

Productivity Commission Early Childhood Education and Care Inquiry

May 2023

Submission from KU Children's Services

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

KU Children's Services (KU) respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Countries of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities on which KU services and programs are delivered. The contribution by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the education of young children existed long before our story began.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

KU has an organisational responsibility to the revitalisation and advancement of the cultures, histories, and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia as determined by them. Guided by our values and ethical practices, we commit to creating locally led programs and opportunities shaped and determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, employees, communities, and organisations.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING

As a child safe organisation, we continue our longstanding and unwavering commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children, with zero tolerance of child abuse.

ABOUT KU CHILDREN'S SERVICES

KU is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit providers of early education. Established in 1895 as the Kindergarten Union of NSW, KU was the first provider of early childhood education in Australia and is the nation's most experienced provider.

KU has a long demonstrated history of providing and supporting high-quality, inclusive early childhood education programs, and continues to lead the way with services and programs in NSW, Victoria, and the ACT, including preschool, kindergarten, long day care, family and early intervention programs and allied health services. In addition, KU is contracted by the Australian Government to provide support for eligible early childhood education services for the inclusion of children with additional needs. This includes the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) and Inclusion Agencies in NSW/ACT, QLD and VIC.

KU's achievements to date in the National Quality Standard Assessment and Ratings far exceed the national average, with all assessed services rated as Meeting or Exceeding the National Quality Standard. Such is KU's experience, expertise, and reputation, that we are often requested to provide specialist advice to other providers, peak bodies, the corporate sector, and all levels of government.

INTRODUCTION

KU Children's Services (KU) welcomes the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care, to identify structural and economic reforms, and targeted policies needed for a sustainable early childhood education (ECE) sector and to support Australia's productivity growth.

High quality, universally accessible ECE is a sensible investment for children's learning and life-long success. KU has provided significant data and commentary to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Price Inquiry to help inform their findings. We have also provided response to the Early Years Strategy and commented on the National Vision for ECE for a whole-of government, innovative, and long-term vision.

We appreciate the opportunity to make recommendations for affordable, accessible, equitable and quality ECE that promotes children's learning and wellbeing as well as assisting families to participate in the workforce.

ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

Affordable and Universal

Australia's spending on ECE has increased, resulting in reduced fees and increased participation rates, but many families are struggling with the cost of living. The CCS hourly rate needs to keep up with rising costs and much-needed future wage increases for educators. KU supports smoothing the CCS curve further by tapering income plateaus and providing a simpler system. We support a transition to a universal 90% childcare subsidy rate as a progressive approach towards fully funded ECE. We also support SNAICC's recommendation for a minimum 30 hours of 95% subsidy per week for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as an ongoing measure to 'close the gap' in participation and for Australian Early Development Census outcomes.¹

Those facing economic and social challenges should be provided with additional support to break the cycle of disadvantage. It has been reported that the activity test results in an estimated 126,000 Australian children from low-income households missing out. We would like to see removal of the activity test, which is supported by the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce to improve economic inclusion, especially for women, and reduce hardship and disadvantage for children.² We support retaining the Additional Child Care Subsidy for eligible families.

Federated arrangements for preschool/kindergarten perpetuates complexity and variation across jurisdictions and between service types. There is inconsistency and regularly changing programs and guidelines. This makes it difficult for families to navigate the maze of services and subsidies and challenges providers to offer flexible services that meet the diverse and changing needs of families. This inquiry provides an opportunity to consolidate and simplify those arrangements. An effective universal program needs a supportive policy context with flexible structures and systems to meet the needs and choices of families on the days and in locations that they need.

ECE improves outcomes for children in a variety of quality settings.³ An artificial division of education and care constrains us from thinking differently. A pedagogy of care underpins quality early childhood education and children are learning regardless of the service type. One complementary approach might be to offer a more unified system to help overcome historical divisions between 'care-focused' and 'education-focused' services. Just as funding under the *Preschool Reform Agreement* is provided to improve preschool participation in long day care (LDC) and preschool/kindergarten services, a cohesive and innovative funding model could see the Child Care Subsidy applied to additional hours in preschool/kindergarten services. This would support families requiring additional days and provide continuity for children who currently enrol across multiple services in response to priority of access and funding guidelines. An integrated funding system, utilising a Child Care Management System and child Customer Reference Number, could provide an incorporated approach that also addresses current data limitations across service types and jurisdictions.

Universal access has been characterised and measured by access and participation in ECE, primarily for children in the year before school and from identified target cohorts. Some jurisdictions have aligned initiatives to promote the participation of all three-year-old children. NSW and Victoria announced a joint commitment to a 'universal early education system' that ensures programs are available in every community, at every service, and for every 3-5 year old child.⁴ A truly universal approach to early childhood education would encompass all ages.

Over half the families who access ECE because parents are working use between 3-5 days.⁵ We support the provision of affordable or free ECE from birth to school age, for at least three days per week, with additional hours available for children from identified cohorts to prevent educational vulnerability. National partnership agreements have concentrated on the year or two before school with little focus on the earlier years for children. Specific attention needs to be given to younger children in ECE.

Available and Accessible

Access and availability are barriers to participation that impact families achieving their preferred level of workforce participation. A gap in planning and infrastructure has resulted in ‘childcare deserts’, especially in regional and remote areas.⁶ The ‘postcode lottery’ shapes many aspects of children’s and families’ lives.⁷ Issues of urban and rural provision is an economic and equity issue. Government has a responsibility to enable provision of essential services in areas of unmet need which may require innovative solutions so that communities are not disadvantaged by their location or population size.

Some jurisdictions are taking a more active role in supply and demand by establishing and providing new services. The NFP sector has valuable experience in strategic planning and partnership approaches that can be beneficial in developing and trialing new service models to improve access and availability in identified regions. To address imbalances, a planning process needs to be established to co-design with local communities, schools, and providers to determine current and future needs, and avoid oversupply in areas already well served. Unregulated growth can place viability stress on existing and new providers alike. Growth needs to be balanced with equity and quality. To do this, we need to address access barriers and bolster quality improvement in ways that don’t put added weight on the sector.

Appropriate and Responsive

Beyond the known barriers of affordability, availability, and accessibility, aspects of engagement need to be considered to support policy and service responses.⁸ Circumstances of a child’s cultural background, languages spoken, family health and income, and risk factors such as trauma and stress, can unfairly prevent them from reaching educational and social outcomes later in life. Children in the most disadvantaged socio-economic areas are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable when they start school and may struggle to catch up.

High quality learning experiences can act as a protective factor by offering pathways to intervention and support services and reduce a child’s chances of adverse development and later problems.⁹ A strengths-based approach focuses on social inclusion and service provision gaps, not on deficit narratives. A well supported ECE sector would enable outreach and wrap-around supports that build on strong partnerships with families, in culturally responsive environments that demonstrate understanding and respond to the unique identities and cultural knowledges of local communities. The not-for-profit (NFP) sector makes a unique contribution to social inclusion, especially for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. In 2022, KU allocated \$794,200 of its own funds to socially impactful programs and supported the inclusion of 778 children with additional needs and 267 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in our services.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Affordable or free early childhood education from birth to school age, for at least three days (30 hours) per week, and removal of the Activity Test.

QUALITY AND OUTCOMES

Child Rights

The benefits of quality ECE are largely undisputed and manifest in outcomes for children, families, and communities, beyond supporting families to work and study. Discourses about children and workforce participation can be conflicted. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Australia needs to make ECE a national priority. Parties to the Convention are charged with giving appropriate assistance to the children of working parents. This means placing children central to decision making about the support and services that are offered. The primary objective of ECE is dutifully about children’s right to have the best start in life and achieving their potential. ECE is a policy lever for the Australian economy, but its fundamental purpose must be to promote positive outcomes for children.

Laying the Foundations

The first five years of a child's life are a sensitive period for neurodevelopment and critical to their learning, health, and wellbeing. Essential groundwork is laid in early childhood for building dispositions for successful learning and establishing solid foundations for engagement in school. Children develop academic skills, creativity, and the personal and social capabilities that they will need to succeed throughout their lives. ECE is an integral part of the education continuum and a fundamental right for children.

A narrow view of ECE as a preparation for school program can perilously cause a 'push down' approach that is not appropriate for early childhood development and learning. Transition to school strategies need to go beyond the current reliance on ECE to provide a developmental summary to schools that invariably does not result in continuity of learning for children. Given the added workload placed on ECE, a review should be undertaken of the current transition to school statements mandated in various jurisdictions, and how they are used by schools, with the view to streamline and optimise their use or consider alternate approaches that build meaningful partnerships to support effective transition. This must be adequately resourced to enable time and processes. There needs to be a consistent transition process that is well supported and funded to promote professional collaboration between prior to school and school settings that includes children and families in the process.

Compliance and Quality Improvement

There is a strong body of evidence that shows outcomes are met by participation in quality ECE, but poor quality ECE can have detrimental effects on children. The National Law and Regulations are crucial for the safety, health, and wellbeing of children. Strengthening the risk focus and regulatory response can create stronger incentives for improving compliance. More attention must be placed on services not meeting the National Quality Standard (NQS) with timely assessment of new services and more frequent assessment of services rated as Working Towards NQS. ACECQA data shows a large proportion of newer services not being assessed for two to three years after opening, as too are services rated as Working Towards NQS not been reassessed in two years, and some rated as Working Towards NQS being reassessed as Working Towards NQS.¹⁰ There must be less tolerance for services not meeting the standard.

ECE in Australia has demonstrated sustained quality improvement since introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF). Qualifications, educator to child ratios, and group size have been linked to program quality and we support the high standards of the NQF. The NQS and Approved Learning Frameworks are internationally recognised and valued by the sector to guide pedagogical practice. The highly nuanced quality rating system, however, remains unclear for many families. A review of the quality ratings to simplify and better distinguish how compliance and quality is represented might help to support this.

RECOMMENDATION 2: ECE is recognised as an integral part of the education continuum and a fundamental right of children.

WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Women's Workforce Participation

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of social infrastructure as a safety net for the economy. If Government aims to leverage women's workforce participation for economic prosperity, it needs to invest in a secure ECE workforce. A thriving care economy, which includes a robust ECE sector, is vital to unlocking women's economic participation and progressing gender equality.¹¹ More needs to be done generally to address pay inequity and correct the undervaluation of female-dominated occupations, including ECE.

Workforce Shortages

Increases in fee subsidies must be paired with investment in the ECE workforce. The strength and wellbeing of our workforce is critical to the successful provision of quality outcomes for children. A highly skilled, valued and professionally recognised workforce is vital and must be considered a policy priority. Workforce shortages across the country have reached historically high levels and present a serious barrier to advancing accessibility and quality. Coordinated efforts are needed to identify priority areas to better support recruitment and retention.

A capable and well-resourced workforce must be supported with ongoing professional learning that reinforces high-quality teaching and educational leadership. Recent budget measures to support the workforce through the professional development subsidy, paid practicum subsidy and practicum exchanges will help to strengthen skills and professional experience. Pathways from vocational to higher education are essential to enable educators to build on previous study and undertake lifelong learning. This is particularly important when coupled with skilled migration initiatives for increased supply and capacity.

Reviving foundational training can help grow the pool of educators. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships offer career and study pathways. These programs must offer a meaningful transition to the profession and be delivered in a professionally connected way. They need to be co-designed, well-resourced, and funded. Internships, paraprofessional and early career programs that provide learning experiences, project development, mentoring and peer support should be explored. Micro-credentials that have academic recognition can be stacked into higher-level certification. Quality professional experience placements are also crucial to a positive entry into the teaching profession. All initiatives, including accelerated workforce programs, must not reduce the essential skills and knowledge development or diminish teaching quality. However, it will not support retention in the long term unless the workforce is appropriately remunerated. KU applauds the *Secure Jobs, Better Pay Act 2022* for enabling voluntary participation in cooperative workplace bargaining and for improving job security and gender equality in the workplace relations system. However, multi-employer bargaining needs to be available for ECE staff who work in all service types in the ECE sector, not just for CCS services.

Skilled and Qualified ECE Workforce

Preparation and ongoing development of the workforce is essential to quality. Well trained, skilled, and knowledgeable educators lift educational outcomes for children. Employment incentives and the skills and training package just announced in the 2023-24 budget will assist teachers and educators to undertake much needed professional learning, but more is needed to support wages. State and territory initiatives to expand services and increase preschool participation will fuel demand and place added pressure on an already strained workforce that could risk compromising quality without the necessary scaffolds in place.

There have been additional requirements placed on the sector for quality uplift, which KU supports generally. At the same time, this increases administrative demands that impact workloads, staffing costs, and ultimately fees. The ECE workforce needs to be well-resourced, supported, and funded to cope with additional requirements and sustain quality outcomes without overloading teachers and educators.

To lift children's educational outcomes, educators must skilfully combine explicit teaching with sensitive and warm, play-based interactions.¹² We need a capable and well-resourced workforce with access to ongoing professional learning to support children's diverse needs. KU advocates for specialist teachers (birth-5 years) and qualified educators who are prepared to meet the growing demands of working with children and families, especially those with diverse and complex needs. Transitional provisions that recognise other teaching qualifications and the move by tertiary institutions to offer birth-12 years teaching degrees to meet the demands of schools means that newly graduating teachers may have limited proficiency in the distinct and differentiated pedagogical approaches and professional practice

required for the early years. Teachers must have a full appreciation of child development, play-based learning, and the approved learning frameworks for delivery of the NQF.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ECE has a stable, skilled, and well-resourced workforce.

PRODUCTIVITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Policy Cohesion

Piecemeal funding and a fragmented policy environment with separate national portfolio strategies and disconnected systems are detrimental to productivity. Government investment needs to be efficient and complementary to maximise educational and economic benefit.

Navigating varied systems and funding programs is difficult for service providers and families alike. A viable ECE sector needs funding certainty and predictability. The sector cannot respond to growing demand without infrastructure support. Reducing system complexity will help families navigate pathways more confidently and efficiently.¹³

Unifying these strategies and initiatives would advance a more cohesive national response. Government has stewardship of funding, regulation, and policy levers. We need a coordinated approach across all levels of Government to improve responsibility and accountability. A siloed approach sees duplication, disconnected data, and unnecessary competition for resources that can result in missed opportunities for collaboration and impact. States and territories are making commitments and forging ahead with initiatives, but a national strategy is needed to bring cohesion. There needs to be a more coordinated response with cross-government and non-government collaboration, with a permanent national partnership agreement for outcomes to be achieved. The *Education Policy Outlook in Australia* report urges collaboration of governments and stakeholders towards achieving policy goals.¹⁴ It is our collective responsibility to ensure that children do not fall through the policy, systems, and funding gaps. Creating new conditions for systemic change in the early years can help us work relationally and amplify the provision of services for children.¹⁵

Evidence Informed

Government investment is a testament to the role that ECE plays in strengthening productivity and economic prosperity. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how vital ECE is to Australia's economic stability. Performance of ECE services is currently measured by participation, cost, demand, qualified staff, compliance, and achievement of the NQF.¹⁶ Better data collection and linking can support an expanded measurement framework so that implementation is underpinned by research and practice evidence. Identifying research priorities will build the evidence base to transform the quality, productivity, and outcomes of ECE, early intervention, health, family, and support services. Establishing a Cooperative Research Council could help to create new ways of working that coalesce to address chronic problems facing collective sectors.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Cross-government and sector collaboration with a unified funding mechanism.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Equity and Inclusion

ECE needs to be adequately resourced and supported to receive children with diverse health and learning needs. For children with a developmental delay or disability, additional planning and support is necessary to make the process simple and inclusive. Integrated service provision can be achieved through strong partnership and referral pathways. This model needs additional investment to release staff to engage in this connected way of working. All approaches should be well-resourced and aim to reduce any administrative burden.

Migrant and refugee populations are increasing and may need additional help to navigate service systems. No child should be excluded from essential support services, but refugee and humanitarian entrants and non-permanent residents are ineligible for certain health services and Child Care Subsidies. Programs such as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and supported and community playgroups offer valuable community engagement and safe pathways to referral. Trauma-informed responses and complex case support may be required, and brokerage to connect families to other services and support programs.

Reform and funding are needed to reduce inequity and tackle the broader determinants of vulnerability. Families with complex needs and entrenched disadvantage can face a variety of practical, social, and cultural barriers to engaging with ECE and other services. Services and programs must be shaped around the needs of families, with a place-based approach that builds on the strengths of local communities. Children with disabilities and additional needs, or from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse backgrounds can face discrimination.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to face structural barriers preventing them from accessing services and as a result are twice as likely to be educationally vulnerable when they commence school.¹⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be integral to the design and delivery of all policies and programs that affect them. The role of kinship and community is recognised as an important protective factor. Aboriginal communities' ownership and leadership of program design, delivery, and governance is to be encouraged. Cultural leadership and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations is needed in service delivery. We endorse recommendations in the position paper, *Working Together to Ensuring Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years*.¹⁸

Holistic and Connected Services

Investment in the early years shows greater economic return than at any other time during childhood with education, health, and productivity benefits for the individual and society.¹⁹ ECE plays a significant role in prevention and early intervention. Initiatives must holistically consider the intersection of ECE services with other sectors, including health and child protection systems. More investment is needed for connected approaches that better support children. There needs to be clear referral pathways, connected supports and wrap-around services, such as family support, and child and family health. Integrated service models and allied health supports can help reduce service fragmentation for children with complex needs and those experiencing disadvantage and trauma. Staff need time to engage with other professionals to support the increasingly complex needs of children that existing structures typically do not support.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Increased funding for children with additional needs and support for inclusion through connected and integrated services.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT

Pay and Conditions

Educators and teachers must receive better pay and conditions that reflect their skills and responsibilities. The sector has a growing number of vacancies that have risen to historically high levels across the country.²⁰ Staffing waivers nationally remain at a worrying high 8.9%.²¹ We need to reverse this trend and reject appeals to undercut ratios or qualifications, which are the bedrock of quality. We welcome the upcoming review of staffing and qualification regulations being undertaken by ACECQA to support quality and reduce complexity.

KU has been recognised as an Employer of Choice in the Australian Business Awards for seven consecutive years, with enviable rates of workforce retention. Over 30% of our staff have tenure of 10 years or more, but we are not immune to the challenge of chronic workforce shortages. The ECE

workforce is fatigued, and many experienced and qualified educators are leaving without enough graduates coming through to replace them. We need a vibrant workforce pipeline and an urgent retention strategy while a permanent solution is being designed and implemented. The *National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy* recommends immediate action to improve wages and conditions.²²

Pay and conditions help attract and retain teachers and educators in the sector which means less turnover and greater continuity for children. Wages are the largest single cost item, around 70-80 % of fees for NFP providers. Implementing an unfunded wage rise for educators and teachers would inevitably mean an increase in fees for families that would undermine the affordability objective of the *Cheaper Child Care Bill*. The NFP sector cannot achieve this without a funding commitment from the Government and to build on Fair Work Commission gains in this area.

Governments have subsidised teacher salaries in the past and we urge the Australian Government to fund an interim 10 % wage supplement for educators and teachers working directly with children, and to extend this to support educators to provide for the vital inclusion of children with disabilities and additional needs. An alternate funding option could be linked to NQF staffing requirements for services with added payments for the inclusion of target child cohorts, in recognition of the added planning and collaboration needed to effectively support these groups.

Technological and Capital Investment

Technology capabilities and innovations may offer solutions for seamless referral and support pathways, efficient data management and reporting, but sharing identified data across the complex service system needs careful consideration for security and privacy. This must be achieved in a way that does not add further burden on the already pressured ECE sector.

Many community-based services have endured underinvestment in capital for many years and may need upgrades to meet the expectations of contemporary educational facilities and workplaces. Making funding available for capital upgrades would support ECE to improve spaces for teaching and learning. Funding should generally be restricted to NFP and government services, or private providers with strong records of delivering high quality inclusion and support. Application to a dedicated funding stream for existing facilities could be assessed on quality, inclusion and access priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Government funded wages or supplement for teachers and educators required under the NQF.

IN SUMMARY

The Australian Government acknowledges the integral part that ECE plays in children's learning and development and recognises it also as a powerful lever for increasing workforce participation. ECE is a core part of the education continuum and the cornerstone of social and economic reform.

This is an unprecedented opportunity to unify efforts across governments and the sector. We call on the Government to act on policy and system level changes for quality, universally accessible, and affordable ECE.

- ▶ *Recommendation 1: Affordable or free early childhood education from birth to school age, for at least three days (30 hours) per week, and removal of the Activity Test.*
- ▶ *Recommendation 2: ECE is recognised as an integral part of the education continuum and a fundamental right of children.*
- ▶ *Recommendation 3: ECE has a stable, skilled, and well-resourced workforce.*
- ▶ *Recommendation 4: Cross-government and sector collaboration with a unified funding mechanism.*

- ▶ *Recommendation 5: Increased funding for children with additional needs and support for inclusion through connected and integrated services.*
- ▶ *Recommendation 6: Government funded wages or supplement for teachers and educators required under the NQF.*

We urge that strategies are prioritised to address workforce shortages, improvement to inclusion funding, and expanding access and availability of quality ECE services.

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment. We welcome further engagement to discuss anything raised in this submission.

If you require more information, please contact Christine Legg, CEO at chris.legg@ku.com.au.

FOOTNOTES

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² Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (2023). [Letter to Minister Gallagher re advice for May 2023 Budget](#)

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⁴ Dandolo Partners (2022). Working through the NSW and Victorian early education reforms. [Paper 1 – Balancing ambitious growth with equity and quality](#)

⁵ Centre for Policy Development (2021). [Starting better: A guarantee for young children and families](#)

⁶ Hurley, P., Matthews, H., and Pennicuik, S. (2022). [Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare? Mitchell Institute, Victoria University](#)

⁷ Matheson, A., (2023). [Ending the 'postcode lottery' in health is more than a technical fix – it means fundamentally reorganizing our systems](#)

⁸ Skattebol, J., Blaxland, M., and Adamson, E. (2021). [The five aspects of effective engagement in early childhood education: Approachability, acceptability, availability, affordability, appropriateness](#)

⁹ Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D., and Smith, C. (2015). [Better systems, better chances: A review of research and practice for prevention and early intervention](#)

¹⁰ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. [National Registers](#)

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¹² Torii, K., Fox, S., and Cloney, D. (2017). Quality is key in Early Childhood Education in Australia. [Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 01/2017](#)

¹³ The Front Project (2022). [The case for system stewardship in Australia's early childhood education and care system](#)

¹⁴ OECD (2023). [Education policy outlook in Australia](#)

¹⁵ McKenzie, F., and Millar, E. (2022). [Systems mapping report: Mapping the systems that influence early childhood development outcomes](#)

¹⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2023). [Report on government services 2023: 3 Early childhood education and care](#)

¹⁷ SNAICC (2020). [Policy and Research: Early Childhood](#)

¹⁸ Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC (2019). [Working together to ensure equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years](#)

¹⁹ García, J. L. Heckman, J.J. Leaf, D. E., and Prados, M.J. (2016). [The life-cycle benefits of an influential early childhood program. National Bureau of Economic Research](#)

²⁰ National Skills Commission (2022). [Skills priority list occupation reports – Education professionals](#)

²¹ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023). [NQF Snapshot – Waivers](#)

²² Centre for Policy Development (2021). [Starting better report](#)