

FINAL REPORT

Shaping Our Future Workforce Project FA2-1

Executive summary

Participation in quality early learning environments positively impacts a child's life outcomes and supports them to realise their full potential. Based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural child-rearing practices that have been growing our kids up strong in culture and community for millennia, ACCOs have been providing integrated early years services tailored to the needs of children and families in their communities for decades.

However, the sustainability and ongoing impact of ACCO integrated early years services hinges on the strength of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce. While ACCOs have become adept at operating within mainstream frameworks and implementing creative solutions to workforce challenges, there is a need for policy reform and investment into programs, systems and approaches that strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce.

As an action under *Shaping Our Future National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy*, this project examines targeted programs to support studies and placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander potential educators and teachers to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce.¹ It is critical that the findings and recommendations of this project are understood within the broader policy landscape and build upon the advocacy and reform priorities identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services and communities.

As a peak body, SNAICC has built its understanding of the workforce needs of the sector through its Early Years Support service which operates in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, discrete research projects and targeted engagement activities such as the ECEC Workforce Development Roundtable held in 2021. As a result, both program-specific and broader reform recommendations are included in this report.

This project expands upon this existing knowledge of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce to consider current factors of success, barriers and opportunities for government to take action in the support and growth of programs and services supporting students to obtain their ECEC qualifications.

The report outlines 14 recommendations, including priority recommendations, across four themes – education and training organisations and support; ACCO sector investment; government policy frameworks; and data investment – that will strengthen the delivery of tailored programs of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain ECEC qualifications.

¹ Australian Government, 'Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022-2031'. Retrieved from: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf>

A key finding from this report is that the combination of tailored and place-based workforce programs and the critical support provided by ACCO ECEC services are key in creating successful students and a strengthened Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce. The combination of the specific program and the support from the ACCO ECEC service is what has the biggest impact on a student being able to complete their qualification.

The full list of recommendations, including priority recommendations, is outlined on the following page.

Recommendations

SNAICC makes the following recommendations which include early opportunity priorities, high impact priorities and longer-term priorities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander potential educators and teachers and strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce. Priority recommendations are expanded upon following the recommendation list below.

1. Education and training organisations and support
 - 1.1 Invest in building the cultural safety and capability of non-Indigenous Registered Training Organisations and Universities including working with them to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and acknowledge the value of cultural knowledge.
 - 1.2 Remove the requirement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to complete practicums outside of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC service they are employed by.
 - 1.2.1 Review the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority guidelines to clarify regulations, requirements and equivalent early childhood qualifications regarding practicums.
 - 1.3 Review entry requirements within institutions with a view to recognising prior learning and cultural knowledge and building in prerequisites in a sustainable way to enable and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to progress.
 - 1.4 Fund 12,000 places across ECEC Certificate III, Diploma and Bachelor of Early Childhood Education courses, including paid practicums, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander potential educators and students.
2. ACCO Sector Investment
 - 2.1 Invest in and prioritise the establishment and expansion of ACCO Registered Training Organisations with a specialisation in early childhood education and care.
 - 2.2 Invest in the sustainable and long-term funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backbone support services to support the growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in gaining ECEC qualifications, building on SNAICC's Early Years Support pilot program.
 - 2.3 Increase funding to ACCO services to provide increase wages and flexible working conditions to remain competitive with mainstream ECEC services.
 - 2.4 Increase investment to adequately resource mentoring and other education and practicum supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC students.
 - 2.4.1 Prioritise funding for ACCO ECEC services and backbone support services to provide direct supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC students.

- 2.4.2 Invest in resourcing to establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC mentors in each state and territory.
- 2.5 Fund the development of wage increase and enterprise bargaining resources for ACCO ECEC services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC staff and students.
- 3. Government Policy Frameworks
 - 3.1 Develop and invest in a dedicated strategy and action plan for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC Workforce. The strategy and action plan should:
 - 3.1.1 Prioritise the attraction and retention of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce.
 - 3.1.2 Include a focus on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training and tertiary educators.
 - 3.2 Ensure recognition of cultural knowledge and cultural strengths are included in the Education and Care Services National Regulations and the National Quality Standards, including components on cultural competency.
 - 3.3 Develop, implement and monitor a shared common language and framework for cultural competence and cultural safety in ECEC workforce education and professional development.
 - 3.4 Establish an innovation fund to support the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care workforce development initiatives. The innovation fund should:
 - 3.4.1 Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led/community-controlled initiatives or/and partnerships between mainstream institutions and Aboriginal community controlled organisations.
 - 3.4.2 Provide substantial funding to cover the high costs of successful delivery of the initiatives and support evaluation to build an evidence base.
 - 3.4.3 Align with the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
 - 3.4.4 Incorporate the recommendations under the Australian Universities Accord Final Report which encourage better alignment and partnership between RTOs, TAFEs, Universities to be responsive to student and ECEC sector needs.
- 4. Data Investment
 - 4.1 Establish an ongoing mechanism to gather and report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC Workforce in alignment with Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles and Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Priority recommendations

The recommendations outlined above are all necessary to progress the support, development and growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC educators and teachers. While all recommendations should be progressed in parallel, there are early opportunity priorities for short term reforms and high impact priorities for greater systemic impact overall. Further context for these priority recommendations is found in the 'Identified success factors' and 'Next steps' sections of this report.

Early opportunity priorities:

1.4 – Fund 12,000 places across ECEC Certificate III, Diploma and Bachelor of Early Childhood Education courses, including paid practicums, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander potential educators and students.

2.5 – Fund the development of wage increase and enterprise bargaining resources for ACCO ECEC services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC staff and students.

High impact priorities:

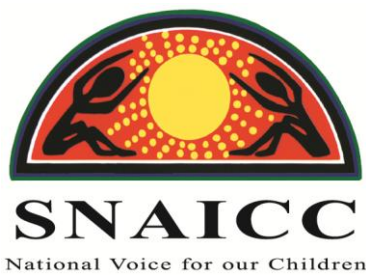
3.4 – Establish an innovation fund to support the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care workforce development initiatives. The innovation fund should:

- 3.4.1 Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led/community controlled initiatives or/and partnerships between mainstream institutions and Aboriginal and community controlled organisations.
- 3.4.2 Provide substantial funding to cover the high costs of successful delivery of the initiatives and support evaluation to build an evidence base.
- 3.4.3 Align with the Priority Reform under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- 3.4.4 Incorporate the recommendations under the Australian Universities Accord Final Report which encourage between alignment and partnership between RTOs, TAFEs and Universities to be responsive to student and ECEC sector needs.

2.4 – Increase investment to adequately resource mentoring and other education and practicum supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC students.

- 2.4.1 Prioritise funding for ACCO ECEC services and backbone support services to provide direct supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC students.

2.4.2 Invest in resourcing to establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC mentors in each state and territory.



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