



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

**OUR
VISION:
EVERY
YOUNG
CHILD IS
THRIVING
AND
LEARNING**

Jobs and Skills Australia: Draft Core Skills Occupation List

Early Childhood Australia Submission

29 May 2024

About us

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation that was first incorporated in 1938. As the national peak body for young children, we work nationally and locally, with active State and Territory Committees in each Australian jurisdiction and a National Board of Directors.

Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school. Our work builds the capacity of our society and the early childhood sector to realise the potential of every child during the critical early years from birth to the age of eight. ECA is highly respected as a trusted voice and partners regularly with service providers, universities and training providers and we have the reach to engage all service and provider types.

ECA acknowledges the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our society, the past and current injustices and realities for them across Australia, and the enduring strength of their cultures and identities. We commit to being at the forefront of achieving a reconciled nation that values, respects and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being.

Find out more at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

Early Childhood Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) recognises and appreciates our ongoing relationship with the Department for Home Affairs and Jobs and Skills Australia, through written submissions and regular meetings to ensure early childhood educators and teachers are considered as part of the broader migration strategies. Similarly, we see a well-conceived strategy to attract and retain skilled early childhood education and care teachers and educators, many of whom are migrants, as critically important to overcome the well-documented gaps in our sector. We pride ourselves on a rich and diverse workforce to ensure every child has their needs met.

ECA consulted state and territory committees in relation to the Jobs and Skills Australia draft *Core Occupation Skills Occupation List*, released for consultation. The sector highlighted particular challenges they currently face with employees and Visas:

1. TSMIT (Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold) is a minimum salary requirement for employers sponsoring overseas workers on a 482 visa. Effective from July 1, 2023, the TSMIT threshold increased from \$53,900 to \$70,000. Owing to the well-documented concerns over the wages of the early childhood workforce, this means that many early childhood teachers and educators are not eligible to work within the new threshold. This caused significant impact on consistency, relationships for children and their families, an increased burden on other staff and the quality outcomes of care and learning that can be provided. In some cases, leadership has had to fill in to meet staffing requirements.
2. The inequity in the role types that are eligible for exemptions and listed in the 'On', 'Off' and 'For Consultation' lists: For instance, Early Childhood Teacher is included, but 'Child Care Centre Manager' is excluded, while 'Child Care Worker' and 'Out of School Hours Care Worker' are listed for targeted consultation.
3. The DAMA II Visa is a time consuming and expensive process and particular jurisdictions are disadvantaged through the lack of a nationally-consistent process.

Concurrently, ECA are undertaking significant consultation and engagement with members regarding national processes for workforce and teacher registration in the early childhood sector, which can inform broader change.

ECA remain cognisant of the need to increase the supply of early childhood teachers and educators is in tension with the imperative of ensuring that qualifications maintain a high standard and quality of teacher practice. According to our member feedback, current challenges with the current Visa restrictions for early childhood employees include:

- *most visa holders will choose to work under casual employment conditions, rather than opting for full-time or even permanent hours;*
- *due to the changes to regional and city requirements on Visas that was introduced at the start of the year, this has seen many of our visa holding employees move back to the larger states, thus disadvantaging smaller jurisdictions.*

In jurisdictions such as the Northern Territory and Tasmania, international students are a particularly important part of the economy and future workforce, both when they are studying and once qualified.

The following examples have been provided to elucidate the real-life impact of the system as it is currently:

Educator: "S"

Country of origin: Sri Lanka

Visa status: S had been in Australia, and Tasmania for a number of years on of different Visa types.

Age: over 45 years

Role in organisation: Room Leader

Educator S was employed with Discovery Early Learning Centres for over 3 years, S was a Montessori trained Qualified Educator who was working as a Room Leader. She was a highly valued and respected member of our team.

S faced two primary barriers to obtaining a medium-to-long-term visa, which were that (1) she was above 45 years old and (2) did not have a positive skills assessment as a "Child Care Worker".

S's occupation of "Child Care Worker" can only be for the subclass 494 visa. Under law, to be able to apply for the subclass 494, S **must** (1) be under 45 years old, and (2) hold a positive skills assessment; at the time she submits her visa application.

As S was a valued employee Discovery sought legal advice and a quote for support with:

1. the preparation, negotiation and submission of a Labour Agreement request

2. the preparation and lodgement of the following:

2.1. Standard Business Sponsorship application

2.2. Employer nomination application of S

2.3. Subclass 494 Visa Application for S as the primary applicant and her children

An employer sponsored visa and the Labor agreement was quoted to the organisation at approximately \$6,000.00 and a cost to S of \$8,500.00. Neither party proceeded as the costs were prohibitive for all.

S sadly left the organisation and the sector in December 2023. She then gained employment in aged care and is studying her Certificate 3 in aged care.

As a provider of early childhood education and care services (ECECs) in the ACT, Rainbow Circle* have made a commitment to sponsor no less than one temporary resident, early childhood educator or teacher per centre. They are a large and growing provider with six ECECs in the ACT and one in NSW.

At one of their ECECs, they employed an Early Childhood Teacher (ECT). This connection was facilitated by a migration agency, but due to the visa class, the provider of the ECEC was required to pay a \$10,000 fee. Fortunately, the provider has a few months before they need to commit to this payment and has since investigated another visa. The alternative is that the ECT pays a \$15,000 fee, which they cannot afford. Currently, Rainbow Circle are waiting for another migration agency quote.

While the service desperately needs early childhood teachers and educators, it is a complex and expensive arrangement for both the employer and employee. This situation reflects what the rest of the early childhood profession is experiencing. Put simply, a payment of \$10,000 means that fewer early childhood educators and teachers can be employed by the provider. Preference would be to invest their money into further training their employees and/or increasing their salary rather than paying a migration agency.

The ECT has had their qualifications recognised to work by ACECQA, and their supervisor reports that they are doing an amazing job, not only working directly with children but also enhancing the culture of the centre. They are so grateful to have been sponsored, seeing it as an opportunity to engage in her chosen profession, develop connections within the community and share their diverse expertise. The supervisor has shared that the ECT demonstrates loyalty, innovation and commitment. The ECT promotes the values of the service and assists with additional leadership skills like reviewing the service philosophy and Quality Improvement Plan. An additional outcome has been that the ECT is able to coach other educators due to their experience and engagement in an early childhood degree that was completed outside of Australia.

Significant challenges within this example include:

- *Educators and teachers haven't passed probation when the payment is due. This is a risk, if for example, the employee doesn't match with the service philosophy and values*
- *Timing is a big consideration. End of financial year pressures can be complex to manage.*

If we don't untie these knots, the early childhood sector will miss out on these much-needed professionals. They bring a different perspective and purpose to their employment and, most importantly, enhance outcomes for all children in our communities.

Professions within the early childhood education and care are on the “targeted for consultation list”. ECA has previously provided advice to the ABS on language changes for the occupations listed below, specifically that we refer to occupation roles as:

- Early Childhood Educators
- Family Day Care Educators
- Outside School Hours Educators
- Early Childhood Teachers
- Early Childhood Education Leaders
- Early Childhood Service Managers

Language is important for the professionalism of the sector and we refer you to our publication [‘How to talk about early childhood education and care’](#) for further guidance.

ECA are aware that comparable issues exist within the aged care sector and their solution had been to seek an exemption through an Industry Labour Agreement. Within early childhood, there are industry and union agreements currently being reviewed, with a wages decision due by the Fair Work Commission expected in June, that will impact on labour agreements.

ECA are clear that improvements in pay and conditions for the ECEC sector are essential and support the process of multi-employer bargaining as a mechanism to achieve this. Hence, we support waiting for the outcome of these negotiations and then that the Federal Government engage with employers, an industry-based union and key stakeholders to discuss future migrant workforce arrangements for the early childhood education and care sector.

In addition, ECA understands further consultation is planned by HumanAbility to understand the unique needs of the early childhood sector. We welcome this process and will support it however we can. ECA are also interested in advocating for the sector in relation to any changes to accepting international students.

ECA are of the view that overseas applicants on the CSOL should have their overseas qualifications assessed as equivalent via ACECQA. It would be useful to know how many overseas applications have been processed by ACECQA as an indicator to the number of ECTs engaged in Australia via the CSOL.

Finally, ECA would like to ensure that support for migrant educators, including training on First Nations cultures and Australia’s approved learning frameworks, is an essential step to build the capability of many new graduate Early Childhood Teachers and educators to successfully perform their roles. Anecdotally, we have heard that many new graduates have an undergraduate degree in another discipline, often from overseas. Subsequently, they complete a Graduate Diploma (EC) or Master of Teaching qualification in Australia and are then eligible to register as an ECT. However, many of these graduates are not 'work ready' to move into an ECT role. The additional cost of recruitment, induction, onboarding and training in qualifications has been significant for services. Support to gain more practical experience and confidence, as well as additional training, are critical to setting them up for success in Australian early childhood settings.

Should you require further input or discussion, we would be happy to meet to elaborate on this submission.

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