
Recommendations and findings

Chapter 3 Government involvement in the early childhood development sector

RECOMMENDATION 3.1

To assist parents' decision making with respect to their choice of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for their children, governments should require ECEC regulators to publish all relevant information on service quality. Published information should be comprehensive, comparable across services, clearly explained and easy to access.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2

ECEC regulators should publish the number of service waivers granted, to whom they have been granted, and whether they are permanent or temporary.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3

ECEC regulators should provide for ongoing consultation with stakeholders and timely dissemination of best practice. Governments should ensure that ECEC regulators establish effective ongoing evaluative processes so that regulatory burdens are identified and minimised.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4

Where voluntary committees currently manage ECEC services, governments should ensure that professional management support (such as shared management services) is readily available to assist with management and leadership.

RECOMMENDATION 3.5

In implementing the National Quality Standard, governments should ensure adequate resourcing for regulators to enable appropriate training of their staff in the new regulatory arrangements and their effective implementation.

FINDING 3.1

Market pressures alone are unlikely to lead to the provision of quality early childhood development (ECD) services. An appropriate regulatory system aimed at quality improvement and assurance is required.

FINDING 3.2

Though the implementation of the universal aspects of the ECD policy agenda will be costly overall, the targeting of relatively small additional amounts of funding to certain aspects of the ECD workforce would deliver substantial additional benefits to the community.

RECOMMENDATION 3.6

Cost increases across the ECEC sector are expected as a result of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) ECEC reforms. To ensure these cost increases do not reduce access to ECEC services by low-income families, governments should consider alternative structures for childcare subsidies that improve the targeting of childcare assistance.

FINDING 3.3

The anticipated increase in ECEC fees borne by parents (under existing funding arrangements) is likely to reduce demand for some ECEC services. Some parents may choose not to return to the workforce or to work shorter hours in order to care for children at home, thus reducing workforce participation.

Chapter 4 The early childhood education and care workforce

FINDING 4.1

There are a number of impediments that restrain growth in the wages of the early childhood education and care workforce, causing them to be unresponsive to demand and rigid around the levels set by industrial awards. Many of these impediments also limit productivity growth for the early childhood education and care workforce, and may explain ongoing difficulties faced by some employers in recruiting and retaining staff.

Chapter 5 The preschool, long day care and occasional care workforce

RECOMMENDATION 5.1

To assist in the transition to the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, governments should permit any 3-year-qualified teachers returning to or entering the workforce to deliver the preschool program, provided a plan is in place for them to upgrade their qualification to the equivalent of a 4-year degree.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2

A review of the decision to exempt occasional care from the National Quality Framework is scheduled for 2014. This review should involve a careful consideration of the full costs and benefits of including occasional care in the National Quality Framework, particularly the impacts of any fee increases for parents, and resulting impact on participation by children from low-income families.

FINDING 5.1

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of early childhood teachers to achieve the reforms set out in the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, salary and conditions offered by long day care centres will need to be competitive with those offered to primary teachers in the school sector. Community- and privately-managed preschools in New South Wales will also need to offer similarly competitive salaries and conditions for their teachers, which is already the case in other jurisdictions.

FINDING 5.2

In order to attract and retain a sufficient number of educators with diploma qualifications to achieve the reforms set out in the National Quality Standard and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, wages for many educators will need to increase, particularly in long day care centres and community- and privately-managed preschools.

Chapter 6 The family day care workforce

FINDING 6.1

To achieve the National Quality Standard, staff-to-child ratios for children under school age will increase in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. These changes are likely to lead to cost increases for family day care services in those jurisdictions, which may result in fewer children attending.

FINDING 6.2

In the case of the most marginal family day care schemes, coordination unit revenue could potentially decline below the minimum threshold required for ongoing operation of the scheme, should fewer children attend family day care as a consequence of increased costs arising from the reforms.

Chapter 7 The outside school hours care workforce

FINDING 7.1

Outside school hours care focuses on holistic child development through constructive play and socialisation. Outside school hours care is also dependent on casual and part-time staff. As a result, the imposition of additional qualification requirements, or new binding staff-to-child ratios, will likely increase difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining staff. Such changes risk decreasing the number of services available while increasing their cost and decreasing their quality.

RECOMMENDATION 7.1

Given the nature of outside school hours care, governments should not impose additional mandatory qualification requirements or binding staff-to-child ratios.

Chapter 8 The ECEC workforce for children with additional needs

RECOMMENDATION 8.1

To ensure that children with additional needs benefit fully from the COAG ECEC reforms, governments should modify the structure and operation of inclusion programs and reassess funding levels so that such programs:

- provide sufficient funding and support to enable the inclusion of all children with additional needs***
- cover the full cost of employing inclusion support workers at market wages***

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- *provide funding for an inclusion support worker to enable children with high support needs to attend preschool for 15 hours per week in the year before school*
 - *have simple and streamlined application processes, which do not place an undue burden on ECEC services*
 - *make funding available to ECEC services in a regular and timely manner*
 - *provide multiple-year funding, requiring re-application or adjustment only where there is a significant change in the level of need of a particular child or cohort of children.*

RECOMMENDATION 8.2

To provide inclusion support staff with the necessary skills to ensure children with additional needs benefit fully from the COAG ECEC reforms, governments should provide additional, priority funding to cover both the cost of relevant in-service training in child development, disability and ECEC, and the cost of replacement staff.

RECOMMENDATION 8.3

Children with additional needs require the services of allied health and early intervention professionals to benefit fully from the COAG ECEC reforms. To enable early childhood development services for children with additional needs to sustain an appropriately skilled workforce of allied health and early intervention professionals, governments should ensure that funding for such services:

- *is based on relevant market wages and conditions for equivalent positions*
- *takes into account the skill sets required to perform the purchased services*
- *includes provision for professional development and support.*

Chapter 9 The early childhood education and care workforce in rural and remote areas

RECOMMENDATION 9.1

To meet the workforce goals of the COAG ECEC reforms, rural and remote areas will need to attract and retain more workers. Governments should assess the cost effectiveness of existing incentives aimed at increasing recruitment and retention in rural and remote areas. These incentives should be compared against alternative strategies such as:

- *targeted recruitment of workers from rural and remote backgrounds*

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- *the delivery of training in rural and remote locations*
 - *support for pre-service teachers to experience working life in rural and remote areas.*

RECOMMENDATION 9.2

To attract and retain sufficient staff to achieve the goals of the COAG ECEC reforms for children in remote areas, governments should provide all ECEC workers in remote communities with timely access to appropriate housing at reasonable cost, including housing for students undertaking placement.

Chapter 10 Training and developing the ECEC workforce

FINDING 10.1

Specifying nominal hours of training and practicum in the Community Services Training Package would have benefits for the quality and consistency of training in the children's services sector. If nominal hours are specified in the training package, they should be decided in consultation with relevant stakeholders and be consistent across Australia.

RECOMMENDATION 10.1

The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council should, as a priority, update the Community Services Training Package to ensure that children's services qualifications:

- *reflect recent changes to the regulatory environment for early childhood education and care (including the National Quality Standard, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care)*
- *contain rigorous, auditable assessment requirements for each unit of competency*
- *require practical skills to be demonstrated in a workplace environment.*

RECOMMENDATION 10.2

Because the increased demand for vocational education and training (VET) qualifications within the timelines specified for the COAG ECEC reforms will pose risks to training quality, the Australian Skills Quality Authority and relevant state VET regulators should take account of these factors when undertaking risk assessments.

FINDING 10.2

Since mid-2010, the framework for VET regulation has changed considerably. New organisations have been established to administer and oversee the new framework. While these changes have the potential to improve the overall quality of VET provision, including the provision of VET children's services qualifications, appropriate evaluation of their effectiveness will be required to ensure that improvement in the quality of VET provision actually occurs.

RECOMMENDATION 10.3

Governments should ensure that the Australian Skills Quality Authority has sufficient resources to effectively fulfil its functions, including the conduct of strategic industry audits on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDATION 10.4

The requirement for VET trainers and assessors to demonstrate knowledge of current ECEC practices should be enforced by VET regulators. Governments should work with registered training organisations to design and implement a program of professional development for VET trainers and assessors working in ECEC to identify and address gaps in their knowledge of current ECEC practice.

FINDING 10.3

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) provides a means by which both the direct and opportunity costs of training may be reduced for workers who already possess the relevant competencies. The proposed development of a national RPL assessment tool for children's services training is likely to promote efficient, effective and consistent RPL.

RECOMMENDATION 10.5

To facilitate access to VET for educators from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, governments should ensure that programs that combine English language and ECEC training are available to this workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 10.6

Where centre-based training is difficult to facilitate, registered training organisations should offer in-home practical training and assessment for family day care educators as an alternative to centre-based training and assessment.

FINDING 10.4

Growth of employment-based training models, such as traineeships, will have benefits for both employees and employers in the ECEC sector.

FINDING 10.5

Training and career pathways are emerging as ECEC is changing. These pathways are useful in attracting, retaining and increasing the skills of staff, and it is important that clear pathways for career advancement are maintained.

FINDING 10.6

Higher education providers appear to be equipping early childhood teaching graduates with the skills and knowledge they require, though access to quality practicum placements remains a concern.

FINDING 10.7

Registered training organisations are likely to play an increasing role in meeting demand for higher education qualifications for teachers. This will require strong oversight on the part of regulators responsible for quality assurance.

FINDING 10.8

Ongoing professional development is important for maintaining a skilled and capable workforce, allowing ECEC workers to build on base-level skills while promoting quality care. Access to support programs encourages the sharing of knowledge, and can promote staff retention.

RECOMMENDATION 10.7

Governments should ensure that every member of the ECEC workforce has access to appropriate professional development and support programs. In some cases (for example, community preschools), additional resources will need to be allocated in order to achieve this. Priority should be given to enabling all workers to participate in professional development that will assist them to:

- implement the National Quality Standard, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care***
- include children with disabilities, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous children in ECEC services***
- enhance the leadership and governance of ECEC services***
- work effectively in integrated ECD services, where relevant.***

FINDING 10.9

Increased use of technological solutions such as online training packages should continue to be explored as a means of facilitating support networks, mentoring arrangements and providing structured feedback regarding interactions between children and teachers and educators. This approach requires ongoing provision of adequate resources.

RECOMMENDATION 10.8

Governments should not endorse or contribute funding to a registration scheme for the non-teacher ECEC workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 10.9

Governments should support teachers working in ECEC settings to obtain professional registration on the same basis as those working in primary schools.

Chapter 11 Planning the early childhood education and care workforce

FINDING 11.1

Despite the large number of existing ECEC workforce policies, a lack of evaluation makes it difficult to assess which policy tools will be most effective for the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 11.1

The Early Childhood Development Working Group should ensure that the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy:

- ***contains clearly identified objectives***
- ***uses sound data on the workforce and clear, robust assumptions about future policies to make projections of expected ECEC workforce demand and supply***
- ***evaluates the costs and benefits of existing workforce policies to determine the most cost-effective instrument to address supply limitations***
- ***takes into account both direct and community-wide effects in assessing cost effectiveness.***

Funding for certificate III and diploma courses does not require graduates to remain in the sector for a minimum period of time. This may limit the effectiveness of training subsidies in increasing the supply of qualified ECEC staff. Alternative subsidy structures, such as those that are offered to students undertaking teaching degrees, can be considered to maximise the effect on labour supply.

To support the development, monitoring and evaluation of the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy, governments could usefully consider:

- *improving access to the National Census of Population and Housing*
- *incorporating ECEC service costs in the National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census.*

Chapter 12 Child health workforce

To demonstrate the cost effectiveness of child health services and better inform consideration of the mix of skills and qualifications in the child health workforce, state and territory governments should work with child and family health nurses to improve the evidence base for child health services. In particular, further research should seek to determine the optimal content, number and timing of child health visits.

Incentives to attract nurses to study child health, and to retain child and family health nurses in underserved locations, should be tested for their cost effectiveness. Scholarships for postgraduate study in child health nursing should only be provided where they are targeted at nurses who would not otherwise have chosen to practice in demonstrated areas of workforce shortage. Alternatives, such as increased funding for professional support programs, should also be considered.

RECOMMENDATION 12.3

In order to reduce unnecessary costs and obstacles to attracting new child and family health nurses, state and territory governments should not require child and family health nurses to have qualifications in midwifery in addition to their qualifications in nursing and in child health, where such a requirement does not already exist.

FINDING 12.1

While child and family health nurses are, on average, older than other nurses, this reflects their higher level of qualifications and experience and does not appear to be a cause for concern.

RECOMMENDATION 12.4

Governments should provide access to child and family health nurses in as wide a range of locations as possible. In areas where this is not possible, other health professionals, such as remote area nurses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, should receive training in child health.

Chapter 13 Workforce for family support services

RECOMMENDATION 13.1

In order to ensure that family support services can sustain their workforces, and as wages are a major factor in the successful recruitment and retention of staff, government funding for family support programs should:

- *be based on relevant market wages and conditions for equivalent positions*
- *take into account the skill sets required to perform the purchased services*
- *be indexed appropriately to market wage growth within the relevant industry sector.*

RECOMMENDATION 13.2

In order to facilitate better workforce planning by services and the attraction and retention of staff, governments should increase the certainty and duration of funding for family support programs wherever possible.

RECOMMENDATION 13.3

In order to obtain the greatest benefit from workers in the family support sector, governments should direct a larger share of funding for family support programs towards obtaining high-quality evidence about the effectiveness of different programs through longitudinal studies and robust program evaluations.

RECOMMENDATION 13.4

In order to obtain better evidence on the effectiveness of family support programs delivered by volunteers and peers, governments should evaluate such programs on a wider scale, with a view to the expansion of such programs if they prove to be effective.

Chapter 14 The ECD workforce for Indigenous children

FINDING 14.1

Limited data availability on Indigenous-focused ECEC services, including their workforce, prevent thorough analysis, reducing governments' ability to plan and deliver these services effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 14.1

To achieve the COAG ECEC reform goals governments should:

- *bring all Indigenous-focused ECEC services into the scope of the National Quality Standard, before the review planned for 2014*
- *have a structured plan with agreed targets, and allocate additional funds to ensure all Indigenous-focused ECEC services achieve a rating of Meeting National Quality Standard or above within a specifically agreed timeframe, without the need for waivers.*

FINDING 14.2

A continued focus across all levels of government on coordination of Indigenous policy is necessary to avoid duplication and ensure optimal use of scarce resources.

FINDING 14.3

Alternative models of service delivery for Indigenous-focused ECEC services are being developed and trialled. Expansion of these models, and possible development of new ones, will be required to meet desired quality outcomes for Indigenous children.

RECOMMENDATION 14.2

ECEC services must meet cultural competency standards to receive National Quality Standard endorsement. The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority should:

- *consult with relevant stakeholders to develop clear and effective Indigenous cultural competency guidelines for ECEC services with Indigenous children*
- *ensure National Quality Standard assessors are appropriately skilled to assess cultural competency.*

RECOMMENDATION 14.3

To meet the goals of the Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development and the COAG ECEC reforms, more workers, and more highly skilled workers, will be required to work in Indigenous-focused services. To support service-level workforce planning and to provide for greater certainty to facilitate more effective attraction, retention and training of staff in Indigenous-focused services, governments should:

- *give priority to the provision of quality ECEC services for Indigenous children, without passing on extra costs to parents*
- *provide multiple-year funding for Indigenous-focused ECEC services.*

FINDING 14.4

Ongoing support for Indigenous children is necessary as they make the transition to formal schooling, to ensure the benefits they gain from ECEC are maintained as they advance through the education system.

RECOMMENDATION 14.4

As part of the broader Early Years Development Workforce Strategy agreed by COAG, governments should work together to develop a coordinated workforce strategy that builds on workforce plans in each jurisdiction, so that priority is given to placing suitably qualified staff in Indigenous-focused services. This should include a specific plan to build the Indigenous ECEC workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 14.5

ECEC services should consider offering more flexible employment arrangements, such as access to additional leave with adjusted pay arrangements for legitimate absences, to attract and retain Indigenous staff.

RECOMMENDATION 14.6

VET and higher education institutions should apply student-centred design principles to the design and delivery of courses for Indigenous students. Sufficient resources must be provided to ensure Indigenous students are suitably supported throughout their training.

RECOMMENDATION 14.7

To assist Indigenous students to prepare for study to qualify to work in ECEC settings, priority funding from state and territory governments for certificate I and II training will be required for students in remote areas.

RECOMMENDATION 14.8

To achieve the COAG ECEC reform goals, the Australian Government should make available additional funding for Indigenous Professional Support Units so that:

- *general Indigenous cultural competency training can be provided to all staff without such competency working in mainstream ECEC services with Indigenous children*
- *tailored professional development on Indigenous cultural competency can be provided to staff working in Indigenous-focused ECEC services where there is demonstrated need*
- *the units can provide sufficient professional development and support to Indigenous staff.*

Chapter 15 The integrated ECD services workforce

RECOMMENDATION 15.1

Future ECD workforce censuses and surveys should identify integrated ECD services separately to facilitate analysis of the workforce and subsequent policy development.

FINDING 15.1

A more flexible approach to the pay and conditions of different occupations will be necessary to avoid recruitment and retention problems in integrated ECD services and to foster true integration.

FINDING 15.2

Postgraduate studies to support the integrated ECD services workforce, with a particular emphasis on management and leadership, are emerging.

RECOMMENDATION 15.2

The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council should consider introducing optional integrated ECD services VET qualifications:

- *that focus on leading and managing integrated ECD services*
- *for early childhood educators and other workers at the certificate or diploma level in integrated ECD services.*

RECOMMENDATION 15.3

The Professional Support Program should provide introductory professional development in integrated ECD services to ECEC staff working in such services. Consideration should be given to the provision of similar courses for managers of such services.

RECOMMENDATION 15.4

The Australian Government should consider if workers in non-ECEC components of integrated ECD services should have access to professional development under the Professional Support Program. Further, the Early Years Development Workforce Strategy should focus on the professional development requirements of the integrated ECD services workforce, and how to meet them.