topic 2.

Accessibility and inclusivity are other important qualities for universal services (Moore, 2008b). Especially with regard to children with additional needs, it is known that there are various barriers to universal access for families to ECEC services. This is consistent with the statistics already provided about utilisation for most key target groups (Productivity Commission, 2011). Some of these barriers are at the levels of the ECEC system itself and in services. This question will be considered in more detail in a later section of the paper.

4.2.4 ECEC services and 'targeted' services

As described in the ECD Strategy, targeted services and supports have the aims of minimising the effect of risk factors for children, building protective factors and resilience and working to reduce inequalities in outcomes between groups of children. Examples of targeted services identified in the ECD Strategy are:

- priority and increased access to universal services; for example, through CCB and other fee subsidies
- disability and inclusion support services.

Characteristics of targeted services

To be truly effective as targeted services or supports, strategies must be flexible and invite and support engagement and participation by ‘target’ children and families. It is not enough to be user friendly and accessible to the majority of families—a major aim is to facilitate engagement with those families whose children are in the target group, but who do not access or continue to use ECEC services. In this regard, it is important to be sure that both priority of access criteria and fee subsidy programs, such as CCB, are flexible enough to invite inclusion of those families who, for various reasons, including chaotic life circumstances or lack of trust of government departments, are least likely to meet requirements, even of a program such as Special Child Care Benefit.⁴⁰

The same can be said of the Commonwealth’s inclusion support services—these should be designed in such a way that target children are not excluded from support because they do not meet criteria—an outcome that easily occurs at present because of failure to meet diagnosis and/or assessment requirements.

The significance of these considerations is their capacity to prevent some target children from accessing the high-quality services that would be able to meet their needs.

For children whose parents successfully access the CCB, and who establish eligibility for disability or inclusion support services, the issue of the quality of the ECEC service is often a real barrier. Reports of lack of pedagogical leadership; inexperienced, unskilled and unmotivated staff; and poor programs in ECEC services are not unusual and can seriously detract from the ability of the targeted support service to deliver its promise on behalf a child with additional needs.⁴¹

Waiting for intensive services

A further consideration is the ability of ‘intensive’ services in the wider community to respond to the needs of children and families. Even when ECEC services are able to function effectively in the role of a universal service interacting with a targeted service, difficulties in accessing intensive supports are common, with lengthy waiting lists for services such as assessment and speech and other therapy. This situation is noted in the literature (CCCH, 2009b; Moore, 2008b) and is backed up by many reports to ECA meetings by directors of ECEC services.

4.2.5 The significance of this topic for our thinking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

As has already been suggested, our tendency to think about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families as ‘vulnerable’ and treating them as a ‘target’ population in our planning disguises the depth and breadth of the challenge of reconciliation. The following extract from the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NP IECD) addresses in principle the question of access to ‘mainstream’ universal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which include ECEC services.

Universal Services

All governments will be required to develop policy and program directions that embed the Service Delivery Principles for Programs and Services for Indigenous Australians ... This will require key system changes and a coordinated approach to service delivery by universal programs within and across governments. Governments will need to reform service delivery systems to ensure that:

- *government investments deliver effective and accessible services that are taken up by Indigenous people in urban and regional locations;*
- *service delivery agencies are culturally competent to deliver good outcomes for Indigenous people;*
- *government investments maximise linkages between Indigenous specific and mainstream services;*

⁴⁰ Information about this has been provided to DEEWR at National Children’s Services Forum (NCSF) meetings, most recently on 7 March 2011. The NCSF will liaise further with DEEWR on this. It is also reported to ECA by ECEC service directors. See also Appendix 7.

⁴¹ The convenor of the National Inclusion Support Agency Alliance advises that the Alliance has given feedback as part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) Reengineering Project of its view that, in some cases, pedagogical leadership is not evident in services or their practices. This is independently supported by anecdotal evidence from inclusion workers in a range of locations and services.

- *government investments deliver service models that respond to high levels of mobility amongst Indigenous Australians; and*
- *investment in services and programs is prioritised and in specific locations that have the greatest impact on closing the gap and breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.*⁴²

This carries many requirements for mainstream ECEC services in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, has implications for funding bodies in providing sufficient flexibility in subsidy programs to support this (see Appendix 7) and has many implications for the training and ongoing support of staff working in mainstream services.

4.2.6 At the interface of universal and targeted services

An interesting example of work at the interface of universal and targeted services and support is the KidsMatter Early Childhood pilot⁴³, being conducted in 100 ECEC services (long day care centres and preschools) around Australia. This pilot is part of the COAG Mental Health Strategy: Early Childhood component. The project aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age, reduce mental health problems among children, and achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties and their families. Integral to this program is the support it provides to ECEC services in their work with families and children. Careful evaluation is a feature of the KidsMatter Early Childhood pilot.

4.3 Some questions

- » When we describe ECEC services as 'universal services', what do we mean and is this generally and consistently understood? How can we better analyse different service types and understand and describe their role in the range of 'universal' ECEC services?
- » The ECD Strategy sets a goal for ECEC and related services to improve supports to families and children to a model of universal, targeted and integrated services. The first 'make or break' step for many ECEC services must be to achieve basic quality improvements and improve their capacity to participate in this model. Are there potential interim strategies to allow the effective delivery of targeted services during the process of building the quality platform in all ECEC services?
- » What information do we need to accurately measure the success of targeted programs that are integrated with universal services?

⁴² www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIS_closing_the_gap.pdf, p. 17

⁴³ www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec

5 TOPIC 3

The National Quality Agenda and Associated Workforce Issues



5.1 Overview

One of the major areas of reform agreed under COAG is the National Quality Agenda (NQA) for Early Childhood Education and Care. The NQA encompasses the National Quality Framework (NQF), the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the establishment of a new national body to oversee the new system. It should be noted that the EYLF is integral to the NQF. The NQF will achieve national consistency in staff–child ratios for long day care centres and preschools/kindergartens, and in family day care; improve requirements for qualified staff in these service types; introduce a National Quality Standard (NQS) and a new quality rating system; and rationalise the administration of compliance systems.

5.1.1 Requirements for qualified staff

Changes to the requirements for qualified staff will be implemented progressively but are to be achieved in all long day care (LDC) centres, preschools/kindergartens and family day care (FDC) services by 2020.

The requirements for staff changes will apply as follows:

By January 2014:

- an early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance at all times in LDC centres and preschool services with 25 or more children
- an early childhood teacher will need to be in attendance LDC centres and preschool services some of the time when LDC centres and preschool are providing services for less than 25 children

- in LDC centres and preschools, half of the staff will need to have or be actively working toward a Diploma qualification and the remaining staff will need to have or be actively working toward a Certificate III qualification
- all FDC coordinators will need a diploma-level early childhood qualification or above
- all FDC carers will be required to have or be actively working towards a Certificate III level qualification or equivalent.

By January 2020:

- a second early childhood teacher or another suitably qualified leader will need to be in attendance at all times when LDC centres and preschools are being provided to more than 80 children
- a second early childhood teacher or another suitably qualified leader will need to be in attendance at least half of the time when LDC centres and preschools are providing services to 60 or more children.

5.1.2 Workforce strategy

Governments recognise that increases in the number of children using ECEC services each year, the requirements of the NQF and the Universal Access commitment are increasing the demand for qualified early childhood professionals. In view of this, the Commonwealth has funded a range of national initiatives to increase the supply and quality of the ECEC workforce, and some states and territories have introduced initiatives of their own. As part of the ECD Strategy and the National Quality Framework National Partnership

Agreement, the Commonwealth is working with states and territories to develop a national Early Years Workforce Strategy broader complementing and building upon existing Commonwealth, state and territory government measures in the area.⁴⁴

5.2 Commentary regarding the National Quality Agenda and workforce issues

5.2.1 ECEC workforce

It is widely recognised (Galinsky, 2006; OECD, 2006) that well-qualified, highly skilled and stable staff underpin the delivery of high-quality ECEC services. Concerns about the ECEC workforce in Australia, particularly in long day care centres, have been identified and the focus of discussion for some time (Press & Hayes, 2000) and were the subject of an Australian Government 'Think Tank' in April 2003.⁴⁵

Specific areas of concern have included the following:

Recruitment and retention

The sector has experienced longstanding difficulties with attracting and retaining staff, particularly qualified staff. Poor working conditions and levels of remuneration and limited career paths contribute to this (Dowling, 2009). In many jurisdictions, ECEC staff employed in the long day care sector receive lower wages, lower professional status and poorer working conditions than their counterparts in the preschool and school sector, and shortages of qualified staff lead to approvals for unqualified staff to be employed in positions of responsibility (Watson, 2006). A further disincentive is that, in some jurisdictions, teachers working in child care cannot be registered as teachers. In the situation where integration of care and early education is a goal, this lack of parity is even more problematic as such differences undermine the willingness of degree-qualified early childhood teachers to work in other sectors, including the long day care sector.

Variations in wages and working conditions

Basic wages and working conditions have been established by state/territory-based negotiations involving a range of unions covering different workers, with little or no consistency among them. Consequently, wages and working conditions vary widely among states and territories.

Impact of unintended consequences

When there is government intervention in the broader industrial arena, there can be unintended consequences and it can be difficult for ECEC services to adjust. For example, the national peak body members of the National Children's Services Forum, and ECA Directors from around the country, report problems with adjusting to the Children's Services Award 2010 and the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2010 as part of the National Transition to the Modern Award System. While the Modern Award process did establish consistent minimum wages, difficulties were reported. These vary across jurisdictions but include the complicated process for calculating individual pay rates over a five-year span; erosion of conditions for some staff, e.g. in the area of planning time; Diploma graduates are unfairly treated under the Award; and staff can be required to work more than a 10-hour day provided they do not work more than a 38-hour week.

Limited push for change from ECEC staff

There is no strong or organised impetus for change from ECEC staff themselves. While there are unions active in the sector, the ECEC workforce is not strongly unionised. Furthermore, unions representing different parts of the workforce are generally not coordinated in their approach and can be competitive. Even more fundamental and of greater significance is the lack of an ECEC profession, in the sense that there is a nursing profession or a teaching profession. This is discussed in more detail below.

It is important that these broader issues are addressed to complement the workforce strategies that governments have already put in place to support the achievement of the NQA goals.

⁴⁴ www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/EarlyChildhoodWorkforce/Pages/home.aspx

⁴⁵ www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/early_childhood_news/jan_2004_overview_of_child_care_workforce_think_tank.html

5.2.2 Qualifications

There are also several questions relating to qualifications for working in ECEC services. These include:

ECEC services require staff with a range of nationally consistent, relevant and rigorous qualifications. In Australia, qualifications include university degrees in early childhood education, and vocational qualifications at the diploma and certificate level. Watson (2006) provided for the Commonwealth a comprehensive overview and analysis of higher education and vocational (VET) ECEC training in Australia and related issues. Her follow-up study (Watson, 2008) focused on higher education in ECEC, and the Commonwealth has further initiatives underway to provide further relevant information and analysis.

A range of specific concerns consistently identified in discussions at the National Children's Services Forum and through ECA forums by people working in the ECEC sector include:

- The variable quality of Registered Training Organisations (the providers of VET training and assessment)—which at the poor-quality end provide inadequate courses and poor assessment practices and deliver incompetent qualification holders. The challenge is to improve accountability and standards in this sector.
- The differences in the content of university courses around Australia and the difficulties of achieving teacher registration status in some states and territories; and the relevance of higher education course content to education and care for children across the full age range, including birth to three-year-old children.
- The great pressure on universities to 'fast track' students to attempt to meet the demand for early childhood teachers.
- The growing engagement by some Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) as commercial providers of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes, with advertising suggesting the majority of experience can be treated through the RPL process and that little further study is required. RPL done well has an important role to play in building the qualifications base of the ECEC sector. Importantly, if current educators working in the sector are fast-tracked to qualifications that do not underwrite improved performance, then the goals of the ECEC Reform Agenda will be undermined.

5.2.3 Qualified early childhood teachers

While the significance of the leadership of the early childhood degree qualified teacher in the new ECEC reform processes is clear, there are some complexities in the detail. Whether these are properly acknowledged and how they are resolved will have real implications for the achievement of the goals of the Reform Agenda. Some issues follow:

The COAG agreement compared with the National Quality Framework

The COAG national partnership agreement for the delivery of the 15-hour universal access commitment specifies delivery of the early childhood education program by a four year qualified early childhood teacher.

The NQF as it applies to long day care centres specifies a more generic 'early childhood teacher' with no other information, and for family day care does not require a teacher.

Further analysis and clarification of these differences would assist in meeting the goals of the ECEC Reform Agenda and the broader goals of the ECD Strategy.

Nomenclature

The preferred terminology of the NQF for all staff working with children in ECEC is 'educator'. This implies no difference in the capabilities and expertise between staff with early childhood teacher degrees, those with the Diploma qualification or those with Certificate III, although people with different qualifications do have different contributions to make and roles to fill.

The masking of these different roles in the common language of 'educator' is counterintuitive given the commitment to early childhood teachers in the NQS. It also potentially undermines parents' acceptance of the Reform Agenda's requirement for teachers and the costs associated with this.

Pace of the reforms

While the full eight-year calendar for the ECEC reform implementation is significant, it also demands real gains in terms of qualified early childhood teachers by 2014.

As already indicated, for graduating teachers and early childhood teachers working in other areas, there are significant salary and other disincentives to working in ECEC. This is not yet being addressed, and, if it is the question of where the required teachers will come from, is significant.

It is acknowledged that actual pay rates in the sector are a matter for individual providers. Increasing salaries will increase costs which will flow on to fees and this is a major consideration in a competitive market.

Building numbers AND quality

Although the commitment of the Reform Agenda to degree-qualified early childhood teachers is strong, it is the quality of the teachers (including their leadership qualities) that will determine whether the agenda can deliver on its promise.

It will be important to find ways to avoid a simplistic numbers-based approach to achieving the required teachers. Teacher quality is to some extent dependent on the calibre of the initial qualification and then on the mentoring and leadership a newly qualified teacher receives when they first enter the profession. Newly graduated early childhood teachers who work in the ECEC sector will need some years experience before they will be in the position to provide the pedagogical leadership for a service.

As has already been indicated, in the current situation of very high demand, the calibre of qualifications is seen to be under threat⁴⁶, while the sector as it stands has no ability to provide the required professional support for new teachers. Both of these issues need to be addressed.

5.2.4 An ECEC profession

The 'status and standing' of the 'ECEC profession' in Australia was a significant topic at the Australian Government's Child Care Workforce Think Tank 2003 (see Section 5.2.1). Fundamentally, the issues of status and standing are related to pay and conditions, to community acceptance that the work is of value and that specific knowledge and understanding (qualifications) are required to do this work well. As has been suggested earlier, Australia lacks an ECEC profession, in the sense that there is a nursing profession or a teaching profession.

The growth of the nascent ECEC profession into a mature and fully realised profession would complement government workforce strategies and help to address many of the workforce issues currently being experienced. It would underwrite the future quality of Australia's ECEC services and allow the vision and potential of the ECEC Reform Agenda to be realised.

Because of this, supporting the development of this profession should be an important goal of this Reform Agenda.

An inclusive profession

It is important that the ECEC profession recognises and includes everyone who works in ECEC services, whatever their role, qualification (university degree qualified, diploma or certificate), or age of children with whom they are working. All parts of the work of building an ECEC profession must aim to achieve this inclusivity.

5.2.5 Professional standards for ECEC

The development of standards is an important part of building professional identity:

Standards

The issue of teacher quality is not only one for the current ECEC Reform Agenda, it is also one that has purchase in other parts of the education reform agenda. Considerable work has been done around the development of teaching and leadership standards for the teaching profession and school leaders by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).⁴⁷ AITSL has in its remit a requirement to look at specialist standards. But this work is some way off.

The literature on standards development suggests that any work on early childhood professional standards should be done in collaboration with practitioners. There is also some argument that this work for ECEC should begin with standards for 'highly accomplished' performance across a range of qualifications.

Professional standards are important because:

- articulating the nature of highly accomplished practice enhances public confidence in the work
- the codification of highly accomplished work across a range of qualifications provides teachers and others with a language to describe and talk about what they do
- standards provide a framework for teachers to chart their own professional growth and learning.

Work done by ECA in partnership with (the then) Teaching Australia over the past year or so on the development of standards for highly accomplished teachers of young children aged three to eight years was welcomed by the many early childhood teachers who participated in the process.

⁴⁶ The observations of people working in the sector regarding the diversity of degree qualifications (confirmed by Watson (2008)) and their fears about the impact of pressures on universities on the quality of degrees is described at Section 5.2.3 above.

⁴⁷ See www.aitsl.edu.au

Leadership

As is recognised in the literature—for example the EPPE Project (Sylva et al., 2008), HighScope, the Chicago Child and Family Centres, the Abecedarian project (Galinsky, 2006)—a high standard of service and pedagogical leadership is one of the key characteristics of programs which deliver lasting benefits to young children. ECEC services need highly qualified staff who are also effective leaders. This involves qualifications, professional standards AND building leadership ‘capabilities’ as described in the Leadership and Capability Framework⁴⁸ of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders. Focusing on capabilities in this way ensures a focus on the human dimensions and ethical tensions inherent in leadership.

Leadership capability standards

If the ECEC Reform Agenda is to take hold, probably the most urgent requirement is the development of ECEC leadership to motivate and inspire other team members, mentor them, support their professional development and help develop leadership skills throughout teams. The development of actual leadership strength and skills in services and the sector will support the implementation of both the EYLF and NQF, and will facilitate achievement against the leadership and management area in the NQF. This work must go forward alongside the work of bringing early childhood teachers into ECEC services.

A strategy for growing leadership skills could be the development of a ‘capability framework’ (this language fits within the leadership paradigm but is also consistent with the standards development area). It would allow ECEC professionals to chart their own professional learning and development in the leadership area, and potentially provide a strong basis for university-accredited professional learning. The website of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders provides comprehensive information about leadership capability frameworks.

5.3 Some questions

Many of these issues take us outside the immediate domain of ECEC policy and practice and point to the need for close cooperation among the Commonwealth and states and territories across relevant portfolios and departments to support the achievement of the goals of the Reform Agenda and the ECD strategy, in addressing issues such as:

- » What is the role for both Commonwealth and state/territory governments in these broader issues?
- » What role does the development of leadership capabilities and standards for teachers and other EC professionals have in building quality ECEC services?
- » How can we best bring quality improvement and stronger accountability to the ECEC VET sector around Australia?
- » How can national consistency in the content of university degree courses to ensure relevance and standards of knowledge and skills in degree-qualified early childhood teachers be best achieved? Do foundation standards for entry-level early childhood teachers have a place in any strategy?
- » How can we best ensure the national integrity of processes such as credit transfer and recognition of prior learning so that we can be confident in the outcomes across the board?
- » How can we best develop early childhood pedagogical leadership potential in the short and long term?
- » How can we achieve the needed experienced early childhood leadership? Is there an experience base in the sector that would provide a platform for pedagogical leadership development?
- » Is it possible to build a standards-based profession in this sector that is inclusive of leaders, teachers and other staff? How is professional identity best built where potential members are diverse and dispersed and unable to engage easily with each other around professional questions and issues?

⁴⁸ See the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) website: www.ancel.org.au

6 TOPIC 4

Pedagogical Frameworks— The Early Years Learning Framework



6.1 Overview

Australia's pedagogical framework for the early years is titled *Belonging, Being, Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF). It is still in the early stages of implementation around the country, having been signed off by COAG in July 2009 after extensive stakeholder input and national consultations.

6.1.1 The EYLF and the Reform Agenda

The EYLF is part of COAG's Reform Agenda for ECEC and is a key component of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for ECEC. It will be incorporated into the National Quality Standard, and in this way contribute to the achievement of quality improvements in ECEC services around Australia. The intent of the EYLF is to support the delivery of nationally consistent and quality ECEC practice across sectors and jurisdictions. It may complement, supplement or replace the frameworks of individual states and territories in a manner to be determined by each jurisdiction.

The broad approach of the EYLF

The EYLF '... describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development. The Framework also recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development.'⁴⁹

The following from the EYLF document (DEEWR, 2009a) is provided only as a summary 'introduction'. The complete document and further information can be accessed at the website (see URL below):

The EYLF principles reflect contemporary theories and research evidence concerning children's learning and early childhood pedagogy. They underpin practice that is focused on assisting all children to make progress in relation to the EYLF Learning Outcomes. The practices encourage educators to draw on a rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children's learning. The learning outcomes are designed to capture the integrated and complex learning and development of all children across the birth to five age range.

49 Accessed from www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy_agenda/quality/pages/earlyyearslearningframework.aspx#supporting

Principles	Practice	Learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships Partnerships High expectations and equity Respect for diversity Ongoing learning and reflective practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopting holistic approaches Being responsive to children Planning and implementing learning through play Intentional teaching Creating physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children's learning Valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families Providing for continuity in experiences and enabling children to have successful transition Assessing and monitoring children's learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have a strong sense of identity Children are connected with and contribute to their world Children have a strong sense of wellbeing Children are confident and involved learners Children are effective communicators

EYLF implementation

The EYLF is now at varying stages of implementation—in many cases, initial stages—in long day care centres, preschools, family day care programs and four-year-old programs in schools around Australia. One of the government-funded supports for EYLF implementation is the EYLF Professional Learning Program (PLP) which can be accessed at:

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfpplp

The EYLF and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In its introduction (p. 6) the EYLF acknowledges the importance of improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and re-states COAG's commitment to 'closing the gap' in educational achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade. It notes that '... a specific document that provides educators with additional guidance on ensuring cultural security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families will be developed and made available to educators'. The principles, practice and outcomes of the EYLF establish an expectation of focus on ALL children,

and the EYLF Educators' Guide⁵⁰ stresses the importance of 'cultural competence' in everyday programming in all services.

6.1.2 Outside school hours care framework

In addition to the EYLF, COAG is developing a framework for outside school hours care—*My Time, Our Place—Framework for School Age Care in Australia*. *My Time, Our Place* is also part of COAG's Reform Agenda, will be a key component of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework and will be incorporated in the National Quality Standards. It builds on the EYLF and extends the principles, practice and outcomes to accommodate the contexts and age range of the children and young people who attend school-age care settings. It will ensure that children in school-age care will have opportunities to engage in leisure and play-based experiences which are responsive to the needs, interests and choices of the children attending the service and contribute fully to their ongoing development.⁵¹ This resource is currently going through the formal processes necessary for COAG endorsement.

⁵⁰ EYLF Educators Guide is available at: www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy_agenda/quality/pages/earlyyearslearningframework.aspx#supporting

⁵¹ Information is available at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Pages/FrameSchAgeCare.aspx

6.2 Commentary to the EYLF—Australia’s pedagogical framework

The development and endorsement of the EYLF by COAG—the first time that there has been a nationally agreed description of learning and outcome goals for very young children in Australia—was a major achievement.

6.2.1 Potential of the EYLF

‘Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia is significant for a number of reasons. It marks a point in our history when ‘early childhood’ has been given national priority; it is Australia’s first national curriculum statement for the varied settings in early education and care; it validates the work of early childhood educators as valued and highly skilled professionals; and it offers families a coherent and agreed view about what constitutes quality early childhood provision in the twenty-first century.⁵²

The EYLF has great potential to contribute to improving the quality of practice in ECEC services around Australia. Its integration with the other elements of the National Quality Agenda makes explicit the need for practice and structural standards to be linked in achieving outcomes for young children, it can bring a consistent foundation to practice with children across the ECEC sector, and it promotes the understanding of parents (and ultimately the community) of the importance and nature of early relationships, experiences and learning.

Obviously, the EYLF’s potential will be best realised if we are thoughtful and realistic about its implementation. A number of areas for consideration follow.

Reaching into and supporting ECEC services

Around Australia there are approximately 16,000 ‘in scope’ ECEC services in total, so supporting them in exploring and implementing the EYLF is an enormous task.

There is great variation in resources, practice and quality among individual services in each of Australia’s service types and some will experience real difficulty in implementing the EYLF and the associated NQS.

This applies to the general pedagogical strategies of the EYLF, and particularly to strategies for working with groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children living with disabilities and children of cultural and linguistic diversity.⁵³

The potential of the EYLF will best be realised if implementation support strategies recognise and respond to this.

Synchronising the relationship between EYLF and the Australian Curriculum for Schools

It is important that we understand and articulate the connections between the EYLF and the forthcoming Australian Curriculum for Schools (AC) in order to:

- support children’s transition between the two settings by consistency of pedagogy and flow of curricula
- promote integration of the two settings, avoiding the potential pitfalls of the ‘schoolification’ of early childhood education.

One aspect of the connection was recently described as follows:

‘The EYLF strongly supports play-based learning, but also strongly supports “intentional teaching” and adult/child interactions through which the educator brings a rich knowledge base to support children to move on to new and higher levels of understanding. The EYLF is not a curriculum that proposes “we leave children where they are in their learning and just let them play”.

Nor does the Australian Curriculum ‘advocate formalised learning’. This curriculum is about content, not about how teachers deliver it. What it attempts to do is establish ‘an entitlement’ for every child in the Australian school system, so that wherever they are in Australia, their teachers will introduce them to significant knowledge and skills that will be the foundation for their future learning. The ‘General Capabilities of the national curriculum—literacy, numeracy, ICT [information and communications technology], thinking skills, creativity, teamwork, self-management, social competence, intercultural understanding and ethical behaviour—make it clear that this curriculum is not just about “writing sentences and doing grammar”—particularly in the first year at school!’⁵⁴

52 Quoted from Connor, J., *Reflections on connections between the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum for ECA and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority* (in draft—not yet published)

53 Reported by relevant national peak organisations at the March 2011 National Children’s Services Forum meeting

54 Connor, J, in ECA Voice Volume 11 No 1 2011

*Both curriculum frameworks—the EYLF and the AC—are based on the same belief in the power of education to transform individuals and society and the same vision for the educational achievement and life success of young Australians. There is therefore, considerable potential to articulate the two frameworks in the interests of continuity for children's learning and reassurance for families and educators.*⁵⁵

Understanding the impact of the EYLF for different stakeholder groups

Achieving clarity in our understandings of what the EYLF means for staff at different levels of qualification and experience, and for families, will be important in strengthening the professional foundations of the ECEC sector and its practitioners and in promoting the importance of family relationships and experiences as the foundation for early learning.

It is not enough to say that everyone is an 'educator' and to leave it at that.

Parents, qualified early childhood teachers and people with different levels of vocational qualification all have important roles vis a vis children's early learning and the EYLF—but equally they bring different capacities and responsibilities to the task. It is much more meaningful to people to have access to understandings and explanations that are authentic to their role and realistic to their situation. We need to be prepared to work with different staff and services to find and promote these, in ways that are accessible to people and build mutual respect and support partnerships.

We need to make use of the best research available that is relevant to varied settings, for example see EPPE (Sylva et al., 2010), and discussions of early language and literacy⁵⁶, and social and emotional development (Bowes & Grace, 2009; NSCDC, 2009) in different settings and to use this to inform our thinking about using the EYLF and understanding potentially differential outcomes.

6.3 A question

- » What policy conclusions and policy directions are there for government from these considerations relating to the implementation of the EYLF?

⁵⁵ Quoted from Connor, J., *Reflections on connections between the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum for ECA and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority* (in draft—not yet published)

⁵⁶ For example, see transcript of interview with Dr Todd Risley at <http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/risley.htm>

7 TOPIC 5

Promoting Integrated Services In Australia



7.1 Overview

For the ECEC sector in Australia, the term ‘integrated services’ has two main but quite distinct meanings. These relate to:

- the bringing together of education and care in programs for young children
- the ready accessibility and availability to families of a range of child and family programs.

Both meanings are recognised and used by governments and people in the ECEC sector in Australia, and they are frequently used without definition.

7.1.1 Integration of education and care

The widespread use of the former meaning indicates the institutionalisation of the historic division between care and education in Australia. The ECEC Reform Agenda is predicated on transforming this—but it will take time and, has been seen, is not without challenges.

7.1.2 Integration of a range of services

The second meaning is more consistent with the broad literature on integrated services and with international usage (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010). It captures the desire of governments to improve outcomes for young children and their families in the face of increasing complexity and stress in parenting, more complex problems in families, and greater difficulties for traditional early childhood and family support services to meet the needs of all families.

While government interest in the integration of service delivery has most recently been highlighted in the COAG Reform Agenda, it is worth noting that in fact Australia has some examples of long-established integrated services (‘one-stop shops’)⁵⁷, and the Commonwealth and state governments have had increased interest in this for some years. Some jurisdictions, including Queensland, South Australia and Victoria, had developed earlier models, including both one-stop shops and forms of integrated hubs or other models of integrated service delivery.⁵⁸

The concerns noted above are among those discussed in the ECD Strategy which, among other strategies, calls for ‘integration where services and professionals across health, ECEC, family support and specialists work very closely whether they are co-located or not’. This integration of service delivery aims to improve the inclusiveness of services, to make services more responsive to different family situations, to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and to build the evidence about what works to improve transitions for families moving between services (ECD Strategy pp. 10–12).

A key feature of the 38 new Children and Family Centres⁵⁹ being developed under the NP IECD is the provision of a range of services from the one location; also to meet local community needs.

57 For example, the Lady Gowrie Child Centres were established in 1940 by the Commonwealth Government as integrated services; the MACS, which were established in the late 1980s, are another example.

58 The range of approaches is summarised by Press et al. (2010), and Moore (2008a) and Tayler, Cloney, Farrell & Muscat (2008) have published relevant reviews.

59 See www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/IECD/Pages/ChildFamilyCentres.aspx

7.2 Commentary regarding integrated services

7.2.1 The integration of education and care

‘Children’s services should provide comprehensive developmental programs that integrate both care and education, for children from birth to school entry’ and ‘separating care and education in the early years fails to acknowledge the interwoven nature of early learning and development’. These quotes are from a Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) Policy Brief, *Early years care and education* (CCCH, 2007) which also summarises the immense literature on this topic. The need for this integration has been endorsed by COAG and is assumed in the Reform Agenda, including in the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standard reforms.

The EPPE project (Sylva, et al., 2008) confirmed that a central feature of this integration of care and education is having a degree-qualified early childhood teacher working across the day in a long day care centre. As can be seen in the table at Appendix 2, there are very few states or territories (pre-COAG reforms) that require this in long day care services.⁶⁰

Some challenges

This is one of the most fundamental but difficult areas for ECEC change in Australia. Challenges include:

- *Changing understandings* at all levels—government, services and families—to know that early education is not about settings but about pedagogy and programs. Integration of education and care is not about the co-location of programs but about their meshing throughout the day in a single program delivered by qualified staff.
- *Doing what is necessary to modify service promotion and delivery* to reflect this integration. This includes informing parents and the community, and may require addressing some of the unintended consequences for ‘child care’ that may flow from the ‘Universal access to 15 hours pre-school’ program—such as the implied message to parents that pre-school education only occurs in the year before school.

- *Providing a suitably qualified and skilled workforce.* This core challenge to the whole Reform Agenda is addressed under Topic 3. However, achieving the integration of care and education around Australia will require not only sufficient qualified staff, but that those staff are trained to lead and deliver this integration; that curricula for tertiary and vocational qualifications are reviewed and modified to reflect this; and that ongoing professional support and development is sufficient to sustain it.

The integration of care and education in an ECEC service should be central to the service’s work and not negotiable. It should be possible within the normal operation of the service, provided the service has the qualified teachers and other staff and the staff–child ratios that underwrite the building of the high-quality relationships essential to children’s learning and development and the provision of ongoing pedagogical leadership.

7.2.2 Integration that supports/ provides access to a range of services

It is widely accepted that ECEC services should be a part of any integrated system of service delivery, whether this is a centre-based ‘one-stop shop’ model, a ‘virtually integrated’ model in which services have different locations but strong links, or a mixture of the two (Press et al., 2010, p.6.) This is integral to the model of universal, targeted and intensive services proposed by the ECD Strategy, and is necessary to achieve successful service delivery to many vulnerable children and families.

The potential of ECEC services

ECEC services are important in integrated service systems. As universal services, they have the potential to provide an ‘un-stigmatised’ and safe entry to the service system. Apart from the significance of ECEC services for children and their convenience for families, they can support the ‘connectedness’ of families to services, which is a key factor in integrated service delivery. ECEC services can play a key role in this because relationships developed between families and ECEC providers can be regular, long term and provide a strong platform for building connections to other services.

⁶⁰ It is noted that for many years this has been a mandatory requirement in New South Wales (NSW) for centre-based services with more than 29 children, and similarly that NSW does not discriminate in its regulations and statistics between child care and preschool (Productivity Commission, 2011).

The need for high quality and additional resourcing

In any integration model, the need for ECEC services to be of high quality is a given. It is important to understand that, while the integration of education and care should be part of the basic 'business' of high-quality ECEC services, making connections with other services—integrating with them in the sense described here—will generally require extra resources. As with almost everything discussed in this paper, the quality base has to be strong for integration with other services to be enabled.

Some current practices

It is important to recognise that the concept of service integration is consistent with the government funding programs that support inclusion and 'early intervention' and with the philosophy of many ECEC services. Integrated service delivery can be achieved in many ways and to some extent is already practised in high-quality ECEC services.

Examples of current beginning approaches to the practice of integration include:

- those high-quality preschools and long day care centres around Australia that work to build and/or facilitate connections between families and children and other support services
- mobile children's services, which develop systematic connections between families and the services they need when isolation and distance make this difficult to achieve
- as noted earlier, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) also offer a model of integrated service
- supporting children's 'transition to school' is one particular example of service integration, and is an area that has received considerable research attention in Australia (CCCH, 2008). Where it occurs well, this demonstrates the strong leadership, cooperation, communication, shared understandings and mutual respect between professionals that are among the hallmarks of successful service integration.

In addition to this, there are the numerous examples of integrated services previously mentioned. Many are described by Press et al (2010).⁶¹

Some challenges to integrated service delivery

There are many recognised challenges to integrated service delivery. In summary, these include:

- lack of clarity about what is involved
- the ongoing demands of achieving and sustaining successful collaborations at all levels—whole-of-government, regional, service and teams in services
- achieving consistently higher quality in service delivery across the range of participating service types. (CCCH, 2009b)
- Issues such as these obviously flow through to ECEC services. More specific barriers to successful integration include issues that are experienced in many ECEC services, such as poor communication that affects understanding of roles and responsibilities and information sharing; financial uncertainties and funding 'silos'; and staff issues—lack of management commitment, constant reorganisation of staff, frequent turnover and lack of qualified staff (CCCH, 2009b).

Where these occur in ECEC services, they obviously negatively impact on the quality of the service delivered every day to all children and families, and as indicated in the following section considering 'vulnerable children', poor quality affects the ability of a service to make proper use of government-funded inclusion programs. It certainly makes it virtually impossible for the service to participate in integrated service delivery with other organisations.

Steps towards fully integrated service delivery for ECEC

In working towards the participation of all ECEC services in an integrated service delivery model, the first step is to ensure that all services around Australia are operating at a sufficient level of quality to meet their prime responsibility to children, families and the Australian community. The full implementation of Australian Quality Framework to its agreed time frame is a vital beginning in this.

61 Press et al. (2010) also provide case studies of integrated services in their Appendix 1

The next step is to enable the full participation of ECEC services in the delivery of integrated services. Considerations necessary to achieving this at a system-wide level include:

Adding value—While the value of ‘demonstration integrated centres’ is recognised (CCCH, 2009b) and indeed such services formed the basis of the Professional Support Coordinators (PSC) National Alliance’s informative research project (Press et al., 2010), the vast majority of children will continue to attend ‘mainstream’ or ‘universal’ ECEC services. Failure to achieve the involvement of these services in integrated service delivery will make it likely that many children will ‘fall through the cracks’. As the requirement for service integration becomes clearer and stronger, even high-quality ECEC services will need to further develop skills and focus in this area. Specific strategies to add integration capacity to mainstream services are essential.

Building the capacity for engagement—For an ECEC service to participate fully in integrated service delivery, as has already been indicated, its base of quality practice must be strong. It must also demonstrate a capacity to engage with (and make visible) thinking and practice that relates to deeper questions; for example, social inclusion, reconciliation and children’s mental health. This means thinking beyond the usual indicators of quality—child–staff ratios, numbers of qualified staff etc.—and challenging and supporting service management and staff to grow in their thinking and practical skills in such areas by using (to their capacity) tools such as the EYLF, training opportunities, and people with expert knowledge and experience. Some of the ‘stories from the sector’ at Appendix 7 provide examples of this.

Developing leaders—Leadership is recognised as a key to success in service integration. ‘It is critical that leaders are well trained and supported, effective in their roles, inspiring and supportive of all staff, and able to work across traditional divides’ (CCCH, 2009b). The 2008 review by Moore and the more recent 2010 research project by Press, Sumsion and Wong (both cited previously) identified leadership as one of the characteristics of successful integration. This reflects both local experience (for example, Colmer at the Adelaide Gowrie, cited by Press et al (2010) and international findings, including Toronto First Duty (as described in the Case Study attached to the CCCH Policy Brief No 17 (CCCH, 2009b).

Support from governments—Governments need to lead by example in this area, both to clarify purposes and inspire others, and to consistently make the changes across jurisdictions and departments that will support services and staff in the community in their integration efforts. While the many difficulties of this are recognised (CCCH, 2008), including the complexity of the governance environment (noted earlier in the paper), much more could be done to achieve integration; for example, across Commonwealth and state/territory funding programs, in service delivery, and even in consistency of language.

7.3 Some questions

- » Ensuring that the capacity for connectedness between services is not constrained by isolation and distance—the National Broadband Network will open up opportunities for developing connected services. How can this be supported?
- » Going beyond the provisions of the National Quality Agenda, how can governments best promote and support the integration of care and education as a universal requirement in ECEC services?
- » In the context that the Quality Reform Agenda is addressing quality improvement in ECEC services and will be achieved over time, how can we best identify and support the skills and focus that high-quality ECEC services need for successful participation as integrated services?
- » How can we best develop professional leaders in the early childhood sector?
- » How can we enhance and use cooperation among governments and departments to more strongly contribute to the delivery of integrated services?

8 TOPIC 6

Meeting The Needs of Vulnerable Children through Early Childhood Education and Care Services



8.1 Overview

A clear intention of Australia's National Early Childhood Development Strategy is for our services to better reach and support vulnerable children. This applies to the whole range of early childhood development and relevant family support services, but is particularly relevant for ECEC services:

Attendance at high-quality early childhood education and care services is known to provide significant long-term benefits for disadvantaged children, including better school performance, staying longer at school and improved social skills at school and later in life. (COAG, 2009a)

8.1.1 Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, in general, 'vulnerable children' are children who are at risk of poorer developmental outcomes from any cause, including physical, mental or sensory disabilities or socioeconomic disadvantage (OECD, 2006), and more specifically, the domains identified and used by the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) (CCCH, 2009a) are:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge.

8.1.2 Underlying goals

The ECD Strategy's fundamental focus on vulnerable children comes from goals of social inclusion (additional help for those children most in need to reduce social inequalities), improved outcomes (the desire to support these children in achieving better life outcomes) and productivity (short- and long-term benefits to society and the economy).

A commitment to social inclusion affirms the need for both universal and targeted programs to engage with and meet the service needs of vulnerable groups, in order to reduce the distance between the everyday lives and life outcomes for vulnerable children and other children. In particular, targeted programs, whether they are mainstream or discrete, acknowledge that children and families who are vulnerable, for whatever reason, will need additional support and resources if childhoods are to be healthy and to be rich in the relationships and interactions that support social and emotional health, general wellbeing and development.

8.1.3 Statistics

The AEDI (CCCH, 2009a) is a population measure of children's development as they enter school. Its focus is on all children in the community and it reports on early childhood development across the whole community, using a teacher-completed checklist to measure the five areas of early childhood development listed above:

- The majority of children are doing well on each of the five AEDI developmental domains.
- Overall in Australia, 23.5% of children are *developmentally vulnerable* on one or more domain/s.

- Overall in Australia, 11.8% of children are *developmentally vulnerable* on two or more domains.
- There are higher proportions of children living in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and in very remote areas of Australia who are *developmentally vulnerable* on each of the AEDI domains.
- The majority of Australian Indigenous children are developmentally on track on the AEDI domains, with the exception of the language and cognitive skills domain.
- Children who are proficient in English and speak another language at home are less likely to be *developmentally vulnerable* on most of the AEDI domains compared to all other children.
- There are children in Australia who only speak English, but are reported as not proficient in English. These children are more likely to be *developmentally vulnerable* on all the AEDI domains.

The AEDI also gives results for individual communities and these are now being used to inform the location of services such as the Early Learning and Care Centres⁶², the Children and Family Centres⁶³ and the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY).⁶⁴

A summary of government concerns and some relevant statistics can also be found in *Supporting the Development of Young Children in Australia 2009: A snapshot* (DEEWR, 2009b), there is more information in the ECD Strategy (COAG, 2009a) and a review and analysis of relevant literature in *Supporting young children and their families* (Moore, 2008c).

8.1.4 Programs and services

This paper focuses on government contributions which are specifically targeted at young children and their families, however it is important to recognise that some other areas targeted in the range of COAG reform agreements—for example, health, housing and workforce development—also have the potential to positively impact on the indicators of vulnerability.⁶⁵ The Commonwealth and the states and territories fund a range of programs to support vulnerable families and children.

As has been noted previously, governments are particularly concerned to ‘close the gap’ for those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are vulnerable, and are now demonstrating this through the broad and integrated strategies, NIRA and the NP IECD, which clearly show the breadth and complexity of approach that is needed in this area.

In the area of providing service to vulnerable children, it is particularly necessary to recognise the importance of a holistic approach, noting, as did the European Symposium on Improving Early Childhood Education and Care 2008, that:

Child poverty impacts severely on children's well-being, on their educational performance, and on their sense of self-worth. ECEC services, however good, can only marginally compensate for family poverty and exclusion ... The outcomes for young children are multi-causal. ECEC policies cannot proceed effectively without coordination with other sectors (such as family policy, improving equality, employment, housing, or access to healthcare). Investments should be made on the whole spectrum of policies that affect young children's lives (EC Europa, 2008).

8.2 Commentary and questions regarding meeting the needs of vulnerable children through ECEC services

This section of the paper is closely linked with the sections dealing with universal and targeted services and service integration. Whereas the other two sections have focused more on the capacity of ECEC services to meet the requirements of a universal service in a community-wide model and within that model to contribute to, and/or participate in the delivery of, integrated services, this section focuses in more detail on what happens or needs to happen within ECEC services to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families, and the capacity of services to deliver that.

The commitment to social inclusion, particularly that part of it which focuses on *reducing the distance between the everyday lives and life outcomes between these children and other children*, requires that all ECEC services are well placed to serve vulnerable children. Of fundamental importance, however, is a high-functioning, high-quality service that will benefit all children and provide a

62 See www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy_agenda/pages/additionalearlylearningandcarecentres.aspx

63 www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/latestnews/pages/establishmentofchildrenfamilycentres.aspx

64 See www.hippyaustralia.org.au

65 See www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm

strong platform for working with vulnerable children. This stress on the importance of high-quality service delivery in ECEC is widely recognised, including by the European Commission in the previously mentioned symposium (EC Europa, 2008).

8.2.1 Characteristics of quality

The basic characteristics of the high-quality and well-resourced ECEC settings that can be of such benefit to vulnerable young children are much the same as the characteristics and resources that deliver benefits to all young children. These include attributes such as:

- strong pedagogical leadership
- well-qualified staff, good staff–child ratios and small group sizes
- good staff–child relationships
- intentional teaching and sustained conversations
- programs and curricula that are play based, appropriate for and engage individual children and focus on the whole child—social, emotional, cognitive and physical development
- engagement with parents
- staff stability and continuity, ongoing professional conversations and development. (Galinsky, 2006).

8.2.2 Additional supports also needed

Speaking particularly of young children with disabilities, Moore points out that in addition, ‘children with special needs require purposeful intervention, because their disabilities and delays often make them dependent upon others, interfere with them learning well on their own, produce slower development and disrupt their interactions with others’ (Moore, 2001, p. 13). The principle of this applies to all vulnerable children, and may indeed apply to any child at one time or another.

The range of interventions and spectrum of support potentially needed for lasting benefits is broad and depends on the individual child and the family:

- For example, as shown by EPPE, for some children living in disadvantaged areas, the intervention may simply be consistent participation (full or part time over a number of years) in a high-quality ECEC program where the parent/s ‘share the educational aims of the program and educators support the home education environment’ (Sylva et al., 2008).

- The other end of the spectrum calls for the same consistent access to a high quality ECEC program and engagement with parents, plus additional services that may include almost one-to-one support for the child in the service, targeted learning programs, and/or intensive treatment or therapy, either in or outside the program with an outside specialist/s referred to by Moore.

8.2.3 Staff characteristics

Services that are well placed to meet this range of needs will have well-qualified staff who are strongly supported and offer the baseline high-quality program that is a ‘given’ in this work, but also:

- have skilled and supportive adult-to-adult communicators who establish and maintain engagement with parents who are often stressed and living with multiple problems
- have the time and skill to work collaboratively with outside specialists, ranging from early intervention workers and inclusion support facilitators to family support workers, health professionals and therapists
- observe when additional assessments or interventions are needed for particular children and offer these and/or assist in accessing them
- participate in the continuing reflective practice, professional conversations and professional development that underpin skilled practice, and demonstrate the capacity for engagement with deeper thinking described in the previous section.

Ideally, services showing all these characteristics will also be well placed to succeed in making use of the available relevant research (CCCH, 2010) to support them in engaging with marginalised and vulnerable families who may not typically participate in ECEC services and other support programs.

8.2.4 Challenges

The reality is that the majority of ECEC services in Australia neither meet these standards nor would they be able to deliver this service in the short term. As has been indicated in this paper in earlier sections, in general our existing ECEC services fail to provide a strong platform for the integration of vulnerable children into mainstream services, particularly long day care centres in most jurisdictions.

While there are some high-quality services to be found which participate well with inclusion support facilitators or early intervention workers, on the whole these are services with experienced and qualified early childhood teachers who are capable of and committed to the delivery of high-quality ECEC programs and who work across disciplines and organisations for the benefit of children.

Even so, as things generally stand, there are human resource limits to cross-discipline activity in any ECEC service, as usually they are not staffed to undertake this extremely time-consuming and sometimes stressful task. ECEC services must give priority to their core business—the provision of high-quality programs for children. Additional unfunded effort will undermine the outcomes.

8.2.5 COAG recognises need for quality improvement in ECEC services

This is a difficult issue to confront but it is clear from the COAG commitment to the National Quality Framework for ECEC services that the quality base of existing services is not high. This is not to criticise the staff who work every day with young children, it is simply to acknowledge that the qualifications and staffing requirements for the delivery of high-quality ECEC services are not in place in many child care services.

Examples of this include the experience of inclusion support workers who often see a lack of pedagogical leadership in services and themselves attempt to provide this, working with the staff to try to improve even very basic aspects of practice (e.g. down to the need for staff to greet individual children and parents on arrival; to organise and engage with small groups of children; not to have very young children waiting in large groups for the next activity) before they can move on to support the enhanced inclusion practices that are their main focus.

Given this, how can these services provide, even in the short term, a strong platform for the integration of vulnerable children into the program? It is hoped that the quality improvements that will come with the rollout of the Quality Reform Agenda will lift the base of quality in services and improve this situation—but this will not happen overnight and in many cases will require intensive professional development and mentoring for staff to learn more effective practice and ongoing support to achieve the level of skill and service described at the beginning of this section.

8.2.6 Integrated service centres

As indicated in the earlier discussions, a particular strategy of governments over recent years has been to promote the establishment of ‘integrated’ service centres, most recently including the Children and Family Centres to serve Indigenous families and children.

These are clearly services that have been/are being located in identified areas of need, should be well resourced, and can be expected to demonstrate excellent practice, including in service delivery for families and children with multiple and complex vulnerabilities.⁶⁶

Ideally, the design of these services is strongly based in relevant evidence of good practice (recognising the complexity and challenge of this), and their performance is being documented and evaluated. Where these services are successful, key structural and process elements should be identified and inform broader government policy and programs into the future and practice in the wider ECEC community.

Nevertheless, while these services are, and will be, welcomed in their communities, they alone will not be capable (especially in our larger states) of addressing the needs of all vulnerable children, who, in fact, are spread throughout the population.

The challenge of lifting the base of quality in all ECEC services, particularly through providing the highly qualified staff to lead improvements, remains.

66 For examples, visit the Browns Plains Early Years Centre at www.bensoc.org.au/director/whatwedo/findaservice.cfm?item_id=67E64B840B020A11537FEA9AA83575E9 and the Autism Specific Early Learning and Centre at Liverpool at www.ku.com.au/news/a-reason-to-celebrate.aspx

8.2.7 The language of inclusion— ensuring that eligibility requirements are broad and inclusive

As has already been indicated, it is important that efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable children by ECEC services, including the integrated services, and inclusion support and early childhood intervention workers, are supported through the government funding programs. In this regard, particular attention needs to go to those families who are least likely to be able to cooperate with system requirements and/or priority guidelines, and to children who fall outside current eligibility criteria, to achieve strategies for their inclusion.

8.2.8 Stories from the sector

Appendix 7 provides a small number of stories from the sector as examples of the potential of and challenges for ECEC services in this area.

8.3 Some questions

- » What implications does this discussion have for funding policy? Is there an interim funding approach that will build the pedagogical leadership base in a service at the same time as providing specific additional support for vulnerable children to be part of the program?
- » Should base levels of operating quality in all 'mainstream' services, combined with the targeted supports, allow the needs of participating 'vulnerable' children to be met without compromising the program for other children? Should this be a base requirement applicable to all service types?

Realistically, what needs to be in place in services to achieve this?

Conclusion

The EU Policy Dialogue meeting will be an opportunity for participants to identify and discuss particular topics and decide on significant areas for future action.



Appendix 1: The Australian context— service types and funding

There are several different types of ECEC services, and they are usually associated with different regulatory and funding landscapes (Information provided by DEEWR).

1. Commonwealth 'approved' services⁶⁷

The majority of child care assistance currently provided by the Commonwealth government is in the form of payments to families to assist with the cost of care (i.e. fees) in mainstream/approved child care services.

- Long Day Care (LDC)—a centre-based form of ECEC service. These services may be run by private operators, local councils, community organisations, employers or non-profit organisations. These services are designed to primarily provide all-day or part-time care to under school age children.
- Family Day Care (FDC)—FDC services support and administer networks of FDC carers who provide flexible care and developmental activities in their own homes for other people's children. To assist with this, each service receives operational support funding from the Commonwealth Government. Both not-for-profit and for-profit providers may operate a FDC.
- Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)—provides care mainly for primary school children before and/or after school and during vacation time.
- Occasional Care (OC)—centre-based child care that provides flexible care for children from birth to school age. Families can access occasional care regularly on a sessional basis or irregularly.
- In-Home Care (IHC)—a targeted service where an approved carer provides care in the child's home. It is only available for families who do not have access to an existing ECEC service, or where an existing service cannot meet their needs. Some of the circumstances in which a family may be eligible for in-home care include where the parent or child has an illness or disability, they live in a rural or remote area, or a family has had a multiple birth.

2. Pre-school/kindergarten

In Australia, preschool (also known as kindergarten) is voluntary and is most often provided to children in the year prior to formal school although some families, especially Indigenous children, may access preschool for two years prior to school. Most children in Australia (current participation is 70%) attend a preschool program around the age of four years.

Preschool programs can be delivered through a range of models, including integrated with school settings (both public and private), integrated into a long day care centre program, and stand-alone community preschools. Providers include a mix of state and territory government preschools, community and independents, with differing funding streams, accreditation and governance arrangements. The cost to parents varies across jurisdictions, with five out of eight jurisdictions offering effectively free preschool programs.

Preschool programs generally comprise a structured play-based educational program, designed and delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher either in a preschool or a long day care centre.

Since the early days of preschool in Australia, sessional 'stand-alone' preschools have remained the province of educators with a high proportion of programs delivered by qualified teachers and a clear focus on curriculum and pedagogy. Session times and hours offered vary across the country with the average number of hours currently offered being 12 hours per week. Preschools attached

⁶⁷ Services where parents can apply for Commonwealth fee subsidy (Child Care Benefit) and Child Care Rebate.

to, or operating within, school settings follow school calendars and are generally open for 40 weeks a year. Preschool delivered in long day care settings may be delivered throughout the day in a fully integrated model, at any time of the day, or for set days only, with the centres offering longer opening hours and usually closing only between Christmas and New Year and on public holidays.

Australia's system of delivery is very diverse and relatively unintegrated (i.e. there are relatively few child care centres that provide preschool programs as well, except in New South Wales where for many years child care centres licensed for more than 29 children have had to employ a degree-qualified EC teacher). OECECC coordinates all child care and early childhood education and care programs on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, including the distribution of program funding.

The integration of ECEC has increased with moves in this direction taking place within the Long Day Care (LDC) sector. This has been driven partly by government intervention (such as the Victorian Government funding the provision of kindergarten programs and the NSW requirement for the employment of a preschool teacher in LDCs with more than 29 four year olds), but also through a number of more advanced ECEC providers systematically employing tertiary qualified teachers. Based on published data from the Child Care Census in 2006 (which will be updated when the 2010 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census is available):

- Thirty-four per cent of Long Day Care services (1656 services) stated that they offered an in-house pre-school program conducted by a qualified early childhood teacher. A further 14% of services took children out to an external preschool program, this includes 2% of services that had both an in-house program and took children to an external program.
- Around 79 220 children aged between 3 and 4 years attended a LDC centre that ran an in-house pre-school program conducted by a qualified early childhood teacher. This represents 38% of the total number of 3 and 4 years olds (approximately 208 140) attending Long Day Care.
- Around 44 720 children aged between 3 and 4 years actually participated in these pre-school programs during the Census week. This represents 56% of the 79 220 3 to 4 year olds attending Long Day Care services with an in-house pre-school program and 21% of the total number of 3 and 4 year olds in Long Day Care.

3. Other DEEWR funded services⁶⁸

The Commonwealth Government directly funds a range of services, known as Budget Based Funded (BBF) services, to provide child care and early learning opportunities where the market would otherwise fail to deliver child care. These services are predominately in rural, remote and Indigenous communities, which generally include children vulnerable to poor life outcomes. BBF services include:

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) are community-based services funded to meet the educational, social and developmental needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Long day care is provided for below school age children with each MACS providing at least one other form of child care or activity such as outside school hours care, playgroups, nutrition programs and/or parenting programs.

Mobile child care services

Mobile child care services (Mobiles) visit rural and remote areas and may provide flexible children's sessions, including playgroups, vacation care, on-farm care, parenting support, toy and video lending libraries, and parent resource library services. Mobile child care services provide children with an opportunity to socialise with other children and participate in early childhood education opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them. Some mobile services also provide regular LDC sessions in community venues, visiting small rural communities each week.

Indigenous playgroups

Indigenous playgroups provide children not yet attending school with a wide range of culturally appropriate developmental, educational and socialisation activities that are relevant to the local community. The social and educational development aims to prepare children for preschool, school and relationships within the wider community. Playgroups also provide an opportunity for families to support each other and share common experiences.

⁶⁸ Definitions taken from www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Resources/Handbook/Part1/Pages/2_7.aspx

Indigenous outside school hours care and enrichment programs

Indigenous outside school hours care and enrichment programs provide care for Indigenous school children and teenagers. Enrichment programs operate from a community venue and may provide supervised care, organised activities, homework centres and nutrition services.

Crèches (including JET crèches)

The crèche model provides a flexible form of child care where other forms of child care are not available. Crèches are centre-based and operate for flexible hours. Crèches offer culturally appropriate child care programs and provide families with an introduction to early learning and child care opportunities. These services foster individual children's strengths, abilities and interests by providing developmentally and culturally appropriate play and learning experiences.

Crèches established before 2008 are known as 'JET (Jobs, Education and Training) crèches', which were set up to assist eligible unemployed parents wanting to undertake study, work or job search activities to help them enter or re-enter the workforce. New services are known as 'crèches' as they will offer child care services to a broader group of clients.

Flexible/innovative services

Flexible/innovative child care services provide flexible early childhood education and care to families living in rural and remote communities with dispersed populations, where quality child care may not be available or is not suited to local circumstances. A flexible/innovative child care service may include OSHC, LDC, OCC, mobile multipurpose services, on-farm care, multi-sited child care, and overnight care.

The weeks, hours and days that the services operate are worked out in consultation with the parents who use the services.

Innovative services assist families and communities where conventional mainstream services do not meet their particular needs.

4. Playgroups

Both community playgroups and supported playgroups are available around Australia. Information is available about both playgroups and supported playgroups at:

www.playgroupaustralia.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=944CDC9D-E7F2-2F96-3A3AD7270350FF7D

Appendix 2

Summary Table: Early Childhood Education across Australia*

	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory	Australian Capital Territory	Australia
Estimated number of four year olds (2009–2010) ¹	90 000	66 700	58 600	18 700	28 700	6 400	3 500	4 500	277 100
Participation ROGS 2010 ²	61.4%	96.2%	25.5%	85.2%	101.3%	96.3%	82.8%	91.8%	69.5%
ROGS 2011 ³	57.1%	99.9%	23.4% ⁴	99.8%	89.4% ⁵	91.4% ⁶	83.3%	79.4%	68.4%
NP ECE 2009 Annual Report ⁷	81.1%	96.2%	32%	84.5% ⁸	Over 95%	96.5%	84.2%	94%	N/A
Fees⁹	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	N/A
Number of preschools¹⁰ (community, government, privately managed and non-government schools)	1 070 com'y = 751 govt = 100 private = 219	1 217 com'y = 892 govt = 220 private = 22 non-govt schools = 83	376 com'y = 339 govt = 30 private = 2 non-govt schools = 5	445 com'y = 20 govt = 425	849 (govt only)	226 govt = 164 non-govt schools = 62	121 govt = 117 non-govt schools = 4	69 govt = 60 non-govt schools = 9	4 373 com'y = 2 002 govt = 1 965 priv = 243 non-govt school = 163
Term used for year before formal school	Preschool	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Kindergarten, Preschool and Child Parent Centre	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Preschool	Preschool	N/A
Minimum starting age for school	Must turn 5 by 31 July	Must turn 5 by 30 April	Must turn 5 by 30 June	Continuous entry in the term after 5th bday	Must turn 5 by 30 June	Must turn 5 by 1 January	Must turn 5 by 30 June	Must turn 5 by 30 April	N/A
Average weekly hours of preschool operation 2009¹¹	12.6	11.8	13.7	11.1	11	11.8	12.9	13	N/A
Number of Long Day Care Services¹²	2392	1126	1324	296	465	104	66	113	5 886
LDC Services with early education program¹³	983	375	223	23	17	8	2	26	1 656

*Table updated February 2011.

	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory	Australian Capital Territory	Australia
Four year olds in early education program in LDC	17 552	4 393	3 343	369	181	79	19	449	26 385
Curriculum framework	YES (Birth to school entry)	YES (Birth to age 8) (VEYLDF)	YES (Prep to school entry. Draft pre-prep being trialled)	YES (Birth to Yr 12)	YES (K–Yr 12)	YES (Birth to age 16)	YES (3–5 yrs)	YES (P–Yr 10)	EYLF Implementation
Teacher qualification requirements in non-government services (Govt preschools generally require an early childhood teacher. Compulsory requirements for teachers in all ECEC services come in from 2014) ¹⁴	Required to employ degree qualified teachers when child numbers exceed 29 (NB: no requirement for teacher being the contact staff member).	No legislative requirements. Centres that employ an early childhood teacher to plan/deliver a preschool program are eligible for per four year old grant funding. ¹⁵	Kindergartens affiliated with C&K required to employ a university qualified early childhood registered teacher, who has responsibility for planning and delivering the program.	No legislative requirements to employ a teacher in a child care centre.	No legislative requirements to employ a teacher in a child care centre.	No legislative requirements to employ a teacher in a child care centre.	No legislative requirements to employ a teacher in a child care centre.	No legislative requirements to employ a teacher in a child care centre.	National Partnership on Early Childhood Education requires a university qualified teacher for preschool/ kindergarten programs by 2013.
Lead agency arrangements	Department of Human Services (Child care, licensing for all community based services and funding for community preschools) and Dept of Education and Training (funding for government run preschools).	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (both preschool and child care).	Office for Early Childhood Education, Department of Education and Training; reports to the Minister for Education and Training and the Arts.	Dept of Education and Children's Services (both preschool and child care) report to the Minister for Early Childhood Development.	Department for Communities (child care). Department of Education (preschool).	Department of Education (both preschool and child care).	Department of Education and Training (both preschool and child care).	Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (child care, licensing of private preschools). Department of Education and Training (preschool) reports to the Minister for Education.	Office of Early Childhood Education and Childcare, Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations.

Appendix 2 (continued)

Notes

- 1 Source: Productivity Commission (2011) *Report on Government Services* (RoGS) Table 3A.2.
- 2 Proportion of residential population using State Government funded and/or provided preschool services in the year before full time school. Source: 2010 RoGS Table 3A. Participation data is not directly comparable across states and includes double counting in some states.
- 3 Proportion of residential population using State Government funded and/or provided preschool services in the year before full time school. Source: 2011 RoGS Table 3A. Participation data is not directly comparable across states and includes double counting in some states.
- 4 Participation rates for QLD are low due to the change in schooling structure in 2007. DETA introduced a year of formal Pre-Year 1 schooling, called the Preparatory year.
- 5 The difference in figures for WA is due to possible double counting in the National Partnership on Early Childhood Education (NP ECE) Annual Report.
- 6 The difference in the NP ECE annual report data and RoGS is due to non government schools.
- 7 Each jurisdiction collects different data on enrolment and participation in government funded preschools, community, private, non-government, and long day care. There are a number of reasons for the variation between the ROGs data and the Annual Report data, including that the figures for NSW include some children attending preschool programs in Long Day Care Centres that do not receive State Government funding.
- 8 SA does not count play centres in their NP ECE annual reports, but they do in RoGS data and the Annual Report data.
- 9 Government preschools in WA, SA, TAS, ACT and NT are fee free with notional financial contribution by parents.
- 10 Numbers of preschool services reported in 2011 RoGS. Does not include all preschools located in non-government schools.
- 11 From 2009 Annual Reports on the NP ECE. Please note that the 2010 NP ECE Annual Report is not yet available.
- 12 Source – Number of Long Day Care centres by state is from *Child Care benefit- Quarterly Information Report, June quarter 2010*.
- 13 'Early Education Program' refers to preschool programs run in-house by a qualified early childhood teacher. A qualified early childhood teacher was defined in the 2006 Australian Government Child Care Census as including contact staff with a bachelor or higher level qualification in the field of early childhood teaching.
Please note that updated data from the 2010 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census will be made available shortly.
- 14 All jurisdictions are required to have a teacher by 2014 under the National Quality Framework.
- 15 In Victorian draft New Children's Services Regulations (released 21 January) there is a proposed requirement that all long day care centres to employ a degree qualified early childhood teacher, effective from 2014.

Appendix 3: Population of Indigenous Australians by state and territory

State/territory	Indigenous population living in a state or territory ^(a) (per cent) 2006	State or territory's total population that is Indigenous ^(a) (per cent) 2006	Population of state or territory ^(b) ('000) June 2010
New South Wales	28.7	2.2	7238.8
Victoria	6.0	0.6	5547.5
Queensland	28.3	3.6	4516.4
South Australia	5.0	1.7	1644.6
Western Australia	15.1	3.8	2296.4
Tasmania	3.3	3.4	507.6
Northern Territory	12.9	31.6	229.7
Australian Capital Territory	0.8	1.2	358.9
Australia	100		22 342.4

(a) From Table 1: Location of Indigenous peoples—by state and territory (2006) www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/statistics/index.html

(b) From www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/mf/3101.0

Appendix 4: Issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The following summary of current issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is based on *A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia* (available at www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/statistics/index.html). Note that it is not a complete reproduction of all the information contained there.

- The Indigenous population has a different age structure to the rest of the Australian population. In 2006, 38% of the Indigenous population were under 15 years of age compared with 19% of the non-Indigenous population; higher fertility rates.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are twice as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to report their health as fair or poor (2004–05).
- A life expectancy inequality gap of approximately 17 years between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian population, for the five-year period to 2002.
- Indigenous infant and child health is significantly poorer than that of non-Indigenous infants and children. Approximately twice as many low birth-weight infants were born to Indigenous women compared to those born to non-Indigenous women between 2001 and 2004.
- After significant reductions to the Indigenous infant mortality rate in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a levelling out of the rate in the mid 1990s. The decline is believed to have halted because of the generally poorer health of Indigenous mothers; their exposure to risk factors; and the poor state of health infrastructure in which infants were raised.
- In jurisdictions where the data is deemed reliable, for the period 2001 to 2005, the number of Indigenous infants who died before their first birthday was approximately two to three times that of non-Indigenous infants.
- Otitis media is a common childhood disease of the inner ear and easily treated. Untreated recurrence of chronic otitis media is often characterised by a perforated eardrum. In 2004–05, rates of otitis media were three times as high among Indigenous children aged birth to 14 years as non-Indigenous children. Otitis media can lead to hearing loss and even deafness, impacting on a child's ability to learn, and gain employment later in life.
- There is a much higher concentration of population in *Major cities* (69%) with less than 2% living in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas.
- Lower income—in the 2006 Census, the mean equivalised gross household income for Indigenous persons was \$460 per week, which amounted to 62% of the rate for non-Indigenous Australians (\$740 per week).
- Lower involvement in employment—nationally, 46% of all Indigenous peoples aged 15–64 years were not in the labour force in 2001. This figure dropped to 43% in 2006. In 2002, 27% of the non-Indigenous population in the same age group were not participating in the labour force, while in 2006 this figure dropped to 24%.
- Educational outcomes—between 2001 and 2006, the proportion of Indigenous peoples aged 15 years and over who had completed Year 12 increased from 20% to 23%. Non-Indigenous people were twice as likely as Indigenous peoples to have a non-school qualification in 2006 (53% compared with 26%). Non-Indigenous people were more than four times as likely to have a Bachelor Degree or above (21% compared with 5%) and twice as likely to have an Advanced Diploma or Diploma (9% compared with 4%).

Appendix 5: 'Universal Access' by jurisdiction

Unless otherwise indicated, the following information has been accessed directly from the websites of jurisdictions. It shows the diversity of approaches to delivery and promotion of universal access to preschool/ kindergarten across Australia. While this information was correct at the time of compilation in early 2011, readers should consult each state and territory website for the latest information on the implementation of 'universal access'.

Australian Capital Territory

(from www.mychild.gov.au)

How will Universal Access be implemented in the Australian Capital Territory by 2013?

Currently 88.3 per cent of eligible children are enrolled in preschool. The Australian Capital Territory has provided four new Early Childhood Schools offering 15 hours of preschool in 2009.

The Australian Capital Territory Government is also committed to:

- increasing hours in Government preschools from 12 to 15 from 2011-2013
- improving the capacity of existing infrastructure
- providing eight additional preschools that will offer 15 hours in 2010
- increasing the number of four year university trained early childhood teachers by 35 per cent
- examining service integration and support.

New South Wales

(from http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for_agencies_that_work_with_us/childrens_services/about_the_preschool_investment_and_reform_plan.html)

NSW-Commonwealth agreement on early childhood education

The COAG National Partnership on Early Childhood Education provides new funds to NSW to achieve universal access to early childhood education in the year before school by 2013.

This new funding is being used to boost preschool funding and reform in NSW. From July 2009, \$21.3 million is being invested in community preschools in NSW and since July, 87 per cent of NSW preschools have received increased funding.

Growth phase

In 2009 the Growth Phase begins and an additional \$29.8 million per annum will be provided as recurrent funding to enable expansion of preschool programs throughout the children's services sector.

The Growth Phase aims to create 5,250 new preschool places so that an additional 10,500 children can attend preschool for two days per week in the year before they go to school.

Northern Territory

(from <http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community/schooling/stages-of-schooling/early-years>)

Early years

The early years of a child's life have an enormous impact on their health, wellbeing and lifelong learning, which is why it's so important that children have access to quality preschool and early care learning programs.

The department is committed to ensuring that every child is able to attend quality early childhood programs. An example is our mobile preschools which travel to some remote communities with qualified staff who work with local staff to deliver quality preschool programs.

In the Northern Territory, school is compulsory from the age of six. The Northern Territory Curriculum Framework forms the basis of learning programs from Transition onwards.

From 2010, children will enter Transition at the start of the school year. Children who have their 4th birthday before 30 June will start preschool, and children who have their 5th birthday before 30 June will start in Transition at school.

From mychild.gov.au

Currently 89 per cent of eligible children are enrolled in preschool. The Northern Territory Government is committed to:

- increasing preschool participation by developing a territory wide plan for preschool delivery by July 2010, with a focus on small remote communities and town camps
- increasing the number of four year university trained teachers through incentives to upgrade qualifications
- increasing the available hours for attending a preschool program from 12 to 15 hours per week, for 40 weeks a year from January 2012.

Queensland

(from <http://education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/national/access.html>)

Universal access to early childhood education

Under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, the federal, state and territory governments have committed to ensuring that all children will have access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013, delivered by a four-year university-trained early childhood teacher for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks per year in the year before formal schooling. Children aged at least four by June 30 can attend kindergarten from the start of that year.

There is a specific focus on ensuring quality early education is available to disadvantaged children, especially Indigenous children, including those who live in remote communities.

To achieve this, the Queensland Government has committed to:

- establishing up to 240 kindergarten services in areas where they are most needed
- implementing a new kindergarten funding scheme for programs delivered in a variety of early childhood education and care settings including long day care
- developing innovative ways to provide a kindergarten program that meets the needs of families and children living in rural and remote locations
- providing support for Indigenous children and children with additional needs participating in kindergarten programs
- implementing workforce strategies to assist the sector in attracting and retaining the necessary early childhood education and care workforce including a focus on early childhood teachers
- developing Queensland's guideline for quality kindergarten learning programs which sets clear expectations about what children need to learn and the standards to be achieved.

South Australia

(from <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/childrensservices/pages/earlychildhoodreform/universalaccess/?reFlag=1>)

How the Department of Education & Children's Services will increase enrolment and attendance at Preschool

The South Australian Government will use three methods:

1. Children attending Department of Education & Children's Services (DECS) funded preschools will have their hours per week increased from 11 to 15. This will be phased in over the period 2010–2013.
2. The Department of Education & Children's Services (DECS) will enter into partnerships with the non-government school sector and with child care providers to provide more preschool places in their services.
3. The Department of Education & Children's Services (DECS) will consult with interested groups to develop some new ways to provide preschool places for children who find it difficult to attend a preschool program. Examples are: children with severe and multiple disabilities and children living in isolated areas.

Tasmania

(from <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/dept/strategies/national-partnerships/early>)

National Partnership on Early Childhood Education

Under this Council of Australian Government (COAG) National Partnership Agreement, the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments have committed to ensuring that all children will have access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013, delivered by a four-year university-trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling. In Tasmania this will be delivered in all government and non-schools and child care services registered as schools.

Bilateral Agreements with State and Territory governments specify the actions and strategies to be undertaken by each jurisdiction to achieve universal access and detail the performance benchmarks each state has committed to achieving, including participation rates (including for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and Indigenous children), hours, teachers and cost.

Victoria

(from: www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/universalaccess/default.htm)

Universal access to early childhood education

All states and territories have committed to moving to 15 hours of early childhood education for children in the year before school through a National Partnership on Early Childhood Education with the Commonwealth Government, to be implemented by 2013. For details of the Agreement, see Early Childhood Education National Partnership.

The National Partnership was signed in December 2008 with the aim that:

- By 2013 every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling
- The preschool program is to be delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with a national early years learning framework, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year
- The program will be accessible across a diversity of settings, in a form that meets the needs of parents and in a manner that ensures cost does not present a barrier to access.

The commitment to 15 hours a week, 40 weeks per year can be interpreted as a requirement for a minimum of 600 program hours in total over the year. For example, a service may alternate the hours offered over 2 weeks (12 hours one week and 18 hours the next), or provide a slightly different number of hours every week for a set number of weeks per year that would be equivalent to 600 program hours (such as 12.5 hours per week for 48 weeks per year or 16 hours per week for 38 weeks per year).

Innovation—Trialling new approaches

Innovative models of 15 hours of early childhood education program delivery will be trialled. Models providing wrap-around care through access to the approved Child Care Benefit (CCB) in stand-alone kindergartens will be trialled jointly with the Commonwealth to provide a national evidence base, available for application in all jurisdictions, for the implementation of universal access in subsequent years of reform. Discussions between Victoria and the Commonwealth are continuing with the aim that the trials will commence in 2012.

The models will inform the state-wide roll-out of universal access in 2013. Further information will be provided as the models are developed.

Frequently asked questions at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/universalaccess/universal-access-faq.pdf>

Western Australia

(from http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/ece/docs/DE30062_Early_Child_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

Increasing Kindergarten to 15 hours a week – Why are Kindergarten hours being increased to 15 hours a week?

To make sure children have the best start to learning, the WA Government has signed an agreement with all other states/territories and the Australian Government to increase Kindergarten hours from 11 to 15 hours a week. A child's learning experiences in the early years of life greatly affect how they learn and develop in the future. This is why early childhood education has become a priority across Australia. Increasing Kindergarten hours means children have more time to learn important skills such as literacy and numeracy and to develop socially and emotionally. It may also make it easier for children as they go to full-time school.

How will the increase to hours be implemented in Western Australia?

The increase in Kindergarten hours is for public and private schools. Certain schools have been selected to begin increasing hours in 2010, with others scheduled to follow. Find out when your school is increasing Kindergarten hours Western Australia's public schools already offer Kindergarten for four half day sessions a week which works out to around 11 hours a week. For most schools, the increase in hours will add a half day session each week. Schools will make the change in different ways to best meet the needs of their communities.

What other changes are happening?

The increase to 15 hours a week in Kindergarten is one of a number of changes over the next four years. Currently, children may miss out on a place at their local public school if there have been too many applications for the number of places available. Steps are now being taken towards making sure children can access a place in Kindergarten at their local public school from 2013. Until then, normal enrolment procedures apply. We are also making sure all families are supported and encouraged to send their children to Kindergarten, particularly Aboriginal children, children from non-English speaking backgrounds and children with special educational needs.

Appendix 6: Examples of additional government funding

This appendix provides a very general overview only, particularly of pre-school funding and support, which varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and early childhood intervention services and parenting and other supports where there is a considerable diversity of programs around the country.

1. Supporting Commonwealth approved ECEC services

Inclusion Support Subsidy (Commonwealth)—

The Inclusion Support Program assists child care services to include children with additional needs in child care. Under the Program, 67 regionally based Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) manage networks of skilled Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) to work at a local level with child care services. ISFs assist child care services to build their skill base and capacity to include children with additional needs. The target groups for inclusion support are:

- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including children from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background
- children with ongoing high support needs, including children with a disability
- Indigenous children.

More information at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Programs/ChildCareforServices/SupportFamilyCCS/Pages/InclusionSupportProgram.aspx#inclusion_support

Support for professional practice (Commonwealth)—

Through state and territory based Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs) and Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs), the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) ensures that all Australian Government approved child care services, regardless of geographic location, have access to quality professional development and support.

More information is at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Programs/ChildCareforServices/SupportFamilyCCS/Pages/InclusionSupportProgram.aspx#professional_support

2. Supporting preschools

States and territories have different funding arrangements for preschools as is shown in the following extract:

‘Expenditure per student varies considerably between the states. As the Commonwealth Grants Commission has noted, the numbers of students and the costs and number of resources provided to each student are only two factors affecting expenditure. The number of students with special needs—Indigenous, LBOTE, students with disabilities, remote and students from families of low socio-economic status—cost more to educate. Policy decisions—such as hours of attendance, number of places for younger children, fees, and proportion and uptake of private preschool services—also affect costs.’

State and territory government expenditure on preschool services, 2006–07 (\$'000)

NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
122 368	118 233	99 013	57 851	79 811	21 571	19 988	21 811	Total: 540 646
Expense per student (\$)								
1868	1989	1556	2263	3770	3599	5630	6666	Average: 2179

Sources: 'Children's services – attachment', *Report on Government Services 2008*, Table 3A.5; 'Preschool education' in *Commonwealth Grants Commission, Report on State Revenue Sharing Relativities: 2008 Update: Working Papers*, vol. 3, p. 3; (Harrington, 2008)

3. Early Childhood Intervention

—the process of providing specialised support and services for infants and young children with developmental delays or disabilities, and their families, in order to promote development, well-being and community participation (Early Childhood Intervention Australia – www.ecia.org.au/about.htm).

States and territories and the Commonwealth are all active in this area. The states and territories have different programs, but typically (and to varying extents) they fund early childhood intervention programs to give individual support to children and families, deliver programs such as playgroups or preschool, and support inclusion into a mainstream ECEC service.

One example of a state-based approach is that of the Victorian Government, see www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/intervention

Queensland's early intervention manual is at www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/disability/support-services/providers/service-initiatives/documents/early-intervention-manual.pdf

The Commonwealth provides funds through the *Better Start for Children with Disability (Better Start)* initiative which aims to assist eligible children with designated developmental disabilities to access funding for early treatment, diagnostic and management services. See www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/progserv/people/Pages/early_intervention_better_start.aspx

The national peak organisation is Early Childhood Intervention Australia, see www.ecia.org.au/index.htm. It has chapters in each state and territory. A good overview of early childhood intervention in New South Wales is at <http://www.ecia-nsw.org.au/faq.php>

4. Parenting support, and supporting vulnerable children and families in the community

There is a diversity of programs and organisations offering this support, and governments are active in this area as funders and in some cases as providers. In addition to those previously mentioned in the paper, examples of programs follow.

Through the Looking Glass—A Community Partnership in Parenting is a Commonwealth-funded joint health, education and welfare collaboration that uses nominated early childhood services to assist families where there is an identified difficulty in the attachment relationship between the parent and child/children.

www.gowrie-adelaide.com.au/cms/?q=node/19

Brighter Futures NSW is the NSW government's program of early intervention for vulnerable children.

www.community.nsw.gov.au/for_agencies_that_work_with_us/early_intervention_services.html

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program targeting families with young children. www.hippyaustralia.org.au

Appendix 7: Some stories from the sector

These are provided to illustrate both the potential and the challenges for mainstream (or universal) ECEC services in working with vulnerable children. They also illustrate the variation both in capacity among services and the supports and resources available to them in different locations/jurisdictions. Note that no real names have been used.

1. From a Professional Support Coordination service—about a long day care centre in a capital city

The brief story below is a good news story about a privately owned service located in a low socioeconomic area with high unemployment and a large amount of assisted government housing and a high number of single-parent families. This service is empowering vulnerable families to make positive choices in relation to healthy eating, to support children's overall health and wellbeing. A number of strategies have been included that are sensitive to families' situations. The service is also aware that many children may not have access to daily fresh fruit and vegetables and role modelling through planting, growing and harvesting from the service's own garden has provided families with some great ideas of including their children in making positive decisions about what to eat.

The director has also engaged successfully with the broader community. Educators regularly engage in walking excursions to the local plant nursery. This has been an opportunity to extend children's understanding of health and wellbeing, through discussions on how vegetables and fruit grow. This commitment to positive role modelling extended to the service seeking donations from a local hardware supplier—garden beds, soil and plants. Each month, vegetables are harvested, a small number of children are taken to the supermarket to buy additional ingredients and lunch is cooked at the service. Recipes are then distributed to families.

The children at the service (from all rooms) eat together on this day and educators have found it a very powerful experience with many positive behavioural outcomes noticed. Children are much calmer, engaged in conversations with the educators and their peers, and eat heartily with lots of discussion about the vegetables they have helped to grow. Families are starting to take an interest and trying the recipes at home.

The Director has requested that families put only water or milk in children's drink bottles. This strategy has been very successful and has also supported families with information on different healthy choices for lunch boxes. Sweets have been sent home and this is decreasing as families are coming on board with healthy eating strategies.

The service attended an information session on the AEDI and as a result has undertaken an action research project. The information has also supported the service to make funding submissions:

- for a new kitchen, to meet council standards, with the hope of providing cooked lunches more regularly
- to purchase a 'people mover' so they can collect those children unable to attend child care due to transport not being available. The service also envisages this vehicle being used by other organisations in the community to transport vulnerable families to medical appointments etc. The opportunities are endless.

2. From the director of a 40-place long day care centre in a regional area

This centre is licensed for 4 children, birth to two years; 12 two to three year old children; and 24 three to five year old children. The director (a very experienced degree-qualified early childhood teacher) is 'non teaching'; there is another degree-qualified early childhood teacher, five Diploma-qualified staff and two staff with Certificate III. The centre is functioning well above mandated minimum requirements. There is no Early Learning and Care Centre planned for the area, but under the NP IECDC there will be a Children and Family Centre established in a town 90 kilometres away.

- *Ashlee, a single parent with five children, has been with the service for seven years. During this time, the service has supported her through hard times and periods of alcohol abuse. Her youngest child is still in child care and Ashlee is on the 'JET' program and studying. Her older children attend vacation care and after school care now at another provider.*
- *Verity is a single mother with mental health problems. She had left all family and other supports in the city to escape domestic violence. We enrolled her baby (ten months) under an 'emergency placement' until he could be absorbed into regular numbers. Her son is now almost four. She and her son are settled, family come to visit, her health is under control through medication, she has made a network of friends through the centre and is in her second year of university.*
- *Scott is a single dad with a four-year-old daughter. The child's mother has mental health issues and, depending on her medication, has good and bad days/weeks. As there was a shortage of places and personnel to provide supervised access, once her medication was under control the service provided this access once a week for the mother and daughter to connect.*
- *Michael, almost three years old and the youngest of three children, was enrolled in the centre part time, when his mother decided to go back to study as well as 'do the books' for her husband's business. During this time the parents separated. Subsequently, the mother was killed in a car accident; the car driven by the father. Michael continued at the centre as he lived with his father and siblings for several weeks until the father was charged and later incarcerated for murder. The maternal grandparents continued Michael's enrolment at the centre until he began formal schooling.*

This director doubts that many other ECEC services in the area would be able to successfully engage with and support these families. She judges that the factors that make a difference for her service include:

- Her own status as a 'non-teaching' degree-qualified and experienced director, which gives her time and skill to engage with families, with other support organisations in the community, and in a leadership role with her own staff. (In many ECEC services, the director is included as one of the 'contact' staff to meet mandated numbers and may be Diploma qualified and/or inexperienced).
- The well-established vision, values and culture of the service mean that it is committed to being more than a 'children's program' (compared with services where staff are judgemental of families; staff don't see engaging with families/other support services as part of their role; and are not skilled and/or resourced to do this).
- The centre's view of children as individuals, seeking to understand them and their behaviour and to build positive relationships and provide engaging programs and activities for them that are underpinned by strong pedagogy (compared with services where children are 'blamed' for disruptive behaviour; where the program does not engage them and there are unreasonable expectations of compliant behaviour; and where pressure from staff and/or other families results in children being excluded from the service).

3. Some stories from integrated child and family centres

- *'A' was born to parents who came to Australia from Afghanistan, her family are a minority group targeted by majority groups. They have experienced massacres, prejudices and lived in fear. When 'A' was three years old and her baby sister just months old, her father (who was working very hard to establish a good life for his family in Australia) was injured at work. Since then, he has endured constant pain, three operations and struggles with depression.*

Through contact with the Community Development Coordinator playgroup program, 'A' was linked into preschool at age three and a half as English was an additional language. At four and a half she is successful in two languages, and presents as a happy, confident and successful child. Her mother is now attending English classes at the centre.

- *'B' is the fourth of five children born to non-hearing parents. Eighteen months ago he was presenting as a child with global developmental delay. He has attended playgroup twice weekly with his parents. The state's early intervention program has worked with 'B' and his family, and advocated the importance of preschool to his family. Now as a four year old, 'B' has almost caught up across the developmental domains, attends his preschool program regularly and has additional help with speech and language. He is being taught Auslan as his second language so he can communicate with his parents.*
- *'C'—One of the family home visiting nurses asked for some advice about a Libyan family who arrived in Australia approximately nine months ago. The family has a young baby, plus a three-year-old daughter, 'C'. The nurse had significant concerns regarding 'C's' behaviour and was concerned that the mother was experiencing significant social isolation. She described 'C' as presenting as very angry, and she wondered whether a referral to the relevant mental health service might be appropriate.*

The nurse arranged for the family to visit the children's centre with an interpreter, and I was able to meet the family. My assessment was that the little girl was experiencing normal grief and loss issues and that increased interaction with other children, plus time, would allow the little girl to adjust to her new circumstances.

But the really wonderful part of the story is that whilst the mother and children were visiting the centre, another mother and child who spoke Arabic were also attending the centre. The two mothers were able to converse in their native language and the little girl had a playmate who also spoke her language. It was heart-warming to see this little girl squealing with delight as she played and explored this wonderful centre. Today, the mother and children are attending the Save the Children multicultural playgroup, and again the little girl is smiling and happy—as is the mum.

I think this demonstrates in a really powerful way what amazing places children's centres are, and the opportunities that they provide for families to connect with each other, whilst having staff who can also assist families that may require some additional support.

I believe it also demonstrates how invaluable it is to have a multidisciplinary team that collaborates so well together. The health staff here are fantastic and we all have a common passion for the families in our community.

4. One story from two perspectives—the Inclusion Support Agency and the ECEC service

(a) From the local Inclusion Support Agency (ISA)

An ECEC service is receiving ongoing support from an ISA team in working with a child from a family with a background of drug and alcohol addiction. There have been several child protection reports.

The service currently works with increased staff–child ratios and chooses to do this to support high-quality outcomes for all children. Although the educators within the room are highly qualified (university degree) there are many challenges from the particular child ('Mary') on a daily basis that include:

- physical abuse to educators and other children
- swearing
- drugs being referred to in conversations
- oppositional behaviour.

Educators are trying different strategies with the support of the Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF) but are finding working within the room extremely difficult. This service currently has a high-quality rating and incorporates many specific strategies to support high-quality outcomes for children, but it struggles in this situation.

It is difficult to access inclusion support funding as there is no diagnosis—'just behavioural'. Feedback to the ISF from some educators at the service is that their own families are encouraging them to leave their employment due to the ongoing stress of the situation. The service has no plans to 'expel' the child but is also in a very difficult situation of providing the support the child requires and support for the educators working with the child.

If the child attended another service, there is indeed a high likelihood that the child would have been expelled before now. This service is seeking support through referral to early intervention services.

The child care sector does have highly vulnerable children in care but with limited resources and lacking suitably qualified personnel to support this. The Inclusion Support Subsidy also is limited as it is linked to a diagnosis and ignores vulnerable children for whom a suitable diagnosis is not available.

(b) The ECEC service—from the director of the long day care centre in a regional area

The following is about a little girl who has just turned four. Her mother died some time ago and she is in the care of her grandmother, who has deteriorating health problems of her own. ‘Mary’ has attended this centre three days per week for two years.

Mary has no reciprocated friendships despite attending the centre with the same children for an extended period. She stutters at times, making interactions more difficult, and displays a high level of physical and verbal aggression towards her peers and educators. She will be playing calmly, then without any noticeable trigger or a very minor trigger (e.g. an educator speaks to another child) she will hit out or throw items. These instances of aggression often escalate despite experienced educators attempting to distract, redirect and/or calm Mary, and she requires one-to-one support in order to sustain play or participate in a group for longer than two to three minutes.

Because of this need for additional support in the ECEC program, we have sought Inclusion Support Subsidy funding (funding support to hire an additional worker for approved hours). For this, it is necessary to have a diagnosis from a doctor and after a lot of negotiation an interim diagnosis was obtained. The paediatrician stated that he thought it was likely that Mary had been adversely affected by drugs while in utero. However, at the last visit to the paediatrician he did not indicate that he was prepared to give a definite diagnosis. This means that we will lose the 5 hours x 3 days funding for the additional worker we have currently.

Educators have now indicated that they do not feel able to provide care for Mary without an additional support person in the room. That will put us in the position of withdrawing care, not something I am comfortable doing, or meeting the financial cost of the additional worker for 15 hours per week ourselves.

In addition, we have had a request to provide care for a child with a diagnosis of autism on a day that Mary attends care. I have had a discussion with this child's mother and explained that under current funding arrangements we are expected to use the one additional worker to support us in working with two or more children with additional needs. At best, we could hope for funding to cover two additional hours. I was in the position of having to say that I did not think that we could meet her child's needs adequately under these circumstances.

5. Vulnerable children and ‘the system’—from an experienced ECA colleague

Accessing Child Care Benefit—Centrelink issues

Some families will not connect with Centrelink and therefore will not access Child Care Benefit (CCB). Their reasons include:

- Aboriginal grandparents who do not have the child they are caring for connected to their Centrelink file
- Those who are disenfranchised from society and their community steer clear of Centrelink, i.e. will not fill out forms and cannot meet reporting requirements of Centrelink
- Phone access—length of calls on mobile phones and lack of financial ability to pay for long calls
- Young Aboriginal mothers have reported that Centrelink offices are confronting, e.g. standing in a queue, being visible and feeling shame
- Parents and grandparents coming in with [state government department] social worker, who supports child's enrolment. Centrelink is not in place and no arrangements have been made for CCB or Special CCB. Sometimes [state government department] pays up front and sometimes they rely on parent to pay, or centre has to wait for Centrelink and CCB, although this may not happen.

Often when centre staff encourage parents to register, or to pay, family will leave. Example:

- 23-year-old mother with three children; eldest is seven years old. The two eldest children attended five days a week child care and preschool for at least two years prior to school. The children were eligible for preschool-funded services but their mother did not want to be involved with Centrelink and therefore the centre did not get any funding for the additional ‘child care’ hours. During this period, the children's nutrition, health and wellbeing improved. Children were positive about participating and now never miss a day of schooling.

The centre was unable to continue to provide care at no cost for the third child, due to financial constraints. The child is now four. During the last year, he has spent time with his mother in a domestic violence centre and a low security prison. The child is now attending preschool and has severe behavioural and health issues, including severe irritable bowel syndrome. His health needs impact on anyone who is

taking care of him. His mother has attempted suicide and is under supervised care. His grandmother now has the child and is only prepared to have him in the centre if he attends for five full days (i.e. school hours). The centre has determined that for the best interests of the child they will wear the cost again.

CCB

Systems can end up punishing and excluding those children who would most benefit from participating in high-quality ECEC service, for example:

- Inability to get immunisation by a specific date means the CCB removed and parents are not informed about the process before the CCB is removed
- Parents have been accepted as having their child back under their care and grandparents lose their grandparenting CCB

Special CCB

First '13 weeks' process has improved and centres can provide child care without excessive forms and clarification.

Burden of proof for second Special CCB is onerous and calls for very specific information that may not be readily available, e.g. regarding unemployment, financial hardship, mental health issues.

There needs to be a system for ongoing Special CCB for families experiencing ongoing issues. Examples:

- A mother with seven children whose husband returned her to a capital city to be closer to her family (who are not supportive) and then he left. The mother developed mental health issues and anorexia. She was not deemed eligible for third Special CCB allocation as she was seen as having continuing issues rather episodic.
- 23-year-old mother with five children, with two of the children in the paternal grandparents' custodial care. She had separated from her partner. Both have had periods in jail. Both have lost jobs, have no car (can't afford car registration) and rely on public transport. The mother has had access to Special CCB but is no longer deemed eligible as she was seen as having continuing issues rather episodic.

She has had to cut back time using child care to try and manage financial situation. The children are now hungry and unwell and the mother is displaying severe distress and this is impacting on her relationship with her children and her partner.

From another experienced ECEC service director regarding Special CCB:

Affordability and the system are two real barriers to many Aboriginal families accessing mainstream children's services.

We have enrolled many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families over the years. They have usually come on referral but after the first 13 weeks of Special CCB has finished, the attendance drops off as they are asked to contribute to the fees. Our service has an Aboriginal worker, and we are well known in our community, but the fees are the biggest barrier.

If we are serious about increasing enrolments for these children, this is a matter for government to fund—maybe like JET or grandparent CCB.

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