



'A path to universal early childhood education and care' draft report response.

We thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to offer feedback on the draft recommendations. Please find below a response to the draft recommendations by VicTESOL and QATESOL.

[Victorian Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages](#) (VicTESOL) is a professional association committed to promoting excellence in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and supporting cultural and linguistic diversity through high quality multicultural education. VicTESOL provides support and services to generalist, content, trade and EAL specialist teachers across the state of Victoria.

[Queensland Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages](#) (QATESOL) is Queensland's only professional association concerned primarily with the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) across early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary contexts. QATESOL has advocated for and on behalf of learners who are learning English as an additional language or dialect for the past 50 years.

English Language Learners Matter in ECE: EAL/D (English as an Additional Language/Dialect) is Key for Equity and Inclusion

Young learners of the English language (English as an Additional Language/Dialect) – a growing demographic – are not explicitly and consistently recognised in the draft report. In this response to the draft report, we draw out key points, some of which we further elaborate on below by engaging with the draft report's recommendations:

- Participation in ECEC can be very unsettling for young children who neither comprehend nor speak the language. Identifying and recognising learners who have English as an additional language/dialect is essential for supporting these young children to full participation in ECEC programs. As a cohort English language (EAL/D) learners can include children of diverse backgrounds (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Asian, Pasifika, African, European and the Americas) who have not used English as their main language every day of their lives with their parents/caregivers.
- EAL/D refers to speaking and understanding a language, and does not equate solely to ethnicity or culture and we argue is not addressed specifically by cultural inclusion and safety measures (elaborated on below).
- English language (EAL/D) learners have in common a learner characteristic - that is, learning the English language in addition to using home language/s with parents, caregivers and family. Young children who are EAL/D learners can be active and adept communicators in their families and communities. Yet, in the ECEC setting these young children can have less facility to convey their ideas, feelings and needs.
- English language (EAL/D) learners can face real barriers in educational settings delivered in English language(s). These barriers can impact engagement and learning, in addition to a growing sense of well-being and identity. It is important that English as an additional language/dialect is not labelled as a disability.
- A common belief is that young children learn additional languages with no assistance. For complex reasons this is not the case. Explicitly identifying and supporting very young children's English language learning is important for supporting them to establish a strong foundation for development of their full language repertoire.
- ECEC is not currently equitably accessed by families who speak languages other than English. Intentionally catering for communities' multilingual heritage and practices in ECEC would promote full inclusion and diversity.
- EC educators can be supported through teacher education programs, professional learning and mentoring to plan, implement and evaluate programs that cater for English language (EAL/D) learners.

Inclusion gap in the draft report findings and draft recommendations (pre-school)

There is a notable inclusion gap in specific recommendations addressing the English language learning needs of CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are not yet proficient in English. Yet, English is predominantly the medium of communication in pre-school. According to a recent AERO paper (Lampe et al 2023, p. 9) children who are not yet proficient in English in their first year of school are ‘disproportionally developmentally vulnerable’. A universal ECEC system that was inclusive of all children would address this increasingly large cohort’s needs for English language support and for support for their home languages.

Response to Information Request 2.2: To address the inclusion gap, we respond to the following questions on cultural safety in ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse families and children.

- **What factors most effectively promote the provision of culturally safe ECEC?**
 - 1) **Promotion of language support.** Provisions for English language support (and support for home languages) should underlie cultural safety provisions which all depend on a common language of communication. Provisions that address language barriers need to be made visible in references to ‘culturally responsive services’ or ‘cultural safety’ so that policy makers have clarity in making decisions (e.g. employment of language speaking staff, EAL/D training for staff)
 - 2) **Terminology that makes additional English language learning needs visible.**
 - We propose the use of the term EAL/D (English as an Additional language or dialect) to distinguish English language learning needs that are covered/occluded in umbrella terms such as CALD which is much used in ECEC documents, or the deficit ‘non-English speaking background’ in data sources: These do not identify the children who are beginning to learn English, in addition to the languages they speak proficiently at home with caregivers.
 - The term EAL/D is strength based and consistent with terminology used in schools, thus aiding consistency in transition reporting. Note, the term is also used in recent government documents about schooling (e.g. Productivity Commission 2022, DofE 2023).
 - Unlike the term CALD, EAL/D can be seen to be inclusive of the English language learning needs First Nations, migrant/refugee English language learners (eg. see DofE 2023). CALD is generally (and erroneously) seen to relate exclusively to migrant and refugee English language learners and not to be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English language learners (eg. see Lampe et al 2023, p. 7)
 - Consider promoting the use of the term ‘Home language other than English’ as an umbrella term for *all* children in the cohort of children described in data sources as of ‘non-English speaking background’ (of which English language learners are a part). This gives recognition to the crucial role young children’s developing home languages play in well-being and learning (see ACTA Early Childhood Principles).

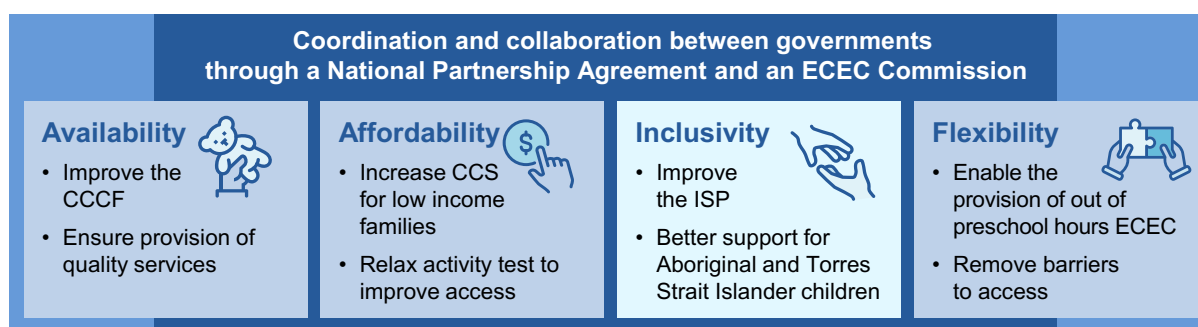
- **Should there be changes to the National Quality Framework to promote cultural safety and capability, beyond the updated learning frameworks? Would a national cultural competency framework help improve the cultural safety of ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children?**

- 1) **Strengthen the NQF.** We support strengthening of the National Quality Framework to promote cultural safety and capability (including provisions for English language learning and support of home languages), beyond the updated learning frameworks.
- 2) **Additional pre-school inclusion framework.** We support the development of a national cultural competency framework to help improve the cultural safety of ECEC services, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children, ensuring also that their linguistic diversity is acknowledged (i.e. the home language for some children is an English, for others a contact language, and others a traditional language).

We suggest the establishment of an *additional* national pre-school inclusion framework to support the full participation of English language learners:

- This framework could draw on/adapt selected features of the schools inter-jurisdictional *Capability Framework: Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners* (DETE 2013) for the pre-school play-based environment. This framework is related to the APST standards and describes capabilities to support safe learning environments, home languages and English language teaching and learning etc. Such a mechanism could be developed to be applicable not only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners, but also to other EAL/D cohorts.
 - The EAL/D schools' framework, *EAL/D Elaborations of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: For use when working with learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)* (ACTA 2015) could also provide pointers to adapt for the pre-school play based environment.
- **Does the structure of the Inclusion Support Program adequately prioritise and allow provision of culturally safe ECEC in mainstream services? If not, what are the issues and how could these be addressed?**
1. **An improved Inclusion Support Program (ISP) for all.** The Commission supports improving the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) and seeing the program as a program for *all*, not just in its current mode, which in practice is 'largely limited to supporting children with disability' (p. 46, see also Aly, 2023). In these terms then, eligibility guidelines for children needing English language support require specification.
 - The ISP guidelines list three groups among those who may have additional needs and require consideration to 'participate fully in ECEC services' in the ISP. All three groups include children who are EAL/D learners: children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, children from refugee or humanitarian backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (DoE 2023 and reported in Paper 2, p. 147).

- 2. ECEC services identify and report on EALD learners, including their home language(s).** Improved ISP guidelines should specify that ECEC services identify and report on EAL/D learners, including their home language/s. This would indicate that the system understands the need base. The indications from the Census are that this is a growing cohort. This would also:
- assist with family - ECEC communication
 - assist with transition to schooling: a learning need to be monitored in school



Source: Supporting an Inclusive ECEC Sector (Productivity Commission 2023, p. 45)

Mentoring, Professional Learning and Teacher Education

Currently, we observe that the needs of English language learners and their families and communities (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English language learners) are not a core component in early childhood educator and teacher qualification requirements, coaching and mentoring opportunities and professional learning. The draft report comments that,

For educators and teachers already working in the sector, there is merit in a degree of public support for ongoing coaching and professional development... This is especially the case if professional development is targeted at areas where there is a clear community benefit in improving workforce capability, such as trauma-informed practice, meeting the cultural and educational priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families ... (p. 35).

To address this need, we engage with the following draft recommendations:

- 1. Draft Recommendation 3.4: Lift support and mentoring for new early childhood teachers**
Draft Recommendation 3.6: Contribute to professional development for the ECEC workforce

We argue that targeted coaching and mentoring and professional development in language-informed programs would benefit ECEC and improve workforce capability and retention. This includes children and families of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and overseas language backgrounds.

We suggest that it is of utmost importance that EC educators and teachers engage with upskilling opportunities in language-informed approaches including specific units on English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) pedagogy and language acquisition within the play-based Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) philosophy.

2. Draft Recommendation 3.5: Improve pathways and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to obtain ECEC qualifications

We concur with the draft report which notes, “Cultural safety, flexible learning options, practical supports are important in encouraging more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain a qualification and work in ECEC” (p. 35). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators who speak languages other than English (i.e. traditional language or contact languages) are under-represented in the qualified ECEC workforce but are essential in community settings where all or most Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students do not speak English in the home.

3. Draft Recommendation 3.2: Support innovative delivery of teaching qualifications

Skilled staff i.e. educators and teachers who can work across a range of diverse settings (p. 34) and who have the capacity and confidence to develop programs for linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English language learners) who make up a significant proportion of the Australian population. To do this we recommend innovative delivery of teaching qualifications through the:

- **Development of Early Childhood Teacher Education Courses**

We advocate for the development of Early Childhood Teacher Education courses (at various levels of certification including certificate, diploma, undergraduate and post graduate courses) that focus on building the capacity of educators and teachers to plan, implement and evaluate programs tailored to the needs of English language (EAL/D) learners and their families and communities. The accumulation of study experience, supportive mentor relationships and qualifications can build confidence within linguistically diverse demographics less well-represented in ECEC workforce.

We would like to draw attention to the challenges posed by accelerated courses which lead to high attrition rates and the overcrowded curriculum. It is essential that these factors are taken into consideration when designing and implementing initiatives to upskill EC educators and teachers in working with bi/multilingual learners and their families.

- **Practicum Placement in ECEC with Mentors Experienced in supporting EAL/D Children**

Create opportunities for pre-service teachers to undertake placements with mentors with expertise in a language-informed play-based approach to ECEC. This mentoring will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of effective practices in the area.

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