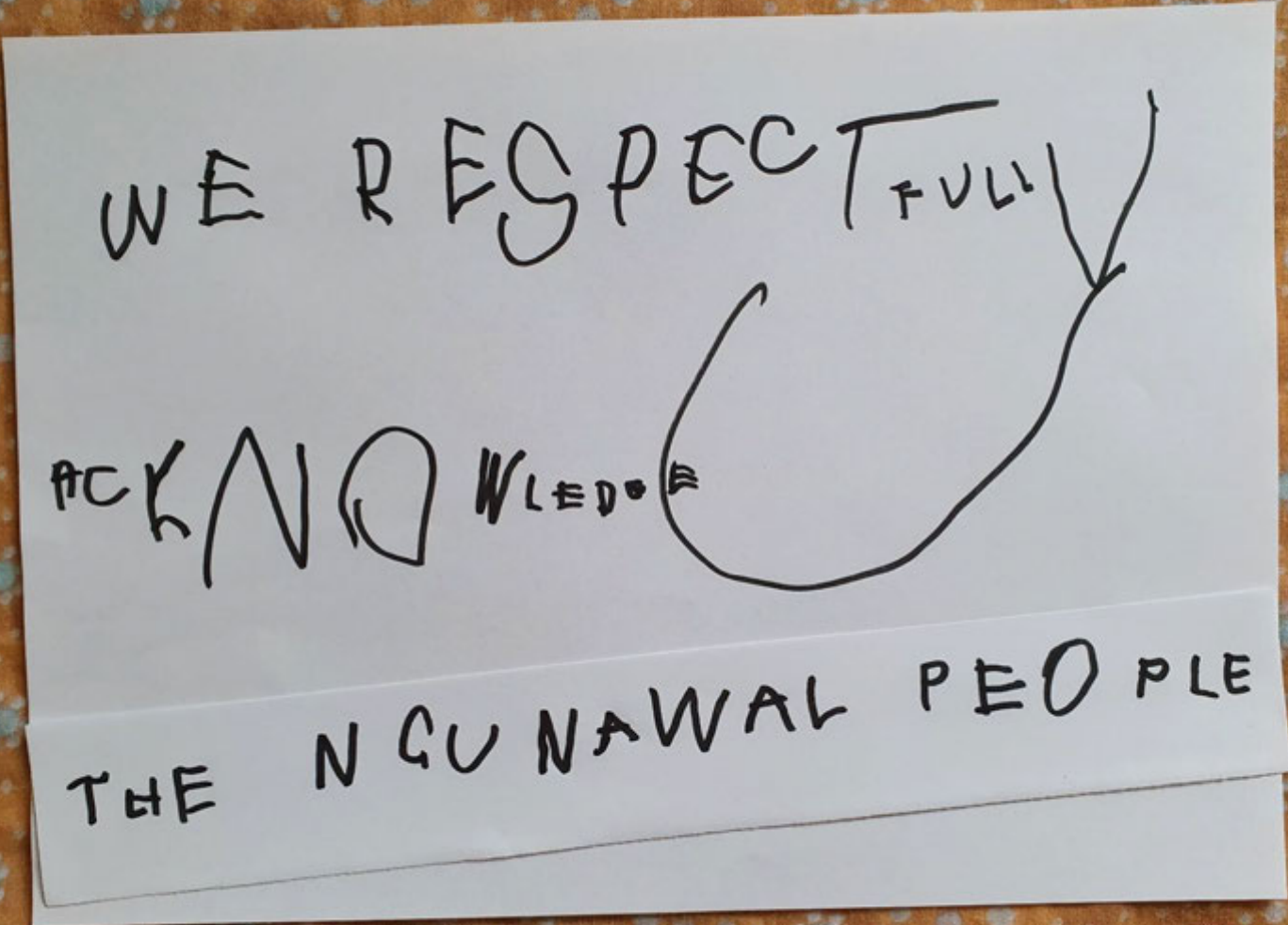


Productivity Commission: Early Childhood Education and Care

MOCCA, Long Day Care, Submission



"Ngunnawal Country, and all Countries
because they are important." 3yrs



MOCCA respectfully acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the land we learn and play on.

We acknowledge and respect all Aboriginal Peoples as important knowledge holders, and respect their connection to their traditional lands, cultures, history and heritage.

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Who are we?



In March 1963 the Canberra Mothercraft Society was given the original building and began providing a service that supported mothers during those early days of the city's development. As the population grew so did the building and demand. And as such we have been caring for children and families for 60 years. As the years passed the organisation grew and adapted to the changing community.

Early in 1987 the ACT Government called for tenders from the community to manage the service as an independently run community organisation. The successful submission came from parents who were using the centre and who were committed to the service remaining a stand-alone community service. In 1988 the Manuka Occasional Childcare Centre Association was formed and acronym MOCCA began.

We now operate as a long day care, Exceeding all areas of the NQF. Our families come from diverse socio and cultural backgrounds. Listening to and respecting children's voices is a core value of ours, and can be seen through all our decisions and work.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to something we consider hugely important in relation to our children and future generation. We recognize the mammoth task ahead of the Commonwealth in understanding and supporting such a broad issue. This is a complex issue, that will require a multitude of strategies and solutions to meet the diverse needs across our country – reflecting the cultural and contextual differences that make this country so special.

Our opinions and feedback certainly do not speak for everyone, but our community. That said, we have endeavoured to draw on current research and knowledge to support ideas.

We are providing feedback from a long day care, ECEC for the best start in life lens.

Terminology

The language we use when discussing these matters is important. It sets a precedent for our opinions and discussions, as well as sharing the lens and discourse through which we view these issues.

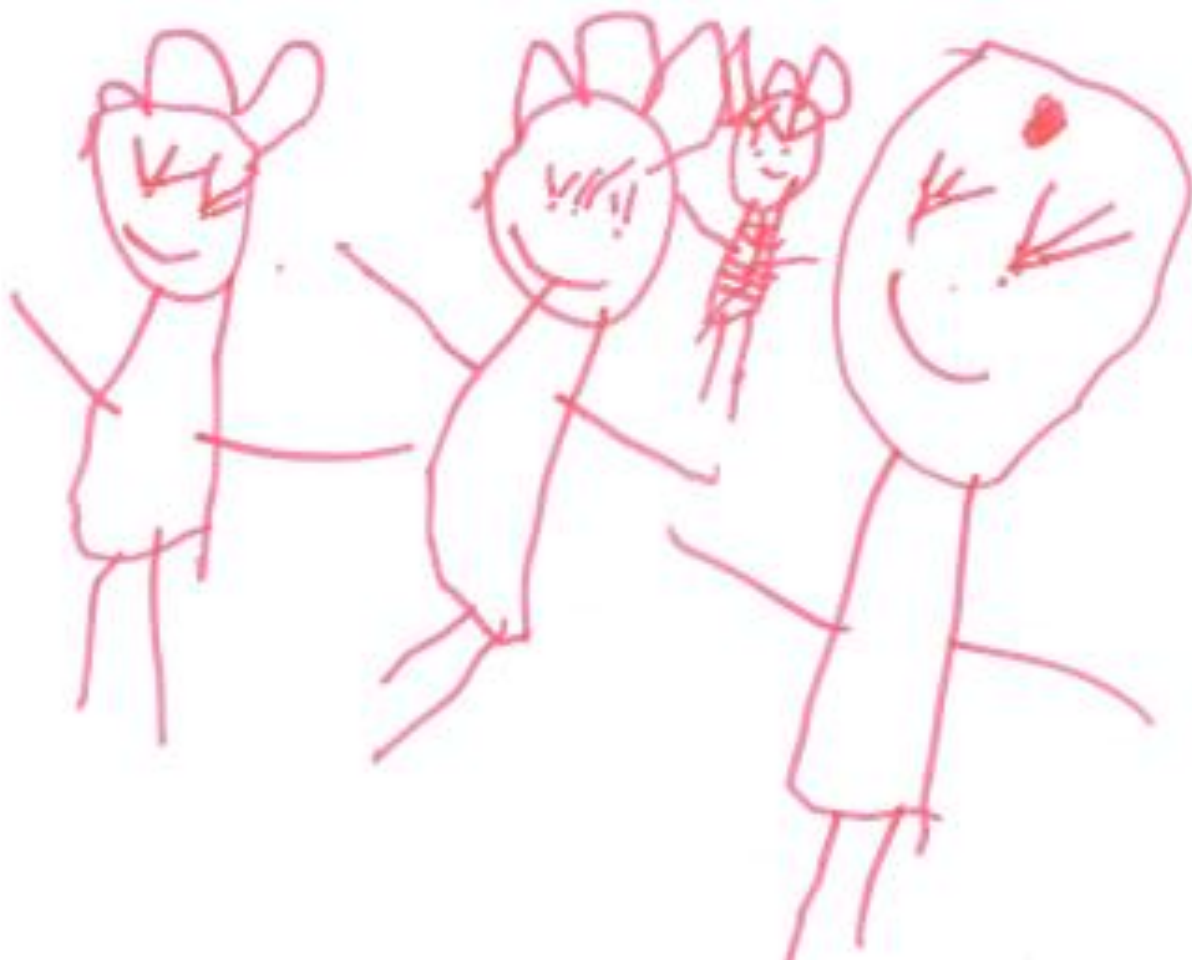
We highly recommend referring to Early Childhood Australia's ['How to talk about early childhood education and care'](#).



Childcare for workforce vs. ECEC for best start in life

The discourse through which we view Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can impact the importance we place on it, how we view its use, and the policies we create surrounding it. ECEC in Australia has a heavy Anglo-American, market model discourse. As a result, it is seen as something to be consumed, rather than as an economic strength, right of the child, and a sector that can support society on many levels.

We urge that the considerations on the differences between 'childcare for the workforce' and 'ECEC for the best start in life' be made.



Childcare for workforce

When considering 'childcare' in the capacity of increasing workforce participation, we need to be mindful that ECEC is only part of that solution.

There are other avenues that families can pursue outside of ECEC but within 'childcare', such as in-home care, and the support of family members. Thought into these options should be considered when exploring 'childcare' to support the workforce.

Consideration may also be made on workforce expectations, cost of living, and the need for both family members to be working. When discussing workforce participation, we also need to be mindful that fathers can stay home with children and be primary caregivers. The targeting of "childcare" to support female participation in the workforce reinforces the idea that caring for children is a female job. If workforce participation is about supporting women, perhaps, assessing stigmas and the lens through which we view child-rearing, supporting fathers to stay home and be equally supported with "Father groups" could shift expectations and see more women return to work.

On this matter, we would also like to suggest that options such as paying superannuation during parental leave would support some of the disparity between men and women in the workforce. Providing longer parental leave – see Norway as an example, along with the payment of superannuation would go some way in alleviating some of the challenges in access 'childcare' during these early years, while also setting the expectation of families taking extended time off to support the birth of a new child, and keeping parents jobs secure for their return.

There are other avenues to explore outside of ECEC that can support workforce participation, but we do recognize that ECEC provides a wonderful opportunity to support both children and the workforce. [Pascoe and Brennan \(2017\)](#) highlighted the wonderful benefit of early childhood education as an avenue to support workforce participation, but also warned that this double dividend is lost when workforce participation eclipses children's education.



ECEC for best start in life

It has been well established by now that the first five years are crucial in a child's brain development, with around 85 to 90 per cent of brain development occurring during this time. The environment and opportunities children are offered during these five years can have a crucial impact on their brain development, and therefore consideration to how government supports a healthy home life, community, and ECEC to support the best start in life for our children should be taken seriously.

At its core, ECEC serves to support children's development and learning in an environment of education and care. The primary role is to offer children a place that allows them to thrive through environments created by staff qualified in child development and education. A secondary benefit of ECEC is that it allows parents to work, as they are not at home with their children.

ECEC recognizes that families are children's first teachers, and thus work to form partnerships with families as they support their child to grow. Partnerships are a crucial part of the National Quality Framework which ECEC sit under. These partnerships make many ECEC services a crucial part in a family's 'village' to raise their child – educators are important to children and parents alike. As such, ECEC services provide much more to families than 'childcare' so they can work.

Quality educators support these partnerships and continually draw on the new research in this relatively young field to build on best practice to support children's growth and development. Care is taken to ensure children learn and develop through play in a way that is meaningful to the child, their context, and their culture. We will talk more about what quality ECEC looks like later.

Research has continued to show that quality ECEC provides positive impacts for children, particularly those from a disadvantaged background. Additionally, quality ECEC can impact school performance and outcomes – if Australia continues to seek ways to improve school outcomes, a holistic approach including ECEC would be beneficial.

As an ECEC service, we could sing to the benefits of all the work we do. However, we also recognize there are many other ways we could support children's best start in life outside of ECEC. We agree with the [South Australian Royal Commission \(p.2\)](#) that *"While the focus of the Royal Commission is on early childhood education and care, it is important we keep in mind the broader opportunity to grow an early child development system, of which education and care is only a part. An early child development system is one that supports each child to develop to their full potential by bringing together all the things we know matter."*

We strongly believe, a shift in how we view ECEC would strongly benefit children and the economy. We would like to again, reiterate the words of [Pascoe and Brennan \(p.7, 2017\)](#) *"Investing in integrating education and care creates the potential for a double dividend – promoting children's wellbeing, learning and development, and supporting parental workforce participation. If supporting workforce participation eclipses children's education, this opportunity is lost."*

Affordability, Accessibility, Equitability

In this section, we will share our experience as an ECEC service, as well as the thoughts and opinions of our families, our community. At MOCCA, we highly value the voices of our children and their families, and thus feel it is important to incorporate them into this submission. These perspectives and thoughts will be primarily around Long Day Care as an ECEC provider. We do want to note that Family Daycare, Outside of School Care, and Occasional Care do also sit under ECEC and are equally as valuable – they should not be overlooked in these areas.

Affordability

"Affordability of preschool is typically worst in those countries where availability is most limited. As simple economics would suggest, those countries with the lowest availability of preschool are also the ones where it is most expensive. This hits lower-income countries hard. In China, the least affordable country in this Index, preschools in Beijing charge monthly fees up to six times as much as a top university. In general, as preschool provision becomes more widely available in a country, it also tends to become more affordable." [Economist Intelligence Unit, p.7](#)

As a service we are continually stuck between a rock and a hard place on the topic of affordability. We would love nothing more than to provide quality care and education to all children at no cost to families, as we strongly believe in the work we do and it's benefits for children, families, and the wider community. However, we ultimately need to remain operational, we have bills to pay, and we very much value the incredible knowledge and skill that our educators and teachers bring to the role. Ensuring that our staff are paid their worth is both important to us and our families.

We recognize that the government has a similar dilemma, in finding the magical solution that supports more affordable ECEC and 'childcare', while also recognizing the qualifications and skill set of an underappreciated sector.

We asked our families, “How could the government make ECEC more affordable?” Their answers are in the blue boxes. We have added to these some thoughts, challenges, and connections to research.

“Additional subsidies only result in higher fees.”

A big contributor to this is the staffing crisis – the sector is losing staff due to conditions and pay. To combat this, many centres focus on the conditions and pay they are offering educators and teachers. To do this, as the award increases (which is welcome, it should be higher) and as cost-of-living increases means that centres need to generate additional revenue. The only means we have to do so is in increasing fees. The majority of centre's do so yearly, and with the new CCS coming into effect in July 2023, there is no doubt others have done the same calculations as us, to see how much of a fee increase the new CCS could absorb. This was not the intention of “cheaper childcare” however, staff wages are a large operational cost, and the government would be remiss if they had not considered how centres would use this to support staff better.

Unfortunately, the consequence of this is that ‘childcare’ is not cheaper – and affordability issues continue. We did do our calculations, with and without the current hourly cap – and without a cap does still provide better conditions for our incredible staff, and cheaper ‘childcare’ for families.

“Affordability would be an issue for some people. I think having options where people can access ECEC for half days or reduced hours would be advantageous. For example, people may find it easier to continue working if they could do 9-3pm or a late start and late finish or an early start and early finish.”

There is certainly scope to explore such options within the current ECEC sector. However, when considering regulations and requirements shorter bookings may result in less availability for families, as centres would need to balance offering of these with revenue to remain operational. For example, if offering shorter day options for early starts and ends, these would have to not overlap with later starts and ends unless staffing were to increase, and therefore operational costs and possibly fees.

It won't be as simple as all current services changing their booking options, and consideration also needs to be made for accessibility. This may be an opportunity to explore alternate ‘childcare’ options to support families looking for shorter day.

“Federal Government funding that not only addresses subsidies for parents but considers early learning as a profession and significant investment in our overall economy. Economic data from Nordic countries clearly show the significant economic benefits of investment into the early years.”

We believe there are huge benefits to looking at the bigger picture and acknowledging the role early childhood education and care, and other early childhood programs can have on our community, society, families, children, and government.

An approach that considers wider issues, beyond just affordability may generate more options that generate affordable options for families.

Some readings to consider in support of this:

[Lienstartingwell.pdf \(eiu.com\)](#)

[Investing in Early Childhood - First Things First](#)

[Being and becoming: why the economic argument for early childhood matters - The Spoke – Early Childhood Australia's Blog](#)

[Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions](#)

[The Front Project: Australia's first Economic Analysis of early childhood education in the year before school](#)

“Preschool program from 3 years old.”

“Government to fund Universal free early childhood education.”

We certainly advocate for universal early childhood education and care. However, to be successful we need to first address the workforce crisis, the lack of positions available, and implement robust and coherent systems to ensure quality across all services.

"I think it's affordable for myself but I think for many families, particularly those with more than one child in care, it could be made more affordable by having a higher subsidy rate for the second and subsequent child and possible a higher family income cut off (ie, a family earning 364k with one child will find full fee less challenging than a family earning 364k with 3 kids)"

"The introduction of the higher rebate for second and third children etc was very helpful."

Accessibility

Accessibility requires enough staff, and enough services to meet the needs of the demographic. It is not just about creating positions, a holistic approach needs to be considered to maintain quality and the best outcomes for children and families.

We asked our families, "How could the government make ECEC more accessible?" Their answers are in the blue boxes. We have added to these some thoughts, challenges, and connections to research.

"Preschool from 3 years old"

"Fully subsidised ECEC for all children aged 1-5."

Again, we certainly advocate for universal early childhood education and care. However, to be successful we need to first address the workforce crisis, the lack of positions available, and implement robust and coherent systems to ensure quality across all services.

“More spots so less wait time/easier to manage days with work.”

“ECEC services need to be considered on a per capita basis in order to ensure that there is physical spaces and access where needed. Greater consideration needs to be undertaken in order to ensure accessibility for all children and families in terms of unique needs.”

“There are long waitlists, especially in more sought after centres. One way would be ensuring that there is a minimum standards for all centres so there aren't a handful of centres that are top performers.”

“I feel that care is available but good quality care is not readily accessible.”

There are multiple factors to consider in these statements.

1. Accessibility of spots
2. Accessibility of *quality* spots
3. Staffing to make spots available.

[The Mitchell Institute](#) released a report in 2022 highlighting 'childcare deserts' in Australia. These are locations in which there are more than 3 children per 'childcare' spot. Their report highlighted that 35% of Australian children live in a 'childcare' desert. Interestingly, the [National Workforce Census \(2022\)](#) suggests that most states and territories still have capacity at long day care ECEC services for more children. Rural areas appeared to have the highest capacities. There certainly needs to be work done to support more availabilities where they are needed for children to attend ECEC.

An additional challenge within availability is families rightly wanting the best for their child. As a result, many families are looking for quality in the spots available. [The NQF Annual Performance Report \(2022\)](#) found that location, highly skilled educators, and quality early learning curriculums all ranked highly for families (above affordability). Simply creating more positions and more 'childcare' will not be enough – thought and time needs to be taken to ensure that support is in place to provide quality positions for children.

A key factor in this will be ensuring we have a skilled workforce – a skilled workforce that is not burnt out or feeling undervalued. This may be an area that is worth significantly investigating and supporting. We share more on our thoughts on quality later.

“Starting and finishing times could be more flexible to allow for individuals whose jobs require them to be at work by 730AM, for example.”

“All structured around long day care. Part-time/part of a day as an option may help with both cost and also getting the balance between work and home life better balanced.”

There is often an argument for ECEC centres to extend hours and be more flexible to support shift work and varying jobs. While we respect that families have a variety of jobs, we would argue that changing the operating hours of ECEC centres only delays a family's problem, rather than solving it, as even with Outside of School Hours Care, there is limited flexibility for families with school aged children. From an ECEC for the best start in life lens, arguments for longer hours and flexible childcare does shift priority to workforce participation over early childhood education ([Pascoe and Brennan, 2017](#)).

A more holistic approach would be needed if a solution were to be explored.

“Adjust the activity test or get rid of it entirely. Further considerations need to be provided for families with children requiring additional support.”

“Increased subsidy for lower income earners. No hard cut off of subsidy as currently exists.”

We have little to add to these points but consider both important for your consideration.

Equitability

ECEC provides benefits to all children, in particular those from a disadvantaged background. We should be prioritising ways to make it affordable and accessible to these children and families first to close the gaps and create a more equitable start in life for all children in Australia.

We asked our families, "How could the government make ECEC more equitable?" Their answers are in the blue boxes. We have added to these some thoughts, challenges, and connections to research.

"Government to fund Universal free early childhood education."

"Affordability and options for part days etc. Perhaps could or should be more like school - free for everyone with the centres being paid for by government. That may also assist with consistent quality of care. We are very fortunate at Mocca with high quality care and commitment to education. I don't feel that all centres are equal in this regard."

We fully support the idea of universal childcare. We also recognise that we will have to take small steps in that direction to ensure it works in the best interest for all.

Given the topic of equitability, we would again like to highlight that research suggests that early intervention, through quality education and care, and addressing disparities from an early age support children to break a cycle of disadvantage. We align with the recommendation made in 2017 by Pascoe and Brennan in *"Targeting additional support for some children and families to promote access, equity and inclusion, recognising that some children and their families require it in order to thrive. Nowhere is the evidence clearer than in the benefits of early intervention. A child who starts behind stays behind, which comes at enormous cost to him or her, the community and governments. Targeted, evidence-based early childhood interventions can prevent this from happening and break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage."* (p. 8)

We have been fortunate to be part of the [ACT 3yr Old Initiative Program](#). The team, and work being done in this area is amazing. As a centre participating, we value the support and expertise that comes along with a child's placement. The teams work with us to fully support the child and their family. The additional work offered to support families to access wider support contributes to a more equitable start for these children and alleviates a lot of the extra work and pressures these families can often feel. Additionally, the team within this program can also support centres to achieve higher quality education and care, by supporting staff with more equitable approaches and professional support. We have seen firsthand how phenomenal this program can work, and highly recommend investigating a similar program to support all children. Research into the effectiveness of programs such as this could assist in creating a supportive policy for all children.



"It would be great to consider how ECEC can become a more multidisciplinary access point for families. How can allied health services be incorporated and parents be better supported through this highly accessed resource?"

Again, we agree with the [South Australian Royal Commission \(p.2\)](#) that *"While the focus of the Royal Commission is on early childhood education and care, it is important we keep in mind the broader opportunity to grow an early child development system, of which education and care is only a part. An early child development system is one that supports each child to develop to their full potential by bringing together all the things we know matter."*

We would also like to highlight again the amazing work of the ACT 3-year-old Initiative. A similar model could benefit many.

"I feel that depending on the setting depends on the level of care. Something like higher pay could assist in making care more equitable. This could assist in making it more of a competitive vocation and thus increase the quality of care across a wider span of ECEC locations."

"Further investment into staffing which supports the recognition of educators as highly qualified professionals. Attracting and retaining more qualified and experienced people to the profession - supporting the continuation of knowledge and experience. Further look into nationalising the assessment and rating process for equity but also an accurate and more positive experience. There are currently significant differences across States and Territories."

"The government could make further investment in ECEC; acknowledge the value it brings to society; and drive reforms to achieve access to high quality care for all Australians."

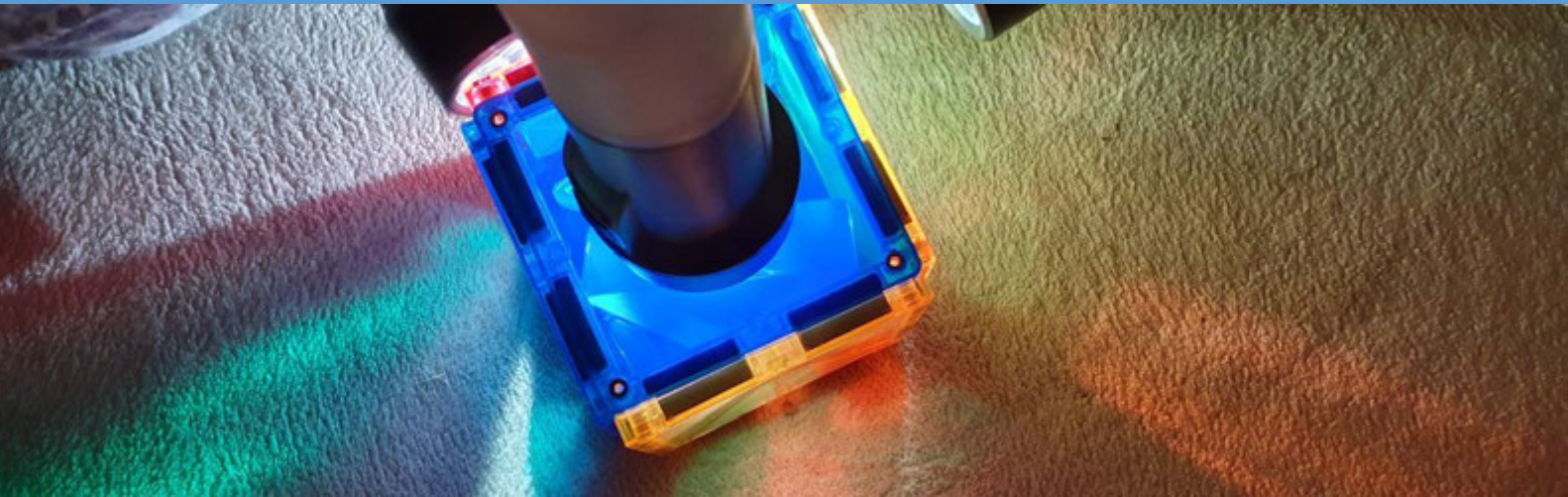
The quality of ECEC offered is an important consideration when exploring affordability, accessibility, and equitability. The creation of new spots, funding of new centres, and funding of more study mean nothing if quality is not being assured, regulated, and tested.

Furthermore, centres will experience an inequity in quality due to individual centre's ability to pay above award and be competitive for the best educators/teachers. Loss to Kinder programs and Public Service, in which conditions of work and remuneration are both better does not aid the situation. Each location will have their own "competing sectors" that entice quality educators and teachers away from our sector.

What quality looks like in different context, is again different. We need to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the need to be flexible, adaptive, and responsive to community, families, children, context, research, and culture.

ECEC comes in many forms, such as long day care, family daycare, outside of school care, and occasional care. Each form has its own unique challenges, and thus blanket policies to ECEC may not always be in the best interest for how ECEC works.

Contributors to Quality Early Childhood Education and Care



“Ensuring a high standard of teacher training and education, setting clear curriculum guidelines, and ensuring parental involvement are some of the main drivers of preschool education quality. Experts from around the world highlight the importance of a high-quality system in ensuring good overall outcomes from preschool education, not least to distinguish it from simple childcare. The factors defining quality are widespread, from high training standards and well-defined guidelines to ensuring parental involvement too. Other factors can help too: reducing student teacher ratios in classes; ensuring good health and safety measures; and creating clear links between preschool and primary school, to name just a few.” [EIU, p. 7](#)

Quality is a term used frequently in reports, policy, and media relating to the ECEC. High quality ECEC has been found by academic research to providing positive outcomes for children, society, and the economy ([EIU, 2012](#); [Productivity Commission, 2014](#); [SA Interim Report, 2023](#)). When exploring equitability, high quality ECEC has been found to have a positive impact on all children, regardless of background and socio-economic status.

What contributes to high quality varies on context, culture and the children. We would argue that given the complexities of quality, and its dependence on context, qualified staff would be in the best position to provide quality for individualized contexts.

We asked our families, how can the government support high quality ECEC? Their answers are in the blue boxes. We have added to these some thoughts, challenges, and connections to research.

“More teachers influencing the curriculum.”

Without negating the value and knowledge that educators bring, Early Childhood Teachers (ECT) are degree qualified, and provided a quality education themselves, often bring a wealth of knowledge, adaptability, and ability to critically reflect on effective curriculums for children, their context, and their community.

Current regulations in ECEC, only require an ECT to be available and present for pre-school aged children. With many services struggling to hire ECTs, this means that those hired are usually placed only in a pre-school room.

The year prior to school is obviously very important, however, brain development research has highlighted how critical the experiences of children in the first 1000 days are. We would argue that ECTs would be as much, if not more, valuable with these ages. Lack of ECTs remaining in the sector coupled with regulations means few children are benefiting from the quality of knowledge of an ECT in the earlier years.

Support to improve conditions within the sector, and encouragement to employ more than one ECT would benefit children.

We are very lucky in this regard as we employ enough ECTs to have one in each room, a factor we believe contributes greatly to our quality.



“Regular quality reviews.”

“Further look into nationalising the assessment and rating process for equity but also an accurate and more positive experience. There are currently significant differences across States and Territories.”

“Ditch the National Quality Framework and allow more flexibility in the market. Parents could then choose the type of centre they wanted to send their kids to. Some centres would specialise in the highest quality ECES, others might focus on affordability, still others might focus on creativity. One-size-fits-all regulations stifle innovation and choice.”

[The NQF Annual Performance Report \(2022\)](#) highlights that the NQF has supported quality ECEC. However, the report also highlights (in Chapter 5) the burden the sector feels in response to the NQF, and provides insight into areas for support for educators, services, and the sector.

Assessment and Rating was rated as one of the factors that creates the most burden for educators and services. While the use of Ratings to indicate quality are useful to families, an ACECQA report from 2021 shows that the rating is the lowest priority for families when choosing a service – trusting reputation, the general ‘feel’ and word of mouth recommendations over the rating.

Could educators and services be un-burdened if the Assessment and Rating process was more about supporting services to a Meeting or Exceeding standard? Could we find ways to connect communities of services to support each other and lift the quality of the sector? There is certainly already plenty of opportunities available for networking and sharing of ideas, but are all services accessing them?



“Support smaller ECEC and not for profit centres that tend to focus more on the children and staff.”

“More funding for ECEC. I think I am in the lucky position to have access to the best ECEC places in Mocca but I don’t know that every centre is even half as good. The children are outside at least three times a day (this should be required in all ECECs). They have the most amazing opportunities to learn through play. I would say ECECs all need to be modelled around Mocca’s principals and philosophies and beliefs.”

As part of our Early Years Strategy submission, our families voiced a strong value of community and a desire for more parks, libraries, and community centres for themselves and their children. We value the love we receive from our families and their support in what we do.

We would like to add, that one service type will not suit everyone’s needs – this is the complex challenge the government and the sector is faced with. Consideration of context and community needs is critical in providing quality ECEC – we touch on this later.

“Ensuring staff are able to be paid an attractive salary to ensure high calibre people are attracted to the sector.”

“Ensure staff are valued, paid well, provided opportunity to grow and build a career in the sector.”

“Work toward increasing staff conditions i.e. pay. This could in turn result in lower staff turnover, attracting high quality candidates.”

“Giving the educators more incentives & better pay.”

“Further investment into staffing which supports the recognition of educators as highly qualified professionals. Attracting and retaining more qualified and experienced people to the profession - supporting the continuation of knowledge and experience.”

Currently, there are 61 Full Time positions available in ECEC within a 5km radius from us. Within the ACT there is a total of 134 Full Time positions currently available. These numbers do not fluctuate greatly. This is the situation services are in – competition for staff is high.

[The United Voice Report into the Crisis in Early Education \(2022\)](#) paints a grim picture, citing 74% of educators planning to leave the sector in the next three years, staff upskilling to ECT qualifications or Masters are among the most likely to leave.

There is a desperate need to address the staffing situation in the sector through examining the conditions and pay of our knowledgeable, dedicated, and essential staff.

We recommend reading:

[Progressing a National Approach to Children’s Education and Care Workforce \(2019\)](#)

[2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census](#)

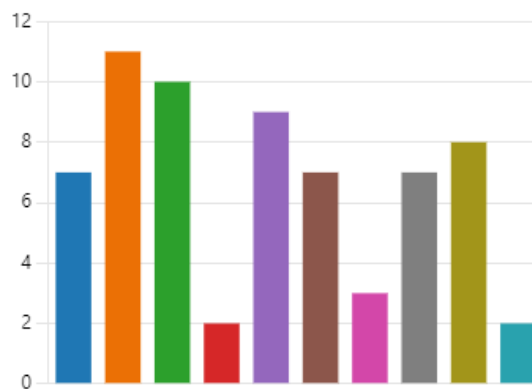
[Shaping Our Future](#)

“An investment in ECEC is an investment in our society and Australia's future.”



In addition to asking our families how ECEC quality could be improved, we also asked what they felt contributed to quality in ECEC.

● Staff qualifications	7
● Staff	11
● Class sizes	10
● Centre size	2
● Centre philosophy	9
● Resources	7
● Planned experiences	3
● Connection with families	7
● Low turnover	8
● Other	2



The other responses included: "Focus on play and child directed learning" and "Ongoing professional learning and critical reflection that supports contemporary pedagogy."

Our families' top indicators of quality were: Staff, Class sizes, and Centre philosophy. We un-pack each of these below.



Quality Staff

We hope by now that it is recognized that the educators and teachers in ECEC do far more than change nappies and wipe noses. The staff in ECEC are educated in early childhood development, they are knowledgeable in how to support development and growth through play, they support children's early literacy and numeracy, they support social skills, regulation skills, recognition of emotions. The staff in ECEC consider each child, each family, and each context in their planning and support. They are adaptable. They draw on current research. They continually reflect on how to improve. They are essential – to our children, to our services, to our community, and to our economy.

At MOCCA, our incredible staff value our children and their opinions on matters that affect them, driven by the UNCRC, National Principles of Child Safe Organisations, and the NQF. Who children's educators and teachers are, and what they are like, impacts our children. We, therefore, thought it important to incorporate what some of our children thought makes a good teacher into our description of quality staff.

What our children say:

What do you like about your teachers?

"They keeping care of us." 4yrs

"They're so nice." 4yrs

"I like them because they give me cuddles." 3yrs

"That they keep care of us." 4yrs

"Talking to my teachers, makes me feel good." 3yrs

"I like drawing with the teachers." 3yrs

What makes a good teacher?

"Kind." 4yrs

"Make me feel happy and gives me hugs when I'm sad." 4yrs

"This is an amazing teacher. She has a big heart. She's loved by all the children and loves the children. She listens. She makes me feel great." 4yrs – refers to drawing below.

"All kind and lovely." 4yrs

Our children highlighted kindness, love, nurture, and caring. The ECEC sector is often seen as less of a profession because of the care side – but the quality of care, kindness, and love provided has a profound effect on children.

If we consider Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, children need to feel cared for, nurtured, and a strong sense of self and belonging before any learning can occur. ECEC educators and teachers know this and work to support this to support children for school. These ideas are evident in the NQF and EYLF, which support quality.

These nurturing and caring pedagogies are backed by research, and do require a wealth of understanding and knowledge to effectively use within a service – from [Pedagogy of Love](#), [RIE](#), [Circle of Security](#), and [Child Safety](#).

[Perceptions of the sector impact our staff](#), and our ability to be recognized beyond 'childcare for the workforce'. Recognition of the importance and impact of the care, love, and nurture side ECEC at a government level could go some way to slowly changing the perspectives of families and society.





Ratios/Class Sizes

We know the ratio size impacts quality of care and education. The sector has advocated for this for years, with the benefits being well established.

There is still limited research on the effects of group sizes, however, [research that has been conducted tends to see a benefit in smaller group sizes](#). Countries such as Norway – who are seen as a model for ECEC – have recognized this and adopt it in their practices.

We have been purposeful with the group sizes in our centre, and see the benefits for children, families, and staff. The staff have more time to get to know children individually, do not feel as run down, and have a greater sense of wellbeing at work. As a result, children benefit. Smaller group sizes also provide better opportunities to build meaningful partnerships with all families to support children and families.

We recommend that ratio and class sizes be explored further as bringing benefits to the staffing crisis, and a best start for children.

Centre Philosophy

We believe a centre philosophy should embrace children, culture, and context. The NQF asks us to continually be critically reflecting and engaging with new research, ideas, and thinking. In doing this, a philosophy that worked in one setting should be reflected on and adapted to meet the needs of any other setting.

An Australian wide philosophy may, therefore, be hard to establish. If we draw on Reggio Emilia, and its huge success – this is due to a philosophy that considers their culture, context, and children. It adapts with the change of children, societal context (such as COVID), new research, and changing cultures,

“The Reggio Approach in other parts of the world, outside Reggio Emilia only makes sense if we are capable of re-inventing it, if we are capable of understanding the context we work in, the values in which each culture believes, and then compare these with what Reggio has been capable of creating in its own specific context and with its own resources.” (Gardner, quoted in Rinaldi, 2013, p.11)

It is worth considering that what works for the demographic in larger cities may not work in more rural communities. If we want to provide the best start for all children in Australia, we need to ensure that the early childhood education and care offered meets the needs of the children. This is an area where consideration to the needs of Aboriginal Communities would be beneficial, how the community teaches, learns, and passes on knowledge may vary from western approaches. Providing ECEC services that are reflective of the community will undoubtedly have benefits for the children, their sense of worth, and their sense of belonging. It would also provide a village, and community hub, for further early childhood support.



Summary of recommendations

This is a brief summary of recommendations. We do highly recommend reading the full submission as it provides additional insights as well.

- 1.** Address terminology used by government and in society. Recommend referring to Early Childhood Australia's ['How to talk about early childhood education and care'](#).
- 2.** We urge that the considerations on the differences between 'childcare for the workforce' and 'ECEC for the best start in life' be made. If we let the former eclipse the latter, we lose the benefits of ECEC.
- 3.** Consider other avenues of 'childcare' outside of ECEC for more flexibility, accessibility, and affordability.
- 4.** Improve conditions for families when having a child: Including paying superannuation during parental leave would support some of the disparity between men and women in the workforce and increasing paid parental leave.
- 5.** Consider a holistic view when making suggestions to affordability and accessibility. For example, fees affect wages, reducing fees for families means centres can support staff with wages by raising them again to current level – to create true cheaper fees, wages need to be considered too.
- 6.** Address the current staffing crisis – affordability, accessibility, equity, and quality will not be achieved in ECEC if the current staffing crisis continues. Supporting staffing crisis would hopefully increase the number of ECTs staying in the sector and allow for ECTs to be used outside of preschools as well as in preschools.
Suggestions on this matter include:
 - a. Addressing wages.
 - b. Increasing perception of the sector.
 - c. Using correct terminology to speak about our sector.
 - d. Further research into class sizes/ratios.
 - e. Better regulation and monitoring of quality of qualification courses.

- 7.** Consider programs such as the ACT 3yr Old initiative which support families to access all the support they need for their child to thrive.
- 8.** Consider context, culture, and children. What works in one city may not work in a small town. Blanket approaches may not work for all.
- 9.** Address the issues faced by the disadvantaged first.

We also echo recommendations of [Lifting Our Game \(2017\)](#).

Thank you.