



Charles Sturt
University

Jobs and Skills Australia – Early Childhood, Education and Care Capacity Study

30 January 2024

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Charles Sturt University

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Rob Bonner
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By email: ECECworkforce@jobsandskills.gov.au

Dear Mr Bonner

Jobs and Skills Australia Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study consultation paper

Charles Sturt University welcomes this opportunity to provide input to this vitally important study. The University has a key role in the training and professional development of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce across NSW, especially in regional areas, and, through our online programs, around the country.

This role has only become more important in recent years: in our strategic discussions with a wide range of regional partners and stakeholders, access to childcare is one of the top issues they raise. The shortage of ECEC staff and places affects many regional families and employers. For the latter it too often limits their ability to attract skilled staff from metropolitan and other regional places, and the University suggests that this issue should be considered in some depth in the Capacity Study.

The attached submission is draws on the experience and expertise of academic staff in the School of Education, part of the University's Faculty of Arts and Education, who, I am happy to say, responded immediately and enthusiastically to the suggestion that we make a submission to the Capacity Study. They have drawn on extensive research at Charles Sturt University, other Australian universities, and leading research teams around the world to identify four interrelated key factors that affect the ECEC workforce:

- low remuneration, especially compared to similar industries,
- perceptions of the profession, among current staff and in the wider community (and government), and
- limited or unclear pathways for career progression.

Despite ECEC staff being highly motivated these three factors lead to the fourth: significant and growing mental and physical health challenges for staff. Any recommendations arising from the Capacity Study must address these factors.

Charles Sturt University suggests that potential recommendations include:

- a commitment from governments (as major funders of ECEC provision) and employers to improve working conditions (including remuneration) and cultures,
- a national strategy to improve perceptions of the ECEC profession in the community, among policymakers, in ECEC employers and the profession itself,
- measures to improve ECEC staff access to support services, with mental health support a priority,
- the development of clearer ECEC workforce career pathways,
- strategies to boost the diversity of the ECEC workforce, with increased education/training and recruitment of First Nations professionals as a priority, and
- targeted interventions to boost workforce supply and capabilities in regional areas.

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Charles Sturt University would welcome the opportunity to provide HumanAbility with more information on any of the issues raised in the submission.

Furthermore, give the particular pressures on the supply of ECEC staff and places in regional areas, we would like to suggest that you consider public consultations in major regional centres. The University has meeting/conference facilities on all of our campuses and we would be happy to host a consultation session for the Capacity Study.

Yours sincerely

Professor John McDonald
Executive Dean
Faculty of Arts and Education

Submission to the Jobs and Skills Australia Early Childhood Education and Care capacity study

About Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt is Australia's largest regional university, with more than 36,000 students and approximately 2,000 full time equivalent staff. We have campuses based in some of New South Wales' most vibrant regional communities: Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Dubbo, Goulburn, Orange, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga. The University supports and hosts a range of social, cultural and sporting activities, including school events and exams, and like our colleagues in other regional universities we played a critical role in helping local communities deal with the challenges of bushfires, floods and the pandemic.

Established in 1989 following the Dawkins' reforms but tracing its roots back over more than a century, Charles Sturt has a long and proud history in providing access to higher education for students who might otherwise miss out on the opportunities it provides. The University Strategy 2030 continues this tradition with clear goals for students, research, and the wider community.

We are particularly proud of our track record in boosting higher education participation and attainment for those living in rural, regional and remote areas, for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and for First Nations peoples. Every year at least 45 per cent of Charles Sturt's students are the first in their family to go to university. Among our domestic enrolments, around 16 per cent come from low SES backgrounds, and almost four per cent are from First Nations backgrounds.

Charles Sturt consistently ranks as Australia's top university for full-time graduate employment according to the Graduate Outcomes Survey, with 84.7 per cent of 2020 graduates in full-time employment four months after graduation, well above the sector average of 68.9 per cent. The University also ranks in the top three for medium-term graduate employment.

More than 75 per cent of Charles Sturt's graduates go on to work in regional areas, placing the University at the centre of efforts to address regional workforce shortages in a wide range of industries, including health and allied health, aged care, engineering, and education.

Charles Sturt University is a leading provider of regional, rural and remote early years initial teacher education and offers a full range of education courses for early childhood education, K-12 and specialist teachers. Particularly important is our Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary), a course that supports both preservice teachers and early childhood education (ECE) settings in regional and remote areas of Australia that would otherwise have limited Early Years professional experience and development. The University provides further opportunities to support regional, rural and remote initial teacher education and ECE workforce by having an online degree Bachelor of Education (Birth-5 years). In 2023 there were more than 1600 students enrolled in the degree. Most will go on to work in careers in Early Childhood Education; our post-graduation full-time employment rate of 91.5 per cent in 2021 underscores the University's significant contribution to the early childhood workforce in regional NSW and Victoria.

Enrolments in Charles Sturt's ECE courses have increased steadily over the past few years. The continued high demand for the course is testament to the relevance and quality of the course content and the positive reputation the course has in the ECE sector. Relationships with regional providers extend beyond Workplace Learning placements and involve a range of ECE services in regional areas of NSW and Victoria including long day care; community preschools; Family Day Care; and

early primary through an Early Years Collaborative Network that involves communities in ECE pedagogy and teaching.

The growth in enrolments is fortunate, as regional ECE continue to have trouble recruiting sufficient staff to meet the demand for early childhood education and care. This in turn limits other regional employers' ability to attract staff as lack of access to services like long day-care deters potential employees from relocating to regional areas. The University's experience across many fields shows that best way to meet regional workforce shortages is to provide professional education and training for regional people and in regional areas, as they are far more likely to stay in regional areas after graduation.

Response to consultation questions

Overview and current state

What are the challenges and opportunities facing the ECEC workforce? How do different ECEC service delivery types (e.g. centre based care, family day care, pre-school) impact workforce challenges and opportunities?

Challenges

There are extraordinary everyday challenges for the ECEC workforce, which is largely female, often underpaid, and significantly undervalued, yet charged with the huge responsibility of the education, care and safety of our youngest citizens. Despite their motivation and passion for early childhood care and education many ECEC staff are at a critical point of despair because of the economic, workload, and well-being challenges they face. Low professional status, lack of career progression and lack of work/life balance for their own families are also factors. This results in high levels of burnout, high staff turnover, and a high risk of poor educational outcomes for young children¹.

Studying and gaining qualifications in ECEC do not compare favourably with the job satisfaction and pay for similar academic investment in other professions².

The key findings of a recent survey of ECEC educators conducted by the United Workers Union in 2021 and attracting over 3800 responses³, suggests that the sector is currently facing considerable challenges including:

- 1) Unsustainably high turnover rates, with the “best and the brightest most likely to leave” (p. 9). Indeed, educators who are currently upskilling are reported as being far more likely to leave than those who aren't: 40 per cent of educators currently upskilling to an ECT degree and 51 per cent of educators upskilling to a master's degree intend to leave in the long term (with many moving into primary education), compared to only 29 per cent educators who are currently not upskilling.
- 2) Low pay is putting severe financial stress on educators with almost 62 per cent reporting they intend to leave the sector because they cannot afford to stay (p. 12).
- 3) Understaffing and recruitment are major issues with high numbers of educators leaving and fewer new educators choosing ECEC as a profession, resulting in thousands of job vacancies

¹ Ng, J., Rogers, M., & McNamara, C. (2023). Early childhood educator's burnout: A systematic review of the determinants and effectiveness of interventions. *Issues in Educational Research*, Issue 33 volume 1 pages 173-206

² Fenech, M., Wong, S., Boyd, W. et al. [Attracting, retaining and sustaining early childhood teachers: an ecological conceptualisation of workforce issues and future research directions](#). *Aust. Educ. Res.* 49, 1–19 (2022).

³ [Exhausted, undervalued and leaving: The crisis in early education](#).

nationally. Two-thirds of the educators surveyed reported that their place of work is “understaffed and they ‘often’ felt pressured to avoid taking leave because of staff shortages” (p. 3).

- 4) Excessive workloads, unpaid work and ‘under-the-roof ratios’ are huge problem (where ratios are calculated across a service rather than within a room) with over two-thirds of educators reporting an increase in their workload over the last few years, and one-quarter of educators reporting at least 5-10 hours unpaid work each month.

The staff shortages reported by the United Workers Union have impacted the capacity of providers to enrol all children wanting to attend, with the capping of enrolments now being common practice in Australian ECEC sector⁴. Three separate surveys conducted by the Australian Childcare Alliance during 2023 showed that:

- In February, 67 per cent of respondents were capping enrolments due to lack of staff, “with a total of 16,300 places removed across one-week alone” (p. 3).
- In May, 56 per cent of respondents reported capping enrolments, “with a total of 10,961 places being withheld from families during the week of 8-12 May” (p. 3).
- This increased in the third survey conducted in October where it was found that a total of 11,123 places were withheld due to staff shortages.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the negative working conditions for many ECEC workers with “stressful, exhausting experiences” and constant change making “burnout central” commonplace⁵. Other impacts include centre closures and increased risks to workforce health and financial security⁶. Several studies indicated that the ECEC sector workforce has been left feeling “undervalued, forgotten and disrespected”⁷, including by governments, and that ‘the profession has abandoned them’⁸.

COVID-19 has also made work in the ECE sector more challenging because of the pandemic’s effect on children’s mental health, including their difficulties with self-regulation^{9,10}) and their experiences of complex trauma¹¹. Yet evidence reveals that educators have little experience and training regarding how to offer appropriate levels of support¹² and that the impact of trauma on children’s learning is often “poorly understood by educators”¹³.

⁴ Australian Childcare Alliance, [2023 survey feedback: capping enrolments due to staff shortages](#).

⁵ Rogers, M., Boyd, W., & Sims, M. (2023). "Burnout central": Australian early childhood educational leaders' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Issues in educational research*, 33(1), 284-306.

⁶ Logan, H., McFarland, L., Cumming, A. T., & Wong, S. (2021). Supporting educator well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of leadership in early childhood education and care organisations. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 46(4), 309-321.

⁷ McFarland, L., Cumming, T., Wong, S., & Bull, R. (2022). 'My Cup Was Empty': The Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Educator Well-Being. In *The Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education and Care: International Perspectives, Challenges, and Responses* (pp. 171-192). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

⁸ Wiltshire, C. A. (2023). Early childhood education teacher workforce: Stress in relation to identity and choices. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-14.

⁹ Laura A. Bentley, Rebecca Eager, Sally Savage, Cathy Nielson, Sonia L.J. White and Kate E. Williams (2022). [A translational application of music for preschool cognitive development: RCT evidence for improved executive function, self-regulation, and school-readiness](#). *Developmental Science*.

¹⁰ Casey C Burgess, (2023). Educator understanding of self-regulation and implications for classroom facilitation: A mixed-methods study. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*. Vol 21(4) 469-483.

¹¹ Howard, J., (2020). Trauma-aware early childhood education and care. Research in Practice Series. *Early Childhood Australia*.

¹² Morgan, B., Palfrey, N., Price-Robertson, R., Guy, S., & Masters, J. (2018). [Introducing the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health: Improving the lives of infants, children and families](#). *Family Matters*. No 100.

¹³ Commission for Children and Young People. (2023). [Let us learn: Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care](#).

Simultaneously, the pandemic underlined the critical need for the continuance and expansion and support of the ECEC sector.

Opportunities

How do different ECEC service delivery types (e.g. centre based care, family day care, pre-school) impact workforce challenges and opportunities?

Australia is not alone in dealing with a crisis of labour supply in ECEC, with many other countries facing growing demand and similar levels of attrition^{14,15}. A 2018 study by Queensland-based researchers indicated that a collaborative organisational culture combined with staff working in teams could have a positive impact on staff retention¹⁶. Other research has highlighted the potential benefits of quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) for Long Day Care Services¹⁷. These outcomes depend on the provider having sufficient staff and resources, though: the 2018 study in part involved centres within large, multi-site organisations and with large (> 60) numbers of places.

Many providers simply do not have the capacity and resources to more effectively engage with QRIS processes. Stand-alone providers make up 80 per cent of Australia's ECEC services, and 51 per cent are not-for-profit. In a submission to the recent Productivity Commission inquiry on Early Childhood Education and Care, Family Day Care Australia (FDCA) urged the Commission to recommend changes to funding mechanisms to address this challenge¹⁸. The United Workers Union report cited above found that even in the for-profit sector there are still significant resourcing barriers that prevent providers from addressing workforce attrition¹⁹.

A further complication is the need to provide culturally appropriate ECE education, training and services in some locations. The NSW Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy²⁰), for example, included a focus on providing qualified educators and teachers with specialised skills in working with First Nations children, children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and children with disability and additional needs, noting widespread shortages especially in rural and remote areas in NSW.

1. How well is the current system responding to workforce challenges?

The draft report from the current Productivity Commission inquiry highlighted the lack of staff as the “biggest challenge facing the sector”. Persistent issues have been affecting the sector for many years but were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with ECEC providers “delaying expansion plans, closing rooms and limiting enrolments as they are unable to find qualified staff.”²¹ Unfortunately, while the problem is clear, and has been for some time, government and industry responses have been inadequate, leaving the system at real risk of collapse.

For example, Shaping Our Future, the 10-year *National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy* released in 2021 offers a ‘call to action’, for governments, peak bodies, service providers,

¹⁴ Wiltshire, C. A. (2023). Early childhood education teacher workforce: Stress in relation to identity and choices. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-14.

¹⁵ Longmuir, F., Gallo Cordoba, B., Phillips, M., Allen, K. A., & Moharami, M. (2022). [Australian teachers' perceptions of their work in 2022](#).

¹⁶ McDonald, P., Thorpe, K., & Irvine, S. (2018). Low pay but still we stay: Retention in early childhood education and care. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 60(5), 647–668.

¹⁷ Gibson, M., Press, F., Harrison, L., Wong, S., Cumming, T., Ryan, S., Crisp, K., Richardson, S., Gibbs, L., Cooke, M., & Brown, J. (2023). *Shining a light on early childhood educators' work. A report from the Australian study Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work: A multi-level investigation*. Queensland University of Technology.

¹⁸ FDCA (2023). RE: [Submission on the inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care](#).

¹⁹ Exhausted, undervalued and leaving: The crisis in early education, p 18.

²⁰ NSW Department of Education. (2018). [Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy 2018-2022](#).

²¹ Productivity Commission (2023), [A path to universal early childhood education and care](#), p21

education and training bodies, regulators and educators²². While providing a roadmap of sorts for the development of a sustainable, high-quality ECE workforce, the strategy is not centrally co-ordinated and has thus far resulted in disparate state and territory-based actions, a series of small research initiatives, and a growing concern that the crisis will remain.

The Department of Education in the state of Victoria has been a standout in its response to the workforce crisis, particularly in fast tracking early childhood teacher qualifications, new graduate mentoring and the payment of retention bonuses and incentive payments for regional employment²³. The NSW Government, for comparison, has been late to respond. While announcing a review of 'access, choice and affordability' by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal²⁴ and, in 2023-24 additional funding to address workforce shortages via scholarships and professional development programs, there is no sign of the NSW Government working to update the Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy released in 2018²⁵.

2. What factors are driving or deterring workforce attraction, retention, and career progression in the ECEC sector? What factors are driving attrition?

This is, fortunately, an issue on which there is extensive research, much of it ready for translation in policies and actions for governments and employers²⁶.

A literature review carried out by the NSW Government in 2020 found the main factors contributing to workforce shortages are poor pay and conditions, especially relative to other industries; lack of recognition of ECE as a profession; stress; and unrealistic expectations of the work, including among staff²⁷. For male staff additional contributing factors include attitudinal barriers and a lack of male peers²⁸.

The NSW Government literature review also noted limited career development opportunities, unclear career pathways, for example to becoming an Early Childhood teacher or centre director, and little financial benefit in pursuing those options.

Conversely, better pay and conditions, stable employment, and a working environment that supports psychological and emotional wellbeing contribute to higher levels of staff retention, as does a more diverse and inclusive workforce.²⁹

Future of the workforce

3. What are the future needs for the ECEC sector and workforce, and what might influence these requirements?

²² Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (2021), [Shaping Our Future: The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy \(2022–2031\)](#).

²³ Victoria State Government (2023) [Early childhood jobs](#).

²⁴ IPART [Early childhood education and care – Independent Market Monitoring Review](#). The report from the review was delivered to the NSW Government in December 2023.

²⁵ NSW Department of Education, [Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy 2018-2022](#).

²⁶ Fenech et al. (2022).

²⁷ NSW Government. (2020). [Literature review: Early Childhood Education Directorate](#).

²⁸ Kirk, G. (2020). [Gender differences in experiences and motivation in a Bachelor of Education \(Early Childhood Studies\) course: Can these explain higher male attrition rates?](#) *Aust. Educ. Res.* 47, 873–892.

²⁹ Browne, K. (2023). Do not Enter? An Autoethnographic Encounter with Policy and Practice Workforce Agendas in Early Childhood Education and Care. In: Weuffen, S., Burke, J., Plunkett, M., Goriss-Hunter, A., Emmett, S. (eds) [Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice in Education](#). Sustainable Development Goals Series. Springer, Singapore.

The chronic and increasing shortfall of appropriately qualified educators (ACECQA, 2023³⁰) has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Thorpe et al., 2020, 2023³¹) and a worsening international economic context. The ECEC sector will require around 37,000 additional educators, including 7,000 additional early childhood teachers, by 2024 (ACECQA, 2023).

Changing international social and academic contexts mean that the skills required of ECEC educators working with children will be increasingly diverse.

4. Are there any specific novel skills and capability requirements emerging in the ECEC sector? How have workforce requirements in ECEC changed over time?

It is imperative that the sector is seen as key to determining and developing the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions required. Research studies such as 'Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work'³², provide "evidence that the early childhood sector knows what is required to ensure that all children, in every Australian early childhood service, have access to high-quality educational practices that will support their learning and wellbeing"³³.

This study found that educator pre-service and on-going tailored professional development, coaching and mentoring, will support educators to provide high-quality practice, though it is essential that ECEC organisations create and foster the conditions that enable them to do so.

Pathways and qualifications

5. How is the education and training system responding to the need for a skilled ECEC workforce? Where are the opportunities and challenges? Are there enablers and barriers in providing ECEC training (e.g., jurisdictional differences)?

Discussed in depth in Jackson (2023)³⁴.

6. What attracts students to ECEC training courses and workers to ECEC roles? What influences job mobility across roles and sectors?

Huang et al., (2022, p. 515)³⁵ point to having a strong ECE identity as crucial to attracting workers:

Teachers' professional identities, or the professional images teachers have of themselves, play an essential role in teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their propensity to stay in the profession ... the social images of EC teachers, professional learning in universities, and requirements in kindergartens were perceived as the main obstacles to achieving a high identity, which refers to a strong, emotional recognition of ECE, satisfaction with the teacher education programme, and positive career prospects.

Participation and engagement

7. What influences patterns of work in the ECEC sector, e.g. performing multiple roles or working in different services?

³⁰ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2023a). [Workforce snapshot](#).

³¹ Thorpe, K., Panthi, N., Houen, S., Horwood, M., & Staton, S. (2023). 'Support to stay and thrive: mapping challenges faced by Australia's early years educators to the national workforce strategy 2022–2031'. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 1-25.

³² Harrison, L., Wong, S., Cumming, T., Gibson, M., Press, F., & Ryan, S. (2022). *Exemplary early childhood educators at work: A multi-level investigation*.

³³ Gibson et al, 2023

³⁴ Jackson, J. (2023). [Developing early childhood educators with diverse qualifications: The need for differentiated approaches](#). *Professional Development in Education*, 49(5), 812-826.

³⁵ Runke Huang, Hao Zheng, Tianxue Duan, Weipeng Yang & Hui Li (2022), [Preparing to be future early childhood teachers: undergraduate students' perceptions of their identity](#), *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 50:5, 515-533.

While it is crucial to understand the influence of leadership in ECE settings (Zhou & Fenech, 2022)³⁶, Nuttall et al., (2022)³⁷, caution against policies that position leaders “with the responsibility for solving workforce problems of quality and morale that have the potential to undermine the reform agenda ... very few Educational Leaders have received higher pay or conditions to support them to accommodate this new role”.

8. What factors influence workforce participation for priority cohorts including First Nations people? What are the enablers and barriers to support the development of a diverse workforce in the sector?

According to Aboriginal children early childhood education strategy 2021-2025 (NSW Department of Education, 2023³⁸), the vision is to provide access quality early childhood education of all Aboriginal children in NSW. To achieve this goal, it is targeted to build a diverse workforce by ensuring the number of Aboriginal educators and teachers, and NSW Government aim to recruit 3 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as early childhood and education directorate staff.

As supported by Locke (2022)³⁹, Indigenous educators’ knowledge regarding country, family and history and perspectives in mainstream ECEC can provide superficial inclusion in the sector, which eventually will provide quality and culturally safe learning environments for First Nations children.

9. How do wages and working conditions (including location) interact with workforce participation? What factors could be considered?

“Providing wage, benefit, and teacher support policies in the early childhood programs may help programs retain teachers” (Hur et al., 2023⁴⁰).

Poor leadership and high workload impede ECE workers’ wellbeing and in unhealthy workplace culture discrimination is tolerated and reproduced (Hine et al., 2022⁴¹).

10. To what extent do employers/the sector invest in professional development to support workers’ career progression, retain workers and improve services?

In ‘Tracing the interconnectedness of early childhood educators’ professional capital’ Nolan (2023) found “inequity in access to professional learning, the valuing of life experiences, clear divisions of labour that impact what knowledge is valued, and differences in educator agency in the decision-making process⁴². Many certificate-qualified educators experience a workplace culture that lacks trust in an individual’s professional competence and does not appreciate collegial knowledge and skill building as a collective enterprise.”

³⁶ Zhou, A., & Fenech, M. (2022). [The role and influence of educational leaders in centres rated as providing high quality early childhood educational programs](#). *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 47(2), 148-161.

³⁷ Joce Nuttall, Linda Henderson, Elizabeth Wood & Tom Are Trippstad (2022) [Policy rhetorics and responsabilization in the formation of early childhood Educational Leaders in Australia](#), *Journal of Education Policy*, 37:1, 17-38.

³⁸ NSW Department of Education. (2023). [First Steps – the NSW Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025](#).

³⁹ Locke, M.L. (2022). [Asking the experts: Indigenous educators as leaders in early education and care settings in Australia](#). *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 51(2).

⁴⁰ Hur, E. H., Ardeleanu, K., Satchell, T. W., & Jeon, L. (2023, April). Why are they leaving? Understanding Associations between early childhood program policies and teacher turnover rates. In *Child & youth care forum* (Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 417-440). New York: Springer US.

⁴¹ Hine, R., Patrick, P., Berger, E., Diamond, Z., Hammer, M., Morris, Z. A., & Reupert, A. (2022). From struggling to flourishing and thriving: Optimizing educator wellbeing within the Australian education context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 115, 103727.

⁴² Nolan, A. (2023), [Tracing the interconnectedness of early childhood educators’ professional capital](#), *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 219-233.

Other insights

11. Are there experiences in other countries with comparable economies or other industry settings that could be considered?

As noted above, there is a global ECEC workforce crisis. A recent OECD report suggests that countries will need to respond to the crisis by offering high quality initial teacher education programs, improved working conditions, remuneration, ongoing professional learning for all positions in ECE, distinct career paths, and leadership development programs, as well as attending to discrepancies in working conditions across public and private settings⁴³.

A scoping study carried out by Skills Development Scotland showed that comparable economies such as Canada (Provinces)⁴⁴, Finland, Scotland⁴⁵, and New Zealand are adopting workforce strategies similar to Australia's, via microcredentials, integrated work study programs, accelerated initial teacher education programs, emergent leadership development programs, public advocacy campaigns, well-being initiatives and improving quality to assist with retention.

Delivery on these strategies, however, remains marginal: no strategy has been fully implemented or realised and individual country's workforce recruitment and retention issues remain unsolved.

The global scope of the problem and the similarity of strategies employed suggests that:

- (1) it is unlikely Australia will be able to address ECEC workforce shortages by recruiting workers from overseas, or at least not without offering far more favourable remuneration and working conditions, and
- (2) Australia may need to develop and implement radically different strategies to meet projected demand.

12. Are there innovative practices or case studies of workforce participation that could be highlighted?

Dr B.A. Dean at the University of Wollongong suggests that scaffolded work integrated learning models can help prepare students for the realities of their teaching careers⁴⁶.

Other recent Australian studies indicate that coaching and counselling can help lower the risk of burnout⁴⁷, that well-being initiatives could be most beneficial for ECE workers^{48,49}.

The *Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work Study*⁵⁰, a multilevel study, included 10 in depth case studies that highlighted how exemplary education settings enabled the practice of educators. The final report made a number of recommendations that included:

⁴³ OECD (2022) [Early childhood education and care workforce development: A foundation for process quality Template Education Policy Perspectives](#)

⁴⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2021) [Early Childhood Educator Workforce Strategy 2021-2022](#)

⁴⁵ Skills Development Scotland (n.d) Skills Investment Plan: Prospectus Scottish Government

⁴⁶ Dean, B. A. (2023). The value of work-integrated learning for preparing the future teaching workforce. In *Work-Integrated Learning Case Studies in Teacher Education: Epistemic Reflexivity* (pp. 11-22). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.

⁴⁷ Ng, J., Rogers, M., & McNamara, C. (2023). Early childhood educator's burnout: A systematic review of the determinants and effectiveness of interventions. *Issues in Educational Research*.

⁴⁸ Berger, E., Reupert, A., Campbell, T.C.H. et al. [A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Wellbeing Initiatives for Schoolteachers and Early Childhood Educators](#). *Educ Psychol Rev* 34, 2919–2969 (2022).

⁴⁹ Wong et al, 2022.

⁵⁰ Gibson et al., 2023



- “Invest in professional development that supports educators’ career pathways, to upskill, build knowledge, skills and dispositions and in doing so impact pedagogy and practice in their early childhood services, and for children.”
- Create authentic opportunities for educator agency to have a valued and meaningful say in decision making at all levels of service provision.
- Provide the conditions in the workplace for educators to have sustained time to fully engage in and with their work (non-contact time, room meetings, paid staff meetings, flexibility).
- Grow and sustain leadership, that fosters teamwork, valuing each educator, inclusive of qualifications and experiences.”

13. Are there any additional insights you would like to provide? Please provide details of any other information, relevant to the Terms of Reference of the ECEC Capacity Study, that could be considered?

In 2011 the Productivity Commission delivered a comprehensive report on the ECEC workforce as part of a wider Education and Training Workforce study⁵¹. The report highlighted many challenges and offered more than 40 recommendations. The Australian Government made an interim response in December 2011 and promised a full response in early 2012⁵², though there is no evidence this was ever delivered.

In 2023 the early childhood education and care sector has been subject to at least five state and federal inquiries and reviews. Those completed to date offer similar recommendations echoing the 2011 Productivity Commission report and earlier studies. The ECEC sector is experiencing review fatigue. The key to a sustainable, high quality ECEC workforce is not more questions but new strategies with clear and deliverable goals, with strong government and sector support and visible action.

⁵¹ Productivity Commission (2011), [Education and training workforce: Early childhood development](#)

⁵² Archived [DEEWR web site](#), accessed 5 January 2024.

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