



Early Learning
& Care Council
of Australia

ELACCA Submission to South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

May 2023



The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) welcomes the opportunity to submit our response to the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.

About ELACCA

The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) was established to promote the value of quality early learning and care as an integral part of Australia's education system. Our 19 CEO members include some of the largest early learning providers in the country, representing both not-for-profit and for-profit services.

ELACCA members operate 1,984 long day care services, 310 preschool/kindergarten services and 92 OSHC services, covering every state and territory. They offer one-quarter of all the early learning places in Australia. Together, our members serve 369,776 children and their families, and employ more than 56,708 staff.

As well as promoting the value of quality early learning and the need for greater public investment, ELACCA advocates for the right of all children to access quality early learning and care, particularly children facing disadvantage. We do this by drawing on the knowledge and practical experience of our members and representing their views to decision makers in government, the media, and the public.

Recommendations to the Royal Commission – Early Childhood Education and Care in South Australia

The high-level recommendations below are informed by the detailed responses to the guided questions posed by the Royal Commission in calling for public submissions. These have been developed in consultation with ELACCA's South Australian Subcommittee.

ELACCA recommends the Royal Commission consider the following action:

Access and equity

1. Every child in South Australia be entitled to up to 5 days per week of quality early learning and care, in the service type of their choice, and:
 - (a) continue work with the sector to implement universal entitlement for 3-year-old preschool
 - (b) engage with peak bodies and other jurisdictions to inform the effective and efficient implementation of an additional targeted entitlement for 3-year-old preschool disadvantaged cohorts.
2. Undertake asset mapping to inform future provision of early learning and care services, taking into account mixed model approach for provision and targeting government investment for new infrastructure in consultation with the sector.
3. Engage with First Nations families, communities and Aboriginal-controlled organisations in the co-design and implementation of culturally strong:
 - (a) early years programs for First Nations children.
 - (b) Workforce initiatives for the attraction and retention of First Nations educators and teachers.
4. Equity and access be considered in the design and implementation to ensure hard to reach, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families benefit from early learning and care before school, including:
 - (a) barriers to attending early learning actively identified and removed
 - (b) inclusion support funded adequately, including provision of outreach staff
 - (c) place-based integrated children and family services are co-designed with families and communities, and funded in partnership with philanthropy (where appropriate, to determine proof of concept).

Quality

5. South Australian Government investment in a targeted, public awareness campaign to publicly identify quality early learning and preschool programs in different service types (including long day care), such as implementing a strategy like the Kinder/Kindy Tick in Victoria/Queensland.
6. Increased investment in the South Australian Education and Standards Board to ensure timely assessment and rating of services, including:
 - (a) all services assessed and rated within a 3-year cycle
 - (b) services rated as 'meeting' assessed every 2 years
 - (c) services rated as 'working towards' assessed every 12 months.
 - (d) communication to families on the outcome of assessment and ratings of service/s their child attends in compliance with National Law and Regulations.

Workforce

7. South Australian Teachers Registration Board work with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to recognise early childhood teacher qualifications as determined by ACECQA, including birth to 5 degrees, and align with New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.
8. South Australian Government consider and invest in targeted workforce initiatives to raise the professional status of early childhood teachers and educators, attract, retain and reattract quality early childhood educators and teachers:
 - (a) Partner with ELACCA to launch the *Big Roles in Little Lives* attraction campaign across South Australia to raise the profile of the sector and promote meaningful, fulfilling early years careers.
 - (b) Partner with industry bodies like ELACCA and local universities to co-design bespoke, co-designed accelerated Bachelor degrees that connect providers, universities and scholars and support experienced diploma qualified educators to complete quality degrees and remain in the workforce.
 - (c) Work with the sector and vocational education (VET) providers to connect VET providers with the sector to develop quality co-designed pathways from Traineeships to Certificate III and Diploma and respond to industry requirements.
 - (d) Invest in an industrial agreement with the whole early learning sector to increase wages for teachers and educators, for example, the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement.

Outside Hours Care in preschools

9. South Australia does not consider offering outside school hours care in preschool, but works with existing long day-care providers to determine latent capacity.

ELACCA submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

Detailed responses to guiding questions have informed the sections below. These were developed in consultation with ELACCA's South Australian Subcommittee.

Seven ELACCA member organisations provide high-quality services in South Australia (G8 Education, Goodstart Early Learning, Busy Bees Early Learning, Edge Early Learning, Nido Education, Guardian Childcare and Education and Gowrie South Australia). These organisations operate over 30% of licenced long day care services across the state.

ELACCA is keen to ensure the Royal Commission considers a holistic, child-centric view of the early learning and care sector. Ensuring access to affordable, quality early learning and care, regardless of the setting should be the clear objective of current and future reform, and related investment.

ELACCA supports the implementation of reform that adopts a child-safe approach, and is designed and implemented in collaboration with our sector, noting the key findings from the Royal Commission's Interim Report that early learning and care in South Australia:

- be universal, but not uniform
- actively encourage full participation of all children in 3-year-old preschool
- cater to the different needs of communities, families and children
- enable families to make choices about what preschool setting and service best meets their needs
- support equity for children and families with some additional supports required to improve outcomes
- be designed to reach or exceed quality benchmarks and improve learning outcomes for all young children.

ELACCA invites ongoing consultation with South Australian Government agencies and the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, in the development of policy and operations that honours and respects the importance of the early years.

First 1000 days, and beyond

It is recognised that the first 1000 days is a critical period of development that provides a distinct and timely opportunity to have a lasting impact on individual social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Optimising early childhood development calls for a holistic approach to policy, programs and services that builds understanding of this important period and advances integrated policies and evidence-informed practices – particularly those that address vulnerabilities and risk factors¹.

Universal access to early learning and care to a quality, early learning program, delivered in accordance with the approved National Quality Standard by qualified staff should be a key offering in all parts of South Australia.

¹ Centre for Community Child Health (2018). The First Thousand Days – Our Greatest Opportunity, Policy Brief Number 28. Murdoch Children's Research Institute/The Royal Children's Hospital, Parkville, Victoria. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.5991184>

Key features of early learning and care should include:

- Place-based with no barriers to access due to cost, geographic location, or cultural safety
- Right to access up to 5 days of early learning and care
- Ease of access for all children in the state, regardless of postcode or parental workforce participation
- Planned, intentional and play-based pedagogy in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework²
- A quality program that is agile to support each child's developmental trajectory and family workforce requirements and reflects the diversity of the population it services.

Access to qualified educators and teachers supported by evidence-based, ongoing professional development to enable depth of understanding and planning to enhance every child's developmental trajectory.

Early childhood pedagogy should be delivered in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework³ across birth to 8 years, appropriately scaffolding every child's developmental trajectory within their cultural, family and community context.

Early learning and care should be planned, intentional and play-based, to build the social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills that enable children to succeed in education, health, wellbeing and employment across their lifespan.

In determining the optimal entitlement for children's access to early learning and care, ELACCA recommends a holistic approach to the sector, and a holistic approach to children's development.

Purpose of early learning and care – core and secondary aims

ELACCA supports a vision for children in their early years that encompasses:

- all babies and children are valued and nurtured in a healthy and safe environment to grow
- universal and proportionate access to care and support for children's optimal health, wellbeing, learning and development
- all children grow and learn in culturally safe environments where diversity is welcomed
- a system that recognises, and responds with additional support for children and families facing hardship, vulnerability and/or disadvantage.

The central aim of early learning and care is to scaffold children's development to set them up for success in learning and in life. Quality programs will respond to appropriately to children's current development and age, for example, younger children will have unique requirements related to social, emotional and physical support.

Significant, but secondary aims of early learning and care include the scaffolding of positive learning dispositions to enable positive transition to school, as well as supporting workforce participation of parents and carers. Both of these aims result in significant economic benefits and productivity gains for South Australia.

² Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE] (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council.

³ *ibid*

Redressing disadvantage in the early years

Provision of quality programs clearly differs across different cohorts of children, and should be acknowledged in how services are funded. In many cases, inclusion funding to support children and families with additional needs is not adequate to support vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts. In some cases, the funding shortfall is mitigated by existing provider capacity and capability to support complex needs, but this varies greatly across locations.

Intensive support and proportionate universality that enables all children to have access to quality is acknowledged and required. Additional resources must be available in a timely and responsive manner, and enablers and barriers addressed to ensure equitable and transformative access for all children, families, and team members. Funding for dedicated family outreach staff, with the capacity to offer 'warm referrals', should be considered to increase access for children and families not connected with local ECEC services.

ELACCA supports funding for dedicated family outreach staff in early learning settings, with the capacity to offer soft entries or 'warm referrals', to increase access for hard-to-reach children.

The Australian Early Development Census provides evidence that many children are starting formal schooling lagging up to 2 years behind their peers, with that gap most likely to grow rather than diminish with time. Supporting early intervention, particularly important for children experiencing vulnerability, is also a primary aim. The percentage of children with two or more developmental vulnerabilities in South Australia (12.7%) is higher than the national percentage (11.7%)⁴.

In addition, many First Nations children experience developmental vulnerabilities in their early years that can be identified and supported through early intervention within a quality, culturally safe early learning program, regardless of the setting.

ELACCA supports the Royal Commission's recommendation that the State Government listen to and work with South Australia's First Nation's community and Aboriginal-controlled organisations, on the future arrangements for preschool for First Nation's children (Recommendation 17), and for this approach to be extended to all early education and care policies, including culturally strong, self-determined responses to redressing disadvantage.

Ensuring the removal of barriers to children and families facing disadvantage should be a clear objective for all levels of Government. ELACCA has advocated to the Commonwealth Government, and will continue to, that the Activity Test associated with the Child Care Subsidy provides an unnecessary hurdle to early learning and care – particularly for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, who have the most to gain from early learning and care.

ELACCA supports the Royal Commission's interim findings that recommend the rigorous trialling and evaluation of different kinds of allied health support (Recommendation 12), to support the early identification and support for children experiencing or at risk of developmental delays.

ELACCA also support the interim findings recommending increased entitlement of preschool for children at risk of a developmental delay, and support this extra support being extended to children under 3 years of age (Recommendation 9).

⁴ Australian Government (accessed January 2023), AEDC Percentage and number of children developmentally vulnerable in 2021, <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data-explorer>

Innovative approaches – co-locating and integrating services

Integrated child and family services

Integrated child and family services are an excellent example of innovative program and service delivery. Noting there is an important distinction between an integrated building, and an adequately funded, high functioning, integrated service.

ELACCA welcomes the benefits of existing Children’s Centres in South Australia noted in the Interim Report (p.33), including capacity to connect the community to provide support to parents and families experiencing disadvantage.

Recent research (2021) into integrated child and family services has demonstrated that they have significant potential to meet many of the key needs of children experiencing diverse vulnerabilities and their families⁵.

Place-based approaches

Place-based approaches that target and respond to different cultural needs and environments should be considered to ensure quality offerings to children who are hardest to reach, but have the most to gain from a quality early learning experience.

The South Australian Government could also consider partnering with philanthropy and early learning and care providers to trial innovative solutions to integrated child and family services. For example, Our Place in Victoria is a partnership between the Victorian Government and the Colman Foundation, offering a place-based approach to supporting the education (including early learning), health and development of all children and families in disadvantaged communities by using school as the universal platform⁶.

⁵ Moore, T.G. (2021). Core care conditions for children and families: Implications for integrated child and family services. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, The Royal Children’s Hospital. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.14593878> Moore, T.G. (2021). Developing holistic integrated early learning services for young children and families experiencing socio-economic vulnerability. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, The Royal Children’s Hospital. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.14593890>

⁶ Our Place website (accessed May 2023), <https://ourplace.org.au/our-approach/>

Quality

High quality ECEC and markers of optimal delivery

A high-quality early learning and care program is one that is delivered in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standards, delivered by a qualified, valued and high-quality workforce. Markers of optimal delivery include but are not limited to a program that:

- is play-based and provides a balance of child-led learning and intentional teaching
- scaffolds children's learning across all developmental domains
- is informed by formative and summative assessment
- meets the needs and interests of all children
- reflects the unique context of the families and community it serves
- supports parents and carers, embraces the holistic nature of the family, and recognises the importance of partnerships between home and learning environments.

Importantly, quality early learning and care should improve outcomes for all children, and be universally accessible with additional targeted supports for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

For families to be assured that the early learning and care program is consistently high quality, they need to know that their service of choice is regularly assessed and rated within a regular three-year cycle, by the South Australian Education Standards Board (ESB). ELACCA welcomes Recommendation 13 in the Interim Report that the ESB be provided with adequate funding to assess and rate every provider at least once every three years.

An improved rating and assessment cycle will lift quality more rapidly in conjunction with systemic support for services 'working towards' the National Quality Standard (NQS). To this end, ELACCA recommends that services rated as 'working towards' be assessed once every 12 months and services 'meeting' be assessed once every 2 years.

ELACCA supports recommendations 13 and 14 in the Royal Commission's Interim Report for the State Government to:

- have a targeted focus on improving the NQS ratings of non-government services currently providing State Government funded preschool programs who are 'working towards', including working with the regulator (the ESB) to ensure that action is taken for consistent non-achievement. We would extend this recommendation to also focus on government preschool programs with a rating of 'working towards', noting that during the public hearing submission by the ESB that many preschools have not yet been rated under the 2018 NQS.
- commission research to better understand the relationship between workforce consistency and quality over time, with a view to identifying further policy levers for inclusion in future quality improvement agendas.

ELACCA also supports targeted communication to families about the outcome of assessment and rating processes at service/s their child is attending. This would help dispel the misconception that quality early learning and care is not available outside state-run services.

Defining high quality early learning and care

ELACCA advocates that a quality early learning and care setting includes the following key features:

- an overall rating of 'meeting' or 'exceeding' National Quality Standards
- a well-resourced service
- continuity of education and care delivered by degree qualified early childhood teachers, diploma and certificate III qualified educators
- strong and responsive relationships between staff, children and families that enable continuity and scaffolding of each child's emerging strengths and needs
- a calm, relaxed, yet stimulating environment for children to explore, learn and develop
- culturally safe, and responsive of the environment and characteristics of its local community.

The outcome of attending a high-quality program should be a child who:

- is adequately equipped with essential executive function and self-regulation skills to confidently and capably transition to formal schooling
- has well developed social and emotional skills to build and sustain positive relationships with peers and adults
- possesses a positive disposition and enthusiasm for learning
- has any atypical development assessed, identified and appropriately resourced

Quality is always best enabled when programs are delivered by a high-performing, well qualified, supported and stable workforce. Continuity of educators supporting and working with children is critical – and quality relationships between the qualified staff, children and their families cannot be underestimated.

Innovative approaches to allied health support in quality programs

Early childhood teachers and educators are often the first professionals that young children engage with for an extended time. As a result, early childhood professionals will often be the first identifier and referral point for children with atypical development. Access to allied health assessments and professionals is critical to enable early detection and intervention for young children. Ideally this occurs within the safety of day-to-day service delivery, in either an integrated or stand-alone setting, however, in regional or remote locations, remote access may be required.

The South Australian Government can support this essential access through a variety of programs. Some excellent practice initiatives currently provided by the Victorian Government include: Flexible Support Packages, School Readiness Funding, Kindergarten Inclusion Support and Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) allied health support⁷.

Local examples in South Australia include: Your Town program in Playford⁸ supporting families with children experiencing trauma-related challenges, and Goodstart Early Learning's partnership with Flinders University's Health2Go⁹. This initiative in the Adelaide metropolitan area supports the detection of developmental delays and other health concerns in children from vulnerable or

⁷ Victorian Government (October 2022) [Children with additional needs in early childhood | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/children-with-additional-needs-in-early-childhood)

⁸ Your Town (accessed January 2023) [Early Childhood Development Program | Elizabeth | yourtown](https://www.yourtown.org.au/early-childhood-development-program)

⁹ F. Lucas 'Goodstart partners with Flinders Uni to strengthen developmental screening in ECEC (thesector.com.au)', *The Sector*, 14 June 2022

disadvantaged backgrounds. A similar developmental screening program has recently been announced by the NSW Government¹⁰.

It is also worth noting that the South Australian Government's Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) screening takes place, at least in preschool programs and has the potential to be rolled out to all early learning and care programs, if adequately resourced¹¹.

Involving parents and caregivers in education and information to support wellbeing and attachment in the early years

ELACCA recognises the early years as a vital period which help shape children's brain development, education, health, wellbeing and life outcomes. In partnership with parents and carers, supportive home environments and access to quality early learning and care enable children to thrive. Our members run services that work with families to build trust to educate and empower parents to best support wellbeing and attachment with their children in their first years.

ELACCA recommends easily navigable services from all levels of Government, enabling families to engage with services without the barriers of onerous activity tests or bureaucratic processes. We encourage the SA Government to partner with experts – including early learning and care providers and peak bodies – to develop, communicate and provide a range of resources to support ease of access to services, wellbeing and attachment in the early years.

¹⁰ New South Wales Government (28 November 2022) [Free development checks to give NSW kids the best start in life | NSW Government](#)

¹¹South Australian Government (2023), Child and Family Health Service, <https://www.cafhs.sa.gov.au/about/overview>

OSHC in preschool

ELACCA recommends caution in considering an expansion of OSHC in preschool in South Australia. There is existing infrastructure across the sector to support families who seek longer hours to enable them to participate in the workforce.

Long day services in South Australia offer parents and carers extended hours care to engage in the workforce as well as a quality preschool program for children, delivered by qualified staff.

Staggered pick and drop off times in long day settings enable individualised, targeted conversations, between staff and parents/ carers about the child's day and any areas of concern, interest, support or celebration. Noting that the younger the child, the more important continuity of relationships, long day enables strong relationships between teachers, educators and families. This is a positive point of difference from government preschool with set start and finish times whereby children and parents arrive and depart collectively in larger groups, offering little opportunity for depth of conversation.

We know anecdotally that in some places in South Australia, families experiencing vulnerability choose free preschool over long day care, even if it requires children to be 'toggled' between settings or reduces parental participation in the workforce. A government-supported campaign to challenge the long-held misperception that a government preschool program is of higher quality than a comparable quality preschool program in a long day care setting would help dispell this myth. An equitable funding model that provided free preschool in quality long day settings would also assist in dispelling the myth as well as reduce 'toggling' of children between services, support workforce participation and enable children to access a quality preschool program within a familiar and consistent environment.

The 'kinder tick' (used in Victoria¹² and Queensland) highlighted in ELACCA's previous submission, and considered at Recommendation 21 in the Interim Report would be an accessible way to identify a long day care service which offers a quality preschool program, delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher, and has the benefit of prioritising children's continuity of care.

ELACCA recommends the South Australian Government utilises existing latent long day infrastructure capacity to enable 3 year old preschool and invests in free preschool in the long day sector and provides pay and condition parity with government preschools.

ELACCA recognises that OSHC in government preschool may be attractive, however, we recommend extention of preschool hours with existing staff, rather than separate OSHC services.

ELACCA also recommends that the South Australian government adopt a system stewardship role across the whole early learning and care sector. A deeper understanding of the market would highlight unintended consequences of removing three and four year olds from long day services and the serious viability issues this would have on the entire long day sector, particularly if fees remain substantially cheaper in government preschools.

¹² Victorian Government (12 October 2022) [Kinder Tick - information for services | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Workforce

In the context of the *Shaping Our Future* national ECEC workforce strategy and other recent announcements by Commonwealth and State governments:

Important competencies for workers delivering quality early learning and care

It is important that early childhood teachers and educators have the following competencies:

- In-depth and practical understanding of early childhood growth and development
- Ability to identify and respond to atypical growth and development (outside normative range)
- Capacity to translate this knowledge to individual and group developmental records/ education plans, assessments and learning pathways
- Capacity to build strong relationships with children and families, and to maintain these across 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool
- A strong understanding and practical application of the National Quality Framework
- Practices strongly embedded in early childhood pedagogies (including play-based, child-led and teacher-led intentional teaching and assessment)
- A strong understanding of the importance of children's agency and the image of the child as competent and capable
- Commitment to ongoing professional development that enhances practice, observation, critical reflection and children's outcomes.

What are the highest value interventions to improve workforce supply in South Australia?

The highest value intervention to improve workforce supply is to improve pay and conditions for early childhood teachers and educators. ELACCA supports pay parity of early childhood teachers and educators with relevant staff in primary schools.

Fully funded degree-qualified early childhood teachers would be a welcome and high value intervention from the South Australian Government, coupled with joint State and Federally funded educators. It is vital that the early learning and care workforce is paid at a rate commensurate with their skills and experience.

Further, important interventions can be taken by investing in:

- Ongoing professional development for all teachers and educators to support continuous improvement, and funded release time – ELACCA welcomes the Federal Government's \$72m professional development funding in the 2023-24 Budget¹³, as a starting point
- Additional funded release time for teachers to plan and program.
- Incentives and scholarships, particularly targeted to hard-to-employ locations, or areas of high population growth (for example, north of Adelaide)
- Intensive funded mentoring programs that provide wrap-around support, particularly for beginning teachers and educators
- Employment wellbeing support, including access to Employee Assistance Programs for all teachers and educators, regardless of setting (in line with the ACECQA 10-year workforce plan recommendation).

¹³ Australian Government (May 2023), [2023-23 Budget - Department of Education](#)

In addition, better pathways, accelerated and innovative uplift programs for Diploma-qualified educators to progress through to teacher qualifications with financial and wrap-around support (such as those offered by Victoria and New South Wales) should be developed and encouraged in South Australia. The importance of linking the scholar, provider and university is crucial, therefore partnerships with employers are vital for qualification completion and retention in the sector.

In the event of the likely merger between the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia, it is imperative that the number of places offered for early childhood teacher Bachelor degrees continue to increase to meet the future needs of the state.

Incentives would also be an important initiative to support upskilling of Certificate III qualified educators to achieve Diploma level qualifications.

What else should South Australia do in addition to workforce supply initiatives already underway?

The current workforce shortage has impacted the capacity of providers to employ early childhood teachers. In the absence of a much-needed nationally consistent teacher registration process, it would be beneficial to bring the South Australian system in line with rules applying already in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia that recognise all early childhood teacher qualifications recognised by ACECQA.

ELACCA notes Recommendation 5 in the Interim Report, exploring the accreditation of Birth to Five teaching degrees and would value being engaged in future discussions regarding this, together with ACECQA.

Further, four-year Bachelor degrees offering the fourth year internship is recommended.

We encourage South Australia to consider the following initiatives to support the attraction and retention of the early learning workforce:

- A public campaign that demonstrates and values early years educator and teacher roles, promoting the importance of a career in ECEC as commensurate with other roles such as teachers.
- Attract and attract-back promotions, such as ELACCA's recent *Big Roles in Little Lives* campaign¹⁴
- School-based traineeships and internships, and free VET courses for post-school students.
- Expansion of technical colleges, with a greater emphasis on pathways into early learning and care careers, including pathway to translate from vocational to tertiary qualifications
- Intensive Initial Teacher Education (ITE) degrees where students are able to work and study
- Funding and scholarships to support paid placements of staff attaining or upskilling qualifications (noting Bachelor of Education degrees requires 80 days of placement and Master of Teaching degrees requires 60 days of placement)
- Authorising and funding providers to pay educators and teachers to complete their paid placements as part of their employment
- Support through funding for early childhood teachers to work in, experience and learn from, regional and remote placement opportunities

¹⁴ Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2022), *Big Roles in Little Lives* - ELACCA, <https://elacca.org.au/big-roles-in-little-lives/>

- Fast tracked visa sponsorship opportunities for educators and teachers, and support for international teachers, through funding, with IELTS and LANTITE costs and tutoring, as well as an induction program focused on the Australian context so educators and teachers are work-ready
- Support discussion around multi-locational degrees
- Mentoring programs for pre-service and beginning teachers.

Incentives to study, support for supervision arrangements and ensuring pedagogical quality are vital pieces of the puzzle. Workforce initiatives should be strongly informed by engagement with educators, teachers, peak bodies, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Are there innovative approaches to building workforce supply that the Commission should consider?

There are opportunities to explore and scale-up existing innovative programs and approaches to building workforce supply, including upskill and uplift programs. This particularly includes successful initiatives developed through industry-university partnerships, for example, the *From the Ground Up* and *ITE Boost* programs co-designed with ELACCA and various Australian universities. *From the Ground Up* was recently profiled as case study by the Australian Government¹⁵.

Innovative programs for targeted or hard to reach communities should also be considered, for example recognising and harnessing culturally safe practices through scholarships for the Indigenous workforce in the APY lands. Scholarships, professional development and a two-way learning exchange for Indigenous and non-Indigenous workforce could be explored.

Innovative teaching qualification pathways and scholarships such as those developed by the Victorian Government requires further consideration by the Commission.

Further, ongoing professional development, upskilling including individual growth plans for teaching staff, and mentoring for beginning early childhood teachers in collaboration with providers, should be considered and funded by the South Australian Government.

ELACCA notes that at Recommendation 4 in the Interim Report, that while teacher workforce supply is being developed, that prior to universal preschool, the State Government trial different configurations of early learning programs delivered by Diploma-qualified educators and rigorously assess the different outcomes. ELACCA would not support this recommendation.

¹⁵ Australian Government (15 February 2023), *Early childhood case studies, Case Study: From the Ground Up* <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/case-studies/case-study-ground>

Other areas of inquiry

Challenges to quality ECEC provision in regional, rural and remote parts of South Australia

Early childhood services located in very remote areas, or those with a high proportion of families and children experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage require a higher level of resourcing, including funding to attract, house and provide transport for degree qualified early childhood teachers. Growing each community's own qualified educators and teachers, should be a priority for remote services.

Innovative programs for targeted or hard to reach communities should also be considered, for example recognising and harnessing culturally safe practices through scholarships for the First Nations workforce. Scholarships, professional development and a two-way learning exchange for Indigenous and non-Indigenous workforce could be explored, in conversation with First Nations people, such as the Goodstart Early Learning and Fitzroy Crossing partnership.

Adequate and targeted funding from the South Australian Government would support the ongoing viability of services, to enable flux in enrolments and workforce. This includes attracting and retaining qualified teachers and educators to remote communities.

An increase in government preschool could also have a significant negative impact on the viability of early learning and care providers, and it is important that careful provision planning occurs to ensure providers can remain viable with additional 3- and 4-year-olds attending government settings.

Opportunities to innovate, redesign and codesign ECEC service models with communities to improve opportunities for families and children experiencing disadvantage

High quality early childhood programs for children experiencing disadvantage, and/or vulnerability, can yield returns of between \$4 and \$16 for every \$1 invested.

Supporting early intervention within universal services is particularly important for children experiencing vulnerability and should be a key focus for State and Commonwealth investment. On many levels, early learning settings are the universal platform for children five and under. Noting that our sector is facing significant workforce challenges, this additional and critical role would need to be appropriately resourced by both the Australian and South Australian Governments.

Warm referrals for higher needs children and families from early learning services to wrap-around services, allied health professionals and other scaffolding support should be considered. In addition, the co-design of place-based, integrated models of service delivery should be funded, trialled and evaluated in areas of demonstrated need. Co-design should be a genuine process between communities, government and the sector – with philanthropy support where available to support the trialling and providing proof of concept.

In support of universal three-year-old preschool

ELACCA notes Recommendation 9 in the Interim Report, of a three-year-old preschool program of 600 hours per year (15 hours per week/40 weeks), and that children at risk of developmental delay should be able to access additional hours and days of three and four-year-old preschool up to 30 hours per week for the most at risk. Children from families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage have the most to gain from a quality early learning program, and should have access to up to 5 days of early learning and care.

ELACCA supports the South Australian Government working with the sector, and other jurisdictions, to determine the most efficient and effective way to target this extra entitlement, across different early learning settings.

ELACCA supports longer days as an appropriate option for three- and four-year-olds. For example, two days a week of at least 7.5 hours would be consistent with the minimum dosage of 15 years per week in the year before school, as set in the intergovernmental Preschool Reform Agreement.

The 2017 *Lifting Our Game Report*¹⁶, noted broad support through consultations for universal access for 3-year-olds, with many stakeholders identifying it as “the single most important reform that the Review should consider”. The Report notes that this is supported by international evidence, which has generally concluded that universal access to preschool for 3-year-olds as well as four year olds is preferred.

How should the Royal Commission conceptualise costs and benefits in relation to its recommendations

ELACCA would welcome a broad interpretation and conceptualisation of costs and benefits by the Royal Commission.

Equal weight should be given to social and economic benefits of investment in early learning and care. Further, early learning and care can be considered through a policy lens that extends to housing, environmental, and transportation policy on a state and national level.

Conceptualisation of costs should also be broad – taking into consideration opportunity cost of not investing adequately in early learning and care, in addition to impact on workforce participation, particularly of women.

Next steps

ELACCA values the opportunity to contribute this submission to the Royal Commission, and to participate in the invitational roundtable discussions.

Should the Royal Commission wish to engage in direct consultation with our members, we would be pleased to facilitate a discussion with our CEO members.

Please contact Elizabeth Death, CEO, [REDACTED]

Thank you for considering our submission.

¹⁶ S. Pascoe and D. Brennan, *Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*, (2017), p.67



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