Final Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the ECEC Workforce Measures (including Departmental Management Response)

6 July 2026, updated 1 September 2026 to include Departmental Management Response

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Table of contents

Executive summary *6*

Departmental Management Response *13*

1. Background and context *17*

1.1 Overview of the ECEC Workforce Measures Package 19

1.2 Evaluation overview 21

1.3 Problem-definition and policy rationale 24

2. Design of the ECEC Measures *29*

2.1 Design of the Measures overall 29

2.2 Design of the PD subsidy 31

2.3 Design of the PP subsidy 34

2.4 Common design assumptions underpinning the PD and PP 36

2.5 Design of the PEN and the PELA 39

3. Implementation of the Measures *45*

3.1 Implementation of the Measures overall 45

3.2 Implementation of the PD subsidy 55

3.3 Implementation of the PP subsidy 58

3.4 Implementation of the PEN and PELA 61

4. What was delivered by the Measures (Outputs) *65*

4.1 Outputs of the Measures overall 66

4.2 What the PD subsidy delivered (Outputs) 68

4.3 What the PP subsidy delivered (Outputs) 75

4.4 What the PEN and the PELA delivered (Outputs) 81

5. Impacts of the Measures *86*

5.1 Impact of PD 86

5.2 Impact of PP 91

5.3 Impacts of the PEN and the PELA 93

5.4 Overall assessment of the impact of the Measures 96

6. Lessons learnt and application of findings *99*

6.1 Implications for future ECEC workforce policy design and delivery 100

6.2 Considerations for future adaptations to the Measures or similar grants 107

6.3 Practical lessons from similar programs 112
Appendices *115*
Appendix 1: Evaluation framework 116
Appendix 2: Stakeholder consultation overview 120
Appendix 3: Evaluation methodology 123
Appendix 4: Case Studies 127

Executive summary

This final evaluation report captures our assessment of the Workforce Measures package (the Measures) – individually and as a package – which includes the Professional Development (PD) and Paid Practicum (PP) subsidies, the Practicum Exchange Network (PEN) and the associated Practicum Exchange Living Allowance (PELA).

The findings of this final evaluation report are informed by document and administrative data analysis, a survey of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program participants, interviews (including with services and providers, peak bodies and Australian Government Department of Education (Department) staff) and in-depth case studies of comparator programs. We outline a range of key – but non-exhaustive – insights below:

Problem definition and policy rationale

- There was a sound rationale for the Australian Government to support the workforce, noting poor retention nationally and the general need for greater coordination of supports across the national ECEC sector.
- While focusing on supporting the delivery of professional development and practicum placements was a reasonable choice for the Australian Government, in that it supported the sector to feel more valued, the extent and time-limited nature of the funding available meant the Measures were unlikely to be significantly impactful in improving overall retention and preventing widespread attrition.
- Compared to other, more impactful Government reform levers for supporting the sector, there was limited potential for the Measures in isolation to deliver a significant impact on overall ECEC workforce retention. At the same time, investing in the workforce aligned with identified priority areas from Shaping Our Future.[1]

Design of the Measures

- The design process for all three programs within the Measures, while responsive to broader policy directives, was contracted, with limited time for adequate consultation with the sector to test assumptions. This resulted in some design decisions being made on some unfounded assumptions about what would best support the ECEC sector.

[1] Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). August 2022. *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce 2022–2031* (Sydney: ACECQA), https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/National%20workforce%20strategy.pdf.

- Some operational design choices, such as using existing subsidy payment infrastructure and a predominantly grants-based funding approach, broadly made sense within the quick turnaround time for standing up the Measures package. However, there was a missed opportunity to scope the Department's in-house capacity to administer grants, meaning that design did not sufficiently anticipate delivery conditions.
- PD was reasonably well-targeted to remove barriers to participation in professional learning and development, especially under workforce crisis conditions. It was designed to remove a key access barrier to training while preserving providers' responsibility for how they deliver professional development.
- The tighter parameters for the PP were appropriate in that they signalled to Child Care Subsidy (CCS)-approved providers that funding was intended to partially rather than fully subsidise time taken for study.
- The choice to stand up a bespoke PEN IT platform was not informed by a proper needs assessment and was surplus to the needs of the sector. It should have been decommissioned at an earlier stage.
- Linking the PELA payments to the PEN was not a well-considered policy decision, and could have reasonably been anticipated to add to the administrative load on ECEC services. It could also have been predicted to have made access to living allowances more challenging for those completing a practicum placement in rural, regional and remote areas.
- The Department appropriately changed the design of eligibility requirements over time, in line with emerging demand patterns, implementation challenges and policy objectives. For example, the PD and PP were initially targeted towards equity groups and broadened over time in response to uptake patterns. However, this design choice could have been reasonably anticipated to lead to some confusion among participants.

Implementation of the Measures

- Rapid stand up of the Measures understandably drove implementation challenges, and there was a fundamental mismatch of staff capacity and in-house capability for the Department in delivering the programs.
- While Departmental staff made a concerted effort to navigate highly manual grant administration processes and respond to high levels of helpdesk inquiries from individuals, services and providers, they were impacted by inconsistent team capacity or capability, and poor oversight in initial stages of delivery.

- Engaging an external provider, Deloitte, reduced operational burden on Departmental staff and led to increased efficiency and consistency in the administration of grants, including via the use of automation.
- Planning for appropriate governance and accountability, risk management, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes was initially under scoped and inconsistent. The approaches to these elements generally matured over time, in response to emerging needs and best practice requirements.
- Though accountability requirements for services were relatively light (in the context of government grants), they were still experienced by some services as a disproportionate amount of workload for the benefit attained from the PD and PP programs. This experience was influenced by services' or providers' capacity to oversee such processes, and the overall number of grants that services and providers administered.
- The Department monitored program uptake patterns and logically redistributed funding from the PP to the PD during implementation, noting a higher level of interest for the PD subsidy than anticipated.
- Similarly, the Department responded to the dramatic undersubscription of the PEN platform and associated PELA with a concerted communications effort.
- The implementation effort for standing up the PEN website was disproportionate to the benefit, which could have been foreseen with more testing with the sector to understand demand and avoid duplication.

What was delivered by the Measures (outputs)

- PD and PP participation rates have changed over time and in line with changes to the guidelines and concerted efforts to boost numbers. Participation peaked in the 2024-25 application rounds, with lower participation in 2023-24 and 2025-26 partially attributed to there being narrower guidelines initially and then a reduced funding profile and eligible cohort afterwards, with many parts of the sector ineligible to re-apply.[2,3]
- The demand for PD outstripped the demand for PP more than was initially expected, with budget shifted from PP to PD, to accommodate higher demand.

[2] Australian Government Department of Education. 2025. *Supplementary Budget Estimates – Division Brief: Workforce development subsidies: Portfolio Budget Statements 2025-2026.* Canberra

[3] Services were not eligible to receive the PD and PP if they had received it in the previous year. See: Australian Government Department of Education. June 2023. *Professional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2023-2024 Program guidelines*

- The PD subsidy has supported a significant share and reasonable cross-section of the ECEC workforce to undergo training, reflecting the general representation within the sector by different service types.
- The PP has been taken up by a smaller cohort, mostly by those completing degree-level teaching programs and in CBDC services, but with some reach into regional and other priority cohorts, such as First Nations.
- The PEN and PELA were significantly undersubscribed during the time the pilot was live. For example, the PEN supported a total of eight practicum exchange matches, and the PELA payment was only distributed to one person during the time the program was made available.
- Of the total funding package allotted to the Measures ($72.4 million), at time of writing, $33.5 million has been deployed towards PD program grants, $19.5 million towards supporting PP placements and $2 million towards the PEN and PELA overall.[4,5]

Impacts of the Measures

- By design, there was limited potential for the Measures in isolation to deliver significant impact on overall ECEC workforce retention.
- Investment in the Measures package appeared to be received positively and was appreciated by the ECEC sector, however, the extent to which the Measures have achieved meaningful uplift of sector capability or significant reduction in overall ECEC sector attrition remains unclear.
- The distribution of the PD and PP programs led to marginal improvements in overall sector capability, but whether this has had a demonstrable impact on overall retention is unclear and unlikely.
- There was some agreement that the PD and PP grants led to greater uptake of professional learning or training, or completion of higher qualifications than otherwise would have occurred without the programs.
- Despite an intention to support services to facilitate practicum placements and individuals completing placements in rural and regional areas, the material impact of the PEN and PELA was very minimal, due to the very low rates of uptake.

[4] Australian Government Department of Education. 2025. *Supplementary Budget Estimates – Division Brief: Workforce development subsidies: Portfolio Budget Statements 2025-2026.* Canberra

[5] Australian Government Department of Education. 2025. *Future Options for Practicum Exchange Network.*

Taken together, we have identified the following key strengths and challenges for each of the Measures programs.

Table 1: ECEC Workforce Measures: Key strengths and challenges

Program	Key Strengths	Key Challenges
Professional Development (PD) Subsidy	• Leveraging existing funding mechanisms to encourage PD uptake • Flexibility to choose preferred program a recognition of professional autonomy and responsive to sector needs • Initial targeting to marginalised groups encouraged above average uptake for those groups	• Refocus on mandatory training, while effective in boosting completions, diluted original intent • Potential duplication of existing investments in PD by certain service types, leading to under-realised potential benefit across the sector • Mismatch of high-quality PD availability with service needs
Paid Practicum (PP) Subsidy	• Targeted mechanism to address a recognised barrier to qualification completion	• Limited practical ability to access PP in smaller parts of the sector or mixed perceptions of applicability • Crossover with other existing and emerging practicum support mechanisms, risking duplication
Practicum Exchange Network (PEN) and Practicum	• Concerted communications effort	• Fundamental mismatch between

Program	Key Strengths	Key Challenges
Exchange Living Allowance (PELA)	of Department to improve uptake (though limited in impact)	genuine sector needs, existing placement match infrastructure and novel policy idea / platform • Resourcing spent on IT and website build led to delays, and was disproportionate to eventual impact (very low uptake) • Linking of PELA with the PEN unnecessarily restricted access to allowance

Recommendations for future delivery of the Measures and other ECEC workforce policy initiatives

Our analysis of the Measures themselves, examples of jurisdictional workforce initiatives and dandolo's experience designing and evaluating programs to support multiple human services workforces in different settings reveal three clear recommendations, namely that:

- The Australian Government should establish a clear position on its role and strategic priorities in strengthening the ECEC workforce to help determine the direction, focus and impact of workforce initiatives.
- The Australian Government should avoid providing stop-start, one-off, time limited grants in future and instead focus on offering sustained grant funding to better support and recognise the ECEC workforce.
- If the Australian Government intends to continue investing in access to professional learning and support for upskilling, it should direct funding to high-quality programs that:
    - For professional learning: are based on a whole-of-service approach, are consistent with clear Australian government objectives or identified priorities for

practice quality uplift, and take an active approach to building the supply and validating the effectiveness of high-quality professional learning.
    - For upskilling programs: are paired with wraparound supports that address the barriers to qualification or training completion for the target cohorts.

Across the Measures, the Australian Government should improve its approach to external communications with the ECEC sector and adjust the ECEC user experience of program administration.

- For PD, the Australian Government should target subsidies towards programs that align with best practice evidence and Australian Government priorities for the ECEC sector, and continue to proactively manage the transition of the program's focus to be on mandatory child safety training.
- For PP, clearer targeting and communication within the sector and adjusted delivery models are needed if Government wants all parts of the workforce to benefit. Paid practicum approaches should also be complemented by other stipends or supports that recognise multiple barriers to qualification completion.
- There is no pressing need to stand the PELA or PEN up again. For any future practicum living allowance supports (such as the PELA), it would be better to use a simpler mechanism that is not linked to a bespoke placement platform (like the PEN). It could also be promoted alongside programs like the PP.

Departmental Management Response

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Measures (measures) was a five-year investment to pilot three initiatives: Professional Development, Paid Practicum, and the Practicum Exchange Network (including the Practicum Exchange Living Allowance) to improve retention and build supply and capacity across the ECEC sector.

In November 2025, the Department of Education commissioned an independent evaluation to:

- determine whether the objectives of the measures have improved workforce retention and capability and whether the initial objectives can be improved;
- examine aspects of the measures' administration to determine if the operation of some elements can be improved; and
- help refine and inform future policy development.

The evaluation found that investment in the measures was positively received by the ECEC sector. However, in isolation, there was limited potential for the measures to deliver significant impact on overall ECEC workforce retention or lead to meaningful uplift of sector capacity and capability.

Responses to the recommendations are as follows:

Evaluation recommendation 1

The Australian Government should establish a clear position on its role and strategic priorities in strengthening the ECEC workforce in order to help determine the direction, focus and impact of workforce initiatives.

Department response: Note

Explanation: The Australian Government recognises that strengthening the ECEC workforce requires collaboration across governments and the sector. Responsibility for the ECEC system is shared, with the Australian Government, state and territory governments, regulators and the sector each playing complementary roles in supporting workforce attraction, retention and capability. The Australian Government supports the ECEC workforce through workforce initiatives, funding investments and broader policy reforms. Future workforce policy development will continue to be informed by evidence, stakeholder engagement and collaboration with state and territory governments to support a sustainable and capable ECEC workforce. This work is also supported by the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, Shaping Our Future, which reflects a shared commitment by all governments to strengthen the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the ECEC workforce.

Evaluation recommendation 2

The Australian Government should avoid providing stop-start, one-off, time-limited grants in future and instead focus on offering sustained grant funding to better support and recognise the ECEC workforce.

Department response: Note

Explanation: The Australian Government acknowledges that sustained and predictable funding can provide greater certainty for the ECEC sector and contribute to improved workforce outcomes. However, time-limited grants can also be an effective mechanism for testing new initiatives and addressing specific priorities. Future funding decisions will consider the appropriate balance between ongoing investment and targeted grant programs to support a strong and sustainable ECEC workforce. The Department of Education notes that the workforce measures were introduced as pilots to test whether these mechanisms could achieve their intended objectives, rather than committing significant funding to unproven strategies. The evaluation findings indicate that, in most cases, the approaches trialled were well received by the sector and viewed positively.

Evaluation recommendation 3

If the Australian Government intends to continue investing in access to professional learning and support for upskilling, it should direct funding to high-quality programs that:

For professional learning: are based on a whole-of-service approach, are consistent with clear Australian government objectives or identified priorities for practice quality uplift and take an active approach to building the supply and validating the effectiveness of high-quality professional learning.

For upskilling programs: are paired with wraparound supports that address the barriers to qualification or training completion for the target cohorts.

Department response: Agree in principle

Explanation: The Australian Government recognises that investments in professional learning and upskilling should be evidence-based, aligned with sector priorities, and designed to maximise impact. The Government also acknowledges the potential benefits of whole-of-service approaches to professional learning in supporting continuous quality improvement. The Department of Education will consider this recommendation as part of future ECEC workforce policy development, including opportunities to support quality uplift through high-quality professional learning, strengthen workforce capability through whole-of-service approaches, and reduce barriers to qualification and training participation and completion.

Evaluation recommendation 4

Across the Measures, the Australian Government should revisit its approach to external communications with the ECEC sector and adjust the ECEC user experience of program administration.

Department response: Agree in principle

Explanation: The Department of Education will consider this recommendation in future communications and engagement activities with the ECEC sector. Future communications efforts will seek to strengthen and expand engagement across the sector, ensuring information is communicated effectively and reaches a broader range of providers and educators. The Department of Education will work with relevant stakeholders to improve the user experience of program administration and streamline processes where possible, reducing administrative burden and supporting increased participation in funded programs.

Evaluation recommendation 5

For PD, the Australian Government should target subsidies towards programs that align with best practice evidence and Australian Government priorities for the ECEC sector, rather than allowing services free choice of programs in a currently under-developed training market.

Department response: Agree in principle

Explanation: The Australian Government has committed funding to support the completion of the mandatory national child safety training for ECEC educators. From July 2026, the Professional Development (PD) subsidy will be refocused to support educator participation in this training, which was introduced in February 2026, with funding extended until 30 June 2029. The Department of Education notes this recommendation and will consider it as part of future professional development policy and program design considerations for the ECEC workforce.

Evaluation recommendation 6

For PP, clearer targeting and communication within the sector and adjusted delivery models are needed if Government wants all parts of the workforce to benefit. Paid practicum approaches should also be complemented by other stipends or supports that recognise multiple barriers to qualification completion.

Department response: Note

Explanation: The Paid Practicum (PP) subsidy is a terminating program, ceasing 30 June 2027. The Department of Education will take this recommendation into account as part of future policy development considerations.

Evaluation recommendation 7

There is no pressing need to stand the PELA or PEN up again. For any future practicum living allowance supports (such as the PELA), it would be better to use a simpler mechanism that is not linked to a bespoke placement platform (like the PEN) and ideally connects to existing programs, such as PP.

Department response: Note

Explanation: The Department of Education notes this recommendation and will consider it in future policy development.

1. Background and context

This chapter covers:

- The role of the ECEC workforce and its importance
- Current workforce pressures (including shortages, increasing demand and gaps in the pipeline)
- The broader policy context

The early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce underpins children's development, families' workforce participation and Australia's economic productivity. High-quality ECEC is associated with improved cognitive, social and emotional outcomes, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage, and these benefits are enabled by the skills and stability of the ECEC workforce.[6] ECEC also functions as enabling infrastructure for the labour market: modelling by the Grattan Institute suggests that improving the affordability and accessibility of ECEC could increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by around $11 billion per year via higher workforce participation, largely of mothers.[7]

However, the ECEC workforce is under sustained pressure. Jobs and Skills Australia's ECEC Workforce Capacity Study in 2024 indicates that Australia needs around 21,000 additional qualified educators and teachers to meet existing demand and move towards more sustainable workloads.[8] The 2024 National Workforce Census data shows that around two in five CBDC services report having no spare capacity due to staff shortages or scheduling constraints.[9] Peak bodies have described a national 'workforce crisis' in 2023 and 2024, noting that thousands of advertised vacancies remain unfilled, competitiveness of wages compared to other sectors is poor, and many services have capped enrolments or have limited new places because they cannot recruit or retain sufficient qualified staff.[10,11] At the same time, demand for ECEC is growing, driven by population

[6] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2015. *Literature Review of the Impact of Early Childhood Education and Care on Learning and Development*. Canberra: AIHW.

[7] Grattan Institute. 2023. *Cheaper childcare: A practical plan to boost female workforce participation*.

[8] Jobs and Skills Australia. *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession: Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study – Extended Report.* Canberra: Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024. August 2020.

[9] Department of Education. 2025. *2024 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census Report.* Canberra: Department of Education.

[10] Grattan Institute. 2023. *Cheaper childcare: A practical plan to boost female workforce participation*.

[11] Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA). 2024. *ACA Enrolments Survey Report: Capping Enrolments Due to Staff Shortages*. Brisbane: Australian Childcare Alliance. https://childcarealliance.org.au/documents/posters/253-aca-enrolments-survey-report-march-2024/file (accessed 29 April 2026).

growth and relocation, increased female labour force participation and Australian Government reforms that reduce out-of-pocket fees for families and expand access to ECEC.[12]

These dynamics expose critical gaps in the ECEC workforce training and career pipeline. Evidence points to inadequate numbers commencing relevant qualifications, high attrition during study and early career stages, and particular difficulty attracting and retaining Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs).[13,14]

Unpaid or under-supported practicums, the cost of releasing staff for mandatory professional development, and limited well-structured career progression opportunities contribute to workforce attrition. While these issues are felt across the ECEC sector, their impacts vary by cohort: educators report lower pay and recognition, teachers and leaders experience heightened workload and responsibility, and more junior employees and leaders are particularly vulnerable in contexts where support and leadership capacity are limited.

These pressures sit within a broader social and economic policy context. Australian governments have explicitly recognised ECEC as both an essential service for children and a key economic participation lever. The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy 2022–2031 (Shaping Our Future) sets a ten-year agenda to improve recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the ECEC workforce.[15] In parallel, Australian Government initiatives such as the Cheaper Child Care policy package, expanded Preschool Reform funding, and strengthened national child safety and quality reforms have increased expectations of the ECEC sector and demand for services.

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[12] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2015. *Literature Review of the Impact of Early Childhood Education and Care on Learning and Development*. Canberra: AIHW.

[13] Australian Government Department of Education. 2025. *Future Options for Practicum Exchange Network.*

[14] Michelle Fenech et al. 2022. *Attracting, Retaining and Sustaining Early Childhood Teachers: An Ecological Conceptualisation of Workforce Issues and Future Research Directions* (Sydney: Macquarie University), https://research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/194904761/140638665_AV.pdf (accessed 29 April 2026).

[15] Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). August 2022. *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce 2022–2031* (Sydney: ACECQA), https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/National%20workforce%20strategy.pdf.

1.1 Overview of the ECEC Workforce Measures Package

This chapter describes:

- The three ECEC Workforce Measures programs (Professional Development subsidy, Paid Practicum subsidy, Practicum Exchange Network – including the Practicum Exchange Living Allowance) and their objectives ("the Measures")
- How the ECEC Workforce Measures are intended to contribute to workforce outcomes
- The implementation timeline and status of each of the Measures.

The ECEC Workforce Measures package (the Measures) was introduced to strengthen educator and teacher capability, support qualification completion, and build long-term sector capacity and capability.[16] The package comprises three programs: the Professional Development (PD) subsidy, Paid Practicum (PP) subsidy, and Practicum Exchange Network (PEN), which target different points in the workforce pipeline:

- The PD subsidy provides ECEC services with a grant to cover one day of training (up to 7.5 hours), originally two days in 2023-24, for eligible ECEC employees where training is undertaken outside of work hours, or to subsidise the cost of backfilling an employee undertaking training during work hours. It aims to build capacity and skills in the ECEC workforce, while also enabling services to maintain mandatory educator-to-child ratios while educators and teachers complete training.
- The PP subsidy provides services with a wage subsidy to give ECEC employees paid leave while they are undertaking their paid practicum. It aims to support services to help employees to complete qualifications, particularly at the Diploma-qualified educator and ECT levels, while reducing financial pressures that can deter qualification completion.
- The PEN piloted a website (discontinued in 2025) connecting ECEC employees in training to another ECEC service for the completion of a practicum, as part of their study towards gaining recognised ECEC qualifications. It aimed to support educators and services to complete their practicum placement by either:
    - Enabling services to 'exchange' ECEC staff members that temporarily relocate to complete practicum at each other's services and still be paid by their usual employer; or

[16] These measures sit within a broader suite of reforms shaping the ECEC landscape. This includes the: Early Years Strategy 2024 – 2034, the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the ECEC system, and the Cheaper Child Care Act 2022 Review – all of which aim to build a more accessible, affordable and high-quality ECEC system, underpinned by a strong workforce.

    - Enabling students to match with a registered service host to complete practicum.
- The PEN's intention was to reduce the need for backfill and the financial burden for individuals associated with completing unpaid practicums. The PEN also included a Practicum Exchange Living Allowance (PELA) for ECEC students completing practicums in regional, rural and remote areas.

Together, the Measures were intended to reduce financial and operational barriers that limit access to training and professional learning, support those in the ECEC sector to complete qualifications, and enable ECEC services to release staff for learning and development without compromising mandatory educator-to-child ratios.

The PD and PP subsidies in the package have been in place since July 2023, have delivered multiple grant rounds, and are now entering the final year of their initial 4 year pilot implementation cycle. They were both slated to be delivered until June 2027 however PD has been extended for a further two years to 30 June 2029 to support educators to complete the National Child Safety Training. The PEN website was launched in October 2024 and decommissioned in September 2025, and the PELA was available for Round 2 of the 2024-25 period and Round 1 of the 2025-26 period.

1.2 Evaluation overview

This chapter outlines the evaluation:

- Purpose
- Objectives and key evaluation questions
- Scope
- Methodology
- Limitations
- Report structure

Purpose

The PD and PP subsidies are now entering the final year of their initial 4 year pilot implementation cycle, while the PEN was decommissioned in September 2025. This presents an opportune moment to assess whether the Measures are achieving their intended outcomes, to reflect on lessons learned, and to refine the design and delivery of the overall package before it concludes in June 2027 (in its pilot form).

Objectives

Our evaluation focuses on determining:

- Whether the Measures are achieving or have achieved their intended outcomes, including improvements in retention, capability development, and qualification completion.
- Which groups, regions, or service types are benefiting or have benefited (and to what extent), and whether any services or employees have been inadvertently disadvantaged.
- How well the Measures are or have been implemented, including operational challenges, barriers to participation, and opportunities to improve design or delivery.

We developed a detailed evaluation framework to examine these objectives, featuring questions such as:

- Did the Measure's design set them up for success? Is it still appropriate?
- How well were the Measures administered and delivered?
- What have the Measures produced?
- What impacts have the Measures had?

For the full evaluation framework, please see Appendix 1.

Findings from the evaluation will provide practical lessons that can inform future workforce policy, including insights for scaling similar workforce initiatives or adapting to evolving ECEC sector needs.

Scope

dandolopartners was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education to evaluate the ECEC Workforce Measures package. Our evaluation focuses on assessing the design, implementation, outputs, and, to the extent possible, the outcomes or impacts of the Measures. It comments on how the Measures contribute to workforce retention, capability development, qualification completion and sector capacity.

This evaluation does not:

- Assess broader ECEC workforce or system-wide reforms beyond the Measures package.
- Attribute changes in ECEC workforce outcomes solely to the Measures where other concurrent policies or external factors influence results, beyond what can be reasonably established.
- Evaluate areas of ECEC workforce or service change not directly targeted by the Measures.

Methodology

The evaluation commenced in late November 2025 and concluded in late June 2026, with most fieldwork taking place between April to May 2026.

Our approach and methodology draws on a range of fieldwork and analysis activities, including:

- **A document review** of key documents, including grant guidelines, process documents, standard operating procedures and project management plans.
- **A jurisdictional scan**, which examined the delivery of and identified learnings from **five shortlisted case studies** of similar programs. Insights from each of the case studies were informed by desktop research and semi-structured interviews with policymakers or staff that have overseen those comparator initiatives.
- **Stakeholder interviews** (see Appendix 2) with:
  - Department staff with involvement with implementation responsibility for, or visibility of, the Measures
  - ECEC peak bodies
  - ECEC services
- **A short survey** to capture experiences and perspectives of those in the ECEC workforce benefitting from the PD subsidy and / or the PP subsidy

- **Analysis of data** provided by the Department, including
    - Data on applications, to understand uptake, distribution, and usage rates for each program
    - Website data, to analyse engagement with the individual programs
    - Survey data from ECEC service representatives to understand awareness of and perceptions of the programs for the entire ECEC sector

For more detail on the evaluation methodology, please see Appendix 3.

Limitations

This evaluation has limitations, primarily related to data availability, timing, and the extent to which outcomes can be attributed to the Measures. These include:

- Findings are based largely on administrative and monitoring data provided by the Department. These data were collected primarily for program administration rather than evaluation, which limits the range, consistency and comparability of variables available for analysis.
- The evaluation does not include a comparison group or counterfactual design. This limits the extent to which observed outcomes can be attributed solely to the Measures, particularly given the influence of concurrent reforms, labour market conditions and wider sector pressures on the ECEC workforce.
- Evidence on outcomes is stronger at the level of individual participants and services than at the level of the broader ECEC system. The evaluation can identify plausible contributions to capability, access and service-level support, but it cannot determine the Measures' direct effect on sector-wide trends in supply, retention or workforce stability.
- Interview and consultation findings provide valuable contextual and explanatory evidence, but they are qualitative in nature and are not statistically representative of all providers, services or educators.
- Survey findings draw insights from 92 recipients of either the PD or PP. The survey mostly reflects the views of ECEC service staff (ECTs, educators) and service leaders (nominated supervisors and other leadership positions). Of the 92 individuals that completed the survey:
    - 16 had experiences with the PP subsidy,
    - 62 had experiences with the PD subsidy,
    - 14 had experiences with both subsidies.
- Due to sample size, insights about the experiences and views on the Measures are triangulated with qualitative data from interviews with ECEC service providers, and from other survey data.

- The PP and PD have operated only since mid-2023 and were both due to conclude in mid-2027. At the time of writing, PD has been refocused to support the National Child Safety Training and has been extended until mid-2029. Accordingly, the evaluation is not able to assess longer-term impacts, including sustained effects on retention, career progression or long-term workforce capability.

We note where these challenges have impacted our findings through the evaluation report.

This report

This evaluation report considers the:

- **Design**, including problem definition and logical rationale underpinning the design of the Measures package as a whole and for each of the three programs: the PD, PP, and PEN (including PELA), to examine whether their design set them up for success.
- **Implementation and delivery**, including timelines, changes over time, key enablers and barriers influencing delivery of each of the programs. This chapter will also examine the operation of governance, risk management, accountability arrangements and administrative processes or systems supporting overall delivery of the Measures package.
- **Outputs**, including metrics on applications, characteristics of services and staff participating in each of the programs. Where relevant, this chapter will also examine the volume, duration and mode of professional development or practicum time supported.
- **Overall assessment** of the effectiveness of the Measures, as a package and for each of the programs, in meeting their objectives and delivering impact for the ECEC sector. This chapter will also consider variation in outcomes, efficiency and potential implications of the Measures ceasing, or not having been available in the first place.
- **Lessons learnt and application of findings** around what works and does not work (and why), to inform future scaling, adaptation or delivery of similar policy initiatives, and identify implications for future ECEC workforce policy design.

1.3 Problem-definition and policy rationale

This chapter outlines:

- The overall problem or issue the Measures (individually and collectively) were seeking to address
- The specific policy rationale for the Australian Government to introduce the Measures

Its key findings include:

- There was a clear case for a coordinated national response to acute ECEC workforce pressures, and it was appropriate for the Australian Government to act, given the levers it holds over funding, quality and training.
- The Measures were introduced alongside wage reform, with low pay recognised as the main driver of attrition and PD/practicum supports intended to complement, not replace, wage increases and other structural changes.
- By targeting professional development and practicum support, the package aligned with the broader Shaping Our Future strategy focus on capability and pathways, but in isolation it was only ever likely to make a modest contribution to overall workforce retention.

There was a need for a coordinated national response to reduce workforce pressures for ECEC educators, teachers and leaders.

The ECEC sector is under increasing strain and pressure. Workforce shortages are impacting services' ability to operate at full capacity, with significant flow-on effects for child wellbeing and broader workforce participation. These challenges are widespread, persistent, and experienced across regions and service types. High attrition, structural reliance on lower wages relative to comparable sectors, and increasing qualification and regulatory requirements have constrained the sector's ability to attract and retain educators, teachers and leaders at scale.[17]

It was reasonable for the Australian Government to invest in sector-wide initiatives to support the ECEC workforce, given widespread attrition and the national levers it holds to address this.

It was logical for the Australian Government to directly invest in a workforce where there are significant unmet areas of need, where workforce issues are impacting on service delivery, where a national response is required, and where the Australian Government holds primary policy and funding responsibility.

The Australian Government was in a strong position to intervene and deliver programs to promote ECEC workforce retention. The Australian Government is responsible for the Child Care Subsidy (CCS), the main funding mechanism for most ECEC service types. The states and territories have varied capacity to deliver on their responsibilities, which are typically skewed towards kindergarten

[17] For further information, please refer to Background and context chapter.

or preschool services, for which they hold primary delivery responsibility. A state-based approach risks fragmented and inconsistent ECEC workforce investment and action.

The Measures were delivered in the context of broader wage reform discussions in the Australian Government. Wages are the most significant driver of retention.

The Measures were introduced alongside broader wage reform discussions underway within the Australian Government. In particular, the Worker Retention Payment was introduced in 2024, providing funding to support wage increases for eligible ECEC workers. These reforms addressed wages as the most critical driver of workforce retention and sustainability, while the Measures were intended to play a complementary role by addressing other financial barriers to retention and upskilling.

Delivering targeted workforce measures was a sound investment decision based on the extent of the workforce pressures experienced in the sector, the consistency of a national response delivered by the Australian Government, and the benefit of complementing critical wage reforms.

The decision to target professional development and practicum placements in the ECEC Workforce Measures package was appropriately aligned with the Australian Government's broader reform approach.

The PP, PD and PEN were introduced as specific levers to address identified barriers in training, professional learning, qualification completion and ECEC workforce distribution, and to support implementation of the broader reform agenda.

'It's a really valuable measure that we need. We need that funding.' — Service provider

'We welcome these initiatives, right? … there is a level of commitment to professional development, professional learning, supporting, breaking down the barriers of doing unpaid practicums… They are really structurally significant commitments.' — Peak body

'Almost definitely... it's really great that the government's able to sort of come in and actually provide that support for some of these issues that we are having here.' — Service provider

Access to PD was identified as a reasonable lever to support retention and career progression, particularly in a workforce with limited structured pathways for advancement. This assumption was

aligned with Shaping Our Future, which identified improved access to core professional development as a key contributor to a sustainable, high-quality workforce.[18]

'[We need] strong, supported leaders [to] create stable workplaces where educators feel valued, heard and motivated to stay.' — Survey respondent

'I have been in EC for 43+ years and intend to keep learning and working but I also have a passion and connection to seeing children's lives enhanced, supporting families and ensuring my team are acknowledged.' — Survey respondent

Similarly, the Australian Government's decision to invest in subsidising providers to provide paid leave to their staff as a strategy for keeping them in the ECEC sector was reasonable. The requirement to complete unpaid practicums has long been recognised as a barrier to upskilling and qualification completion, particularly at the Diploma and Bachelor's Degree levels. The PP subsidy reflected a sound policy judgement that reducing the financial burden associated with placements would support continued participation in training. This approach became consistent with broader Australian Government policy settings that were later developed to address other priority workforces, such as the Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) Program, that provides paid placement support to workforces including teaching and nursing.[19]

'Continue to extend this subsidy for years to come. Very valuable considering the amount of time I need to stop working to do practicum, it makes that less stressful.' — Survey respondent

The Australian Government's decision to invest in supporting current ECEC workers undertaking further ECEC qualifications through a practicum exchange network and living allowance to educators as a strategy for keeping educators in the sector was, in theory, an innovative idea to addressing an identified problem. The PEN was intended to respond to challenges attending practicums, particularly for educators attending in regional and rural areas. Educators in these locations are less likely to have access to practicum host services and often need to temporarily relocate to attend a practicum, and services may have limited capacity to backfill their own staff undertaking practicums. The inclusion of a placement-matching mechanism and living allowance reflected these access challenges.

[18] Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). August 2022. *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce 2022–2031* (Sydney: ACECQA).

[19] Department of Education. 2025. *Commonwealth Prac Payment.* https://www.education.gov.au/commonwealth-prac-payment-cpp

There was limited potential for the Measures in isolation to deliver significant impact on overall ECEC workforce retention.

As a package of programs, the Measures are not the primary levers to support workforce retention. Initiatives to support professional development and participation in practicums (through payments and matching) are a reasonable way to demonstrate that the Australian Government values the sector. However, the opportunity for impact is modest relative to the significant challenges the ECEC workforce faces.

In considering critical issues such as pay and working conditions in the workforce, relative to the modest size, scale, and quantum of the PD subsidy, the PP subsidy, and the PEN, the scale and complexity of pressures currently being experienced in the sector could not have been addressed through the Measures alone.

The Australian Government acknowledged the intended complementary, rather than foundational, role the Measures were to play. While the limitations of the Measures were recognised at the outset, these considerations remain relevant in assessing the appropriateness of the policy response.

2. Design of the ECEC Measures

This chapter outlines:

- The design of the Measures package as a whole, including the common design decisions or assumptions made that spanned multiple programs
- The design of each of the three programs: the PD, PP, PEN (including PELA)

Its key findings include:

- **PD design:** PD sought to remove key financial and backfill barriers to participating in professional development, particularly for priority cohorts and service types. It sought to preserve provider or service PD choice. While helpful to instil trust in the sector's professionalism, effective use of the subsidy relied upon provider or service capability to spend it effectively, and to quality assure available training offerings.
- **PP design:** PP offered a targeted, partial contribution to practicum related costs in priority qualification pathways. It was signalled clearly as a temporary, needs-based grant rather than an ongoing wage supplement. While all CCS approved services were eligible to apply for the grant, the design of PP did not accommodate ECEC workers in all service types, in practice.
- **Overall PD and PP design:** PD and PP design was fit-for-purpose, given short timeframes and acute workforce pressures. Using existing ECEC funding systems to stand up time-limited, provider-mediated "top up" subsidies helped to target immediate upskilling barriers, though were unlikely to lead to significant overall capability uplift.
- **PEN and PELA design:** PEN and PELA were built on untested assumptions about what supports the sector sought and the Department's capacity to deliver. Tying financial support to a new online placement platform could have been foreseen to constrain access. Both were eventually decommissioned due to low uptake.

2.1 Design of the Measures overall

The current iterations of each of the Measures are largely a product of design and implementation unfolding in tandem. This reflects a process of iterative adjustment and adaptation resulting from a compressed, responsive design process.

The design and implementation of the Measures were developed in response to workforce crisis and strong desires for rapid action. As a result, the design process did not follow a neat, linear sequence. The Measures were delivered in an urgent, high-scrutiny context and were responsive

to high expectations to stand up visible workforce supports quickly, with limited time for consultation or formal options analysis. The Department was tasked to develop expeditious measures to respond to the workforce crisis, targeting supply and retention, while structural sector reforms progressed.

In practice, this meant that design and implementation were tightly intertwined. There was a swift move from a limited shortlist of recent sector proposals to high-level concept to delivery, with minimal upfront consultation with services, educators or ECEC students. The lack of consultation with the sector had downstream effects on implementation that we explore in the following chapter.

'Consultation when government are thinking about these types of grants... some representation from the sector... would also help... if there was some form of a consultation process around that, I think would be... great. And I think, for the government, I think they would get a lot out of it as well.' — Service provider

'I can't recall the specific consultation that led to the development of the professional development subsidies specifically…' — Peak body

Detailed design choices were made under compressed timelines and then refined during delivery in response to uptake, administrative feasibility and evolving political decisions. Governance and oversight mechanisms were stood up to oversee the initial design and rollout of the Measures, including six-weekly Project Board meetings for approvals and monthly performance and issues reports (such as from the Project Manager) to the Project Board and the Project and Investment Committee.[20] The ECEC Workforce Development Grants team (with responsibility for the PD, PP, PEN and PELA programs) were allocated as the owners of the Compliance Strategy and its evaluation.[21]

Stakeholders described this as an iterative design process that unfolded alongside implementation, particularly on the delivery side. For example, in the case of the PD and PP subsidies:

- The choice of grants administration model and delivery partners evolved over time, moving from manual, internally managed processes towards outsourced, portal-based models.
- The program guidelines maintained their core focus and objectives, but were adjusted between iterations as the Department learned more about demand patterns, reduced funding profiles, administrative burden and compliance requirements.

This has two implications for how we assess the Measures:

[20] Australian Government Department of Education. August 2025. *Project Management Plan - Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Budget Measures 2023-24*.

[21] Australian Government Department of Education. N.d. *Compliance Strategy 2024-25: Workforce Development Grants*.

- When we describe the ‘design’ of each program, we are largely referring to the current state, rather than implying that this was the product of a single, upfront, best-practice design process. The current settings are the result of progressive refinement, influenced by implementation experience, stakeholder feedback and policy directives. We also refer to ‘design choices’, which may refer to both upfront decision making or ongoing design adaptations.
- The blurring of design and implementation shapes how we interpret implementation findings. Some delivery challenges are, in part, a consequence of the way design decisions were made and remade under time pressure. Conversely, some of the strengths we identify in the current design reflect ongoing adaptations to the design of the Measures rather than original design intent. We do, however, call out upfront decisions that set the Measures up for success.

For these reasons, the following chapters first set out the mature design of the PD and PP, as reflected in current guidelines, and the ‘final’ design of the PEN and associated PELA payments (noting both have been discontinued). We will consider how the iterative, externally responsive design process influenced the way these programs were delivered in practice, in the Implementation chapter of our evaluation report.

2.2 Design of the PD subsidy

PD was reasonably well-targeted to remove barriers to PD participation, especially under workforce crisis conditions.

The PD subsidy is designed as a targeted response to wage and backfill barriers that limit access to professional development, with clear objectives, eligibility, and prioritisation settings. The design aims to support PD that advances service quality and regulatory obligations, while leaving content selection and course costs to employers.

‘There is no slush fund that props up those costs… absolutely everything comes out of their own pocket, so yeah, absolutely appreciated.’ — IHC provider

‘These initiatives are really supportive… there's a lot of services out there struggling with financials, especially… small independently owned services.’ — Service provider

The central intent of the program was to remove barriers to professional development in the context of a broader workforce and retention challenge, with wage and backfill costs highlighted as key reasons PD is difficult to prioritise, especially for smaller or regional services. It is not a generic training incentive but is intended to address a cost pressure that many services are less able to absorb on their own.

Delivering PD payments as grants was driven by a needs-based logic, with priority given to equity cohorts.

The PD subsidy was originally designed to provide a flat per-day payment for two days, which has since been revised to one day (up to 7.5 hours) of PD per eligible employee, with different rates for educators, ECTs and directors, calculated from the Children's Services Award and the Education Services (Teachers) Award plus casual loading.[22] Providers can use the grant to:

- Supplement the cost of backfilling while employees engage in PD during normal working hours; or
- Pay employees a supplement for training undertaken outside work hours, under mutually agreed arrangements.

The PD subsidy's administration via the CCS subsidy appropriately utilised existing systems. The principle of attaching payment to the provider, rather than the individual, was pragmatic, owing to time pressures.

The PD subsidy has a demand-driven, eligibility-based grants model. Applications are submitted online, assessed in order received against eligibility and value-for-money, and may be prioritised according to location and First Nations status if funding is oversubscribed.[23] This prioritisation was prominent during the first grant round in 2023-24 but was less significant for subsequent rounds after eligibility criteria broadened. Payments are made via Services Australia to services' CCS bank accounts, with services initially able to submit applications at any time to be paid quarterly in the 2023-24 period, and moving to two scheduled application rounds in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 periods. Providers must enter into a Grant Outcome and Agreement Letter, acquit funding within 12 months, and retain records for 24 months, with provision for audit and evaluation participation.

Service contexts are acknowledged via eligibility for all CCS-approved providers (Centre Based Day Care [CBDC], Family Day Care [FDC], In Home Care [IHC], Out of School Hours Care [OSHC]) and different delivery modes. These include, for example, weekday release with a relief educator, after-hours or weekend training with wage supplementation, and online or multi-session courses.[24] This flexibility was intended to enable broad uptake across diverse operating models and employment arrangements, and that services can integrate PD around different rosters rather

[22] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2024. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Professional Development and Paid Practicum Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2024-2025)*

[23] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2024. P*rofessional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2024-2025 Program guidelines.*

[24] Australian Government Department of Education. June 2023. *Professional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2023-2024 Program guidelines*

than an idealised full-time, CBDC model. However, in practice, these broad guidelines had a range of implications on awareness and uptake across different service contexts, as discussed in the following chapter.

The PD subsidy was designed to remove a key access barrier to training while preserving providers' responsibility for how they deliver professional development.

The Guidelines specify that PD must be delivered through formal activities (such as courses, workshops, training and conferences) and must either support a service to meet its obligations under the National Quality Standard and National Law and Regulations, or focus on mentoring and leadership. Eligible activities include induction, cultural competence and inclusion, leadership and coaching, support for children with additional needs, pedagogy and curriculum, and mandatory regulatory requirements such as first aid, child protection and food safety.

Crucially, the subsidy is deliberately confined to wage and backfill costs, with responsibility for training content and course fees remaining with employers. Funds cannot be used to employ external consultants, pay course fees, or duplicate other wage-replacement funding.[25] This design allows the Australian Government to remove a specific access barrier, the cost of releasing staff for PD, without blurring responsibility for PD design and quality or crowding out routine employer and state or territory investment in professional learning.

Within these boundaries, the eligibility of both highly recommended and mandatory training anchors the PD subsidy in a mix of regulatory compliance and broader quality improvement. It also gives the Australian Government a lever to steer effort towards priority capability areas that may or may not be mandatory (for example, child safety, inclusion and leadership), rather than simply subsidising whatever training happens to be available.

The scope of eligible PD narrowed from highly recommended and mandatory offering to only mandatory training. This was to encourage uptake in time sensitive child safety requirements.[26] While, this change in scope is intended to help services meet child safety standards, it has also sharpened an underlying tension for providers: scarce subsidised release time can be pulled towards compliance-focused training at the expense of more developmental or pedagogical PD. This trade-off is explored further in later chapters.

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[25] Australian Government Department of Education. June 2023. *Professional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2023-2024 Program guidelines*

[26] At the time of writing, the Professional Development Subsidy has been refocused to support the National Child Safety Training in 2026-27 and has been extended until mid-2029. See: Australian Government Department of Education, April 2026, *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Professional Development National Child Safety Training Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2026-2027).*

2.3 Design of the PP subsidy

The choice to administer the PP as a grant logically utilised existing systems and reinforced its intention to be delivered as a temporary boost, rather than an ongoing supplement.

Design choices related to the administration of PP embed the measure within established Australian Government funding machinery, supporting governance, probity and evaluability. They reinforce that PP is a time-limited, accountable subsidy rather than an ongoing entitlement.

PP's grants administration model is demand-driven and eligibility-based. The 2024-2025 Guidelines specify that:

- Applications are submitted online and assessed in order received against eligibility and value for money. Where funding is constrained, they may be reprioritised using defined location and cohort preferences.
- Payments are made via Services Australia to services' existing CCS bank accounts.
- Providers must sign a Grant Outcome and Agreement Letter, acquit funds within 12 months, and meet specified record-keeping, audit and evaluation participation requirements.

Offering PP to the ECEC workforce was a rational response to a sector experiencing rapid turnover and seeking greater rates of upskilling.

Delivering payments for practicum placements for the ECEC workforce looking to upskill was a logical decision. The core concept was sound and was a precursor to other paid practicum initiatives that were stood up later by the Australian Government around other social services, care and education workforces, including nursing, midwifery, social work and teaching.

The Department tested assumptions about the utility of this concept for the ECEC sector with providers and sector representatives, to understand how implementation would occur in an ECEC context (as well as across different provider and service types). However, the choice to focus on paid practicums and to design a program to meet this need was sound and aligned with broadly identified needs.

'Really, really great idea. I think it's really beneficial for students who are doing those pre-service placements to be supported to do that… They're giving up other paid employment, they're giving up time from families… So initially, it's a really good concept.' — Service provider

The PP pragmatically targets its funding towards practicum-related financial barriers in priority qualification pathways, using a flexible, CCS-anchored model that adapts to a range of service contexts and practicum patterns.

The PP was intended to help services enable employees to complete qualifications by providing paid leave to student employees to complete practicums, according to its 2024–25 Guidelines.[27] Students undertaking ACECQA-approved Diploma, ECT and relevant postgraduate ECT qualifications are eligible, positioning the measure squarely around qualification pathways. All CCS-approved provider types (CBDC, FDC, IHC, OSHC) are eligible to apply, and the guidelines explicitly allow for different practicum patterns (full-time blocks, one day per week, or spread over several weeks).

By limiting eligibility to ACECQA-approved Diploma, ECT and relevant postgraduate ECT qualifications, and to contact workers employed in CCS-approved services, the design mostly directs funding towards upskilling the existing workforce, where the chances of retaining qualified staff in the sector are highest.

The PP addresses the specific financial barrier of income loss while on a practicum in priority qualification pathways (Diploma and ECT). This focus matters because it pinpoints a known leakage point in the pipeline: working educators and aspiring ECTs who are already enrolled, often already in the sector, but face a financial cliff when required to complete unpaid placements.

‘So, this grant provided … the opportunity for them to have a bit of financial relief and a little bit of stability. And we do have feedback from people who advise they might have had to defer or may have had to withdraw from these studies completely if they didn’t have the financial support.’ — Service provider

The clear parameters for the PP payments signalled to CCS-approved providers that funding was intended to partially rather than fully subsidise time taken for study. Its tighter scope was appropriate.

The PP is structured as a flat weekly rate of $1,162.40, based on a Diploma Award level, available for up to eight weeks per practicum and up to two practicums per employee per financial year, according to the 2024–25 Guidelines.[28] This flat, capped structure makes the offer straightforward

[27] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2024. P*rofessional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2024-2025 Program guidelines.*
[28] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2024. P*rofessional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2024-2025 Program guidelines.*

while the caps specify the maximum level of support per individual. This signalled that the subsidy is intended to contribute to, rather than fully underwrite, extended study leave.

The 2024-2025 Guidelines specify that practicums must commence within the specified financial year, reinforcing the program's time-bound, funding-controlled nature. Only CCS-approved providers can apply, and employees must be:

- Contact workers (educators, ECTs or directors)
- Employed full-time, part-time or casually, with at least 40 hours in the preceding three months
- Undertaking an ACECQA-approved Diploma, ECT or relevant postgraduate ECT qualification.

These criteria mean the measure is tightly focused on upskilling the existing, front-line workforce in recognised qualification pathways, increasing the likelihood that funded practicum time translates into service-level capability gains and retention, not just individual benefit. However, while the PP subsidy was appropriately targeted, in practice, the timing of payments and capped amount impacted uptake. These impacts are discussed in the Outputs chapter.

It is also important to highlight that this design choice excludes pre-service students not yet working in CCS services and staff in non-CCS settings, a clear signal of which parts of the sector are outside the scope of support, such that it:

- Prioritises support towards educators already in CCS approved CBDC and preschool roles, rather than prospective entrants.
- Risks strengthening retention and upskilling of existing ECTs while potentially weakening the pipeline, as services may struggle to replace Certificate III and Diploma roles.
- Excludes educators in non-CCS settings (e.g., playgroups, sessional programs, some Aboriginal community controlled or family services), despite their working with the same children and communities.

2.4 Common design assumptions underpinning the PD and PP

It was appropriate to work within existing ECEC funding systems to stand up PD and PP given the timeframes, but this depended on providers and services being able to mediate access to the subsidies.

Across both the PD and PP, the Department chose to work within existing ECEC and Commonwealth funding systems. Eligibility is limited to CCS-approved providers, payments are

made through existing CCS bank account arrangements, and support is delivered via grant agreements with providers, not payments to individual educators.

This was appropriate and arguably necessary given the timeframes and risk settings. It allowed the Department to leverage existing identity, compliance and payment infrastructure, and to keep responsibility for rostering, wage arrangements and training choices with employers.

However, it also means the Measures were mediated by the providers such that individual educators and students do not access support directly. Actual uptake depends on each service's awareness, administrative capacity and internal priorities. In design terms, this trades administrative efficiency and governance strength for less direct control over which individuals benefit and some inevitability of gatekeeping at the service level.

The tightly targeted scope of PD and PP meant that funding was directed to service level workforce retention and capability uplift, leaving some of the potential workforce out of scope.

Both Measures are tightly targeted at the existing, regulated ECEC workforce and are aligned with National Quality Framework elements. For PP, only employees undertaking ACECQA-approved Diploma, ECT or relevant postgraduate ECT qualifications are eligible. For the PD subsidy, funded activities must be formal professional development that contributes to meeting obligations under the National Quality Standard and National Law and Regulations, or that focuses on mentoring and leadership.

In both cases, employees must be contact workers (educators, ECTs or directors) with a minimum recent employment history at the service. This design choice directs funding towards upskilling people already working directly with children in regulated services. This is addressed in the separate PD and PP design chapters.

Embedding equity into the PD and PP allocation logic was a reasonable method of achieving workforce distribution and equity goals.

Equity considerations are embedded in the allocation logic for both programs, rather than being treated as an add-on. Where funding is oversubscribed, both Measures include preferences for providers and employees in inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas, drawing on ABS remoteness classifications. This is also the case for First Nations-owned and controlled providers and First Nations employees, drawing on ABS Closing the Gap definitions.

In design terms, this means that when funds are constrained, the Measures are structured to tilt support towards harder-to-staff locations and priority cohorts, rather than defaulting purely to

first-come, first-served dynamics. It provides a mechanism for aligning Government support with workforce distribution and equity goals, while still operating within a relatively simple, demand-driven grants model. The efficacy of these guidelines is discussed in the Outputs chapter.

It was reasonable to maintain shared responsibility of workforce development through a subsidy logic for the PD and PP.

Both Measures provide a subsidy to providers rather than covering full costs. PP provides a flat weekly contribution towards wages during practicums, and the PD subsidy provides a flat daily contribution towards wages or backfill for one day of PD. In each case, providers remain responsible for any wage gap between the grant and the employee's usual pay and for the cost of backfill and course fees.

It aims to maintain shared responsibility for workforce development: government contributes where its system-level objectives (qualified staff, quality, child safety) intersect with costs that individual employers struggle to meet but does not become a general wage funder. While this design explicitly positions the Government as addressing specific access barriers without substituting for routine employer or state / territory investment in wages and training, it does not account for the willingness of smaller providers to meet this gap. This design feature will be addressed further in the Implementation chapter.

The Measures are time-limited interventions rather than permanent entitlements. This means that they represent a flexible lever, or bridge measure, prior to structural reform.

Finally, both PD and PP are implemented as time-bound grant programs, with clear administrative and evaluative expectations. Support is tied to specific financial years. Providers:

- Enter into a Grant Outcome and Agreement Letter
- Must acquit funding within 12 months
- Are required to retain records and participate in audit and evaluation activities as requested.

This framing reinforces their role as short-term, targeted supplements rather than ongoing entitlements, creates natural points for review and adjustment, and supports evaluability. At the same time, it limits their capacity to drive sustained, system-wide change on its own. The time-limited subsidies create incentives for discrete episodes of PD or PP supports for current cohorts, rather than long-term shifts in practice, planning or workforce behaviour.

2.5 Design of the PEN and the PELA

It was an intuitive decision to focus on supporting current students to complete their ECEC qualifications with additional supports.

The PEN was originally designed as a novel solution to address two recognised challenges facing ECEC workers undertaking an additional ECEC qualification: challenges for ECEC services in releasing their employees to complete practicum, and the demand on individual ECEC staff to take annual or unpaid leave to do so. The attached PELA payment was intended to alleviate the additional financial burden of accommodation and travel costs for ECEC practicum participants looking to temporarily relocate to regional, rural or remote locations.

'The [original proposal] envisioned a coordination program by which Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) could undertake their practicum by swapping with another ECE or ECT at a different service.' — PEN Decommissioning paper

The reduced opportunity for educators to upskill has flow on effects to providers and the sector more broadly, namely access to a more specialised workforce to deliver high-quality care and meet legislated ratios. This issue is acute in regional, rural and remote areas, alongside the additional demands on ECEC practicum participants to access these placements, due to geographical distance and a lack of available local social infrastructure.[29,30]

The design of the PEN was a contracted process that was responding to broader policy directives.

The PEN was developed over a short period, in the context of an acute ECEC workforce crisis and a shifting, fast-moving policy environment, with key decisions influenced by broader policy settings and expectations. In practice, this meant that when the PEN was approved to be progressed as part of the Measures package, the Australian Government was rapidly navigating multiple constraints and dependencies. This prevented their completion of a comprehensive design phase prior to delivery of the PEN (and the PELA).

[29] Scyne Advisory (For the Department of Education). July 2024. *Summary findings Review of targeted programs to support people in regional and remote areas to complete Early Childhood Education and Care qualifications. https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/regional-and-remote-potential-educators-and-teachers-report*

[30] Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). August 2022. *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce 2022–2031* (Sydney: ACECQA)

There was inadequate scoping work completed to investigate existing practicum placement mechanisms targeted to support those finding and completing their practicum.

There was insufficient upfront scoping to map existing practicum placement arrangements and assess whether a new match-finding platform was required. As a result, the PEN proceeded, despite overlapping with established mechanisms already offered by large providers and Registered Training Organisations, including in-house placement arrangements and existing provider-led partnerships. For example, Goodstart Early Learning, one of Australia's largest ECEC providers, offers traineeships and student placements, including a search function for students to locate their nearest available service.[31,32]

'We've done centre swaps if they're close enough, so the students can actually swap.' — Large service provider

Less time spent on consultation meant that assumptions about the most appropriate way to facilitate access to practicum placements and financial support were not based on adequate evidence.

A Sector Reference Group (SRG) was established to support the design of the PEN, including representatives from different service models and service sizes. SRG members were expected to contribute ideas to features of the website and participate in functionality and user acceptance testing.[33] A total of four meetings were conducted across June-August 2024 before the group was disbanded due to low attendance.

Despite utilisation of the SRG, a more comprehensive needs assessment should have been undertaken to substantiate a case for investing in a bespoke digital platform to facilitate practicums. This meant that there were missed opportunities to bolster existing practicum placement sourcing systems.

Initially, the logic for the PEN also assumed that services would have staff seeking to undertake practicum placements at sufficiently overlapping points in time to enable exchange-based matching. While this oversight was partially addressed during the design phase by allowing services to register as hosts without offering an ECEC staff member to swap in return, the

[31] Australian Government Department of Education. N.d. *Decommissioning of the Practicum Exchange Website.*
[32] Goodstart Early Learning. 2026. *Traineeships and Student Placements*. https://www.goodstart.org.au/careers/working-at-goodstart/traineeships-and-student-placements
[33] Australian Government Department of Education. June 2024. *Outcomes from first Practicum Exchange Website Stakeholder Meeting*

evidence base for a significant investment in a new platform to facilitate practicum was relatively limited.

The mechanism of an online platform for the PEN, and attaching the PELA payment to its access, could have been reasonably anticipated to obstruct adequate uptake of both the PEN and the PELA.

The decision to make PELA student eligibility contingent on having used the PEN to secure a host service further relied on a series of untested assumptions. These included that:

- The PEN would be widely used as a pathway for finding practicums and / or initiating swaps
- Educators most in need of financial support would be engaging with the PEN platform

These assumptions would have benefited from further interrogation, including whether the PEN reflected how those in the ECEC sector typically secure placements, whether it represented a natural or likely pathway for them to seek financial assistance, and whether services would choose to register and participate in the program. They ultimately shaped how access to practicum support was designed and influenced where design efforts were focused.

Establishing the PEN platform required a substantial design effort, including developing specifications and procuring an external vendor through an RFQ process to build and maintain the platform (for more detail on this process, see the Implementation chapter).[34]

The design of the PELA appropriately echoed the grant approach taken for the PD and PP programs.

Alongside the platform, the PELA was designed as a separate grant that services could apply for on behalf of their staff attending a practicum through the PEN. Under the PELA, services in identified regional, rural and remote areas could apply for and receive a living and travel allowance of $1,543.50 per week for up to four weeks, to pass onto the participating employee.[35]

Otherwise, the grant application process and eligibility settings of the PELA were broadly consistent with the Paid Practicum subsidy, including a demand-driven, eligibility-based application process with CCS-linked payment arrangements. The only key difference included the logically

[34] Department of Education. 2023. *Project Management Plan.*
[35] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2025. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2025-2026)*

narrow scope of eligible costs to include accommodation and travel expenses in regional, rural and remote areas.[36]

The PELA was designed as a grant to reduce financial barriers to practicum participation and was administered as a standalone grant.[37] Access to the allowance was explicitly contingent on educators and services having registered on the PEN specifically and successfully achieved a match through the platform.[38] This meant that ECEC staff (supported by their services) that could have benefited from the PELA, but were not looking to engage with the PEN, were ineligible to apply for or receive the payment.

'And we do know that practicum is a block, particularly for people who are regional, rural, remote, you know, living in community and so on. So simplify it and certainly look for equity of access. We want it to be freely available.' — Peak body

Financial relief is a useful mechanism for alleviating barriers to ECEC staff participating in a practicum, especially in regional, rural and remote areas.[39] However, it could have been reasonably anticipated to be counterintuitive for the PELA to be attached to a placement-finding initiative, and for the PEN to act as a front door to a living allowance for eligible students. Given the limitations of deploying a placement-finding platform as a mechanism for accessing placement living allowances, prioritising PEN platform development represented a less effective use of limited design effort.

There was widespread acknowledgement that there were barriers for both host ECEC services and participating ECEC staff to delivering or accessing practicum placements in regional, rural and remote locations.[40] By making access to the PELA contingent on the awareness of, registration on, and successful use of a novel stand-alone PEN platform, design attention was less concentrated on a mechanism that was identified as an important lever for addressing challenges attending practicums in these areas.

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[36] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2025. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2025-2026)*

[37] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2025. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2025-2026)*

[38] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2025. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2025-2026)*

[39] Scyne Advisory (For the Department of Education). July 2024. Summary findings Review of targeted programs to support people in regional and remote areas to complete Early Childhood Education and Care qualifications. Summary findings Review of targeted programs to support people in regional and remote areas to complete Early Childhood

[40] Scyne Advisory (For the Department of Education). July 2024. *Summary findings Review of targeted programs to support people in regional and remote areas to complete Early Childhood Education and Care qualifications. https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/regional-and-remote-potential-educators-and-teachers-report*

The design of the PEN rested on assumptions about internal Australian Government capability and ICT procurement processes that were not adequately recognised at the outset.

At the point of initial design, the Australian Government assumed it had the capability within the Department to stand up and maintain a digital platform internally. This assumption did not align with available specialist web development capability or government ICT procurement and assurance requirements.[41] As a result, the PEN design approach did not fully account for the constraints associated with developing and maintaining a bespoke platform.[42]

There were sound intentions around governance, reporting and evaluation for the PEN and PELA.

The PEN and PELA included clearly articulated arrangements for ownership and oversight, with defined governance roles to support accountability for delivery.[43] An example of this was the appointment of the Project Board to provide strategic oversight. The design also incorporated an intention to embed measurement and evaluation from the outset, with planned use of administrative and platform-user data to monitor implementation and outcomes.[44] This included: tracking the number of service and individual registrations, the scale of match activity facilitated through the PEN platform, and the uptake of the PELA.[45] These elements reflected sound intent to align governance, performance monitoring and future decision-making within the design of the PEN and PELA.

There was an ongoing redesign process alongside the implementation of the PEN and PELA prior to its decommissioning.

Because some elements of the design were not fully resolved upfront, the PEN design continued to be adjusted during implementation. This included attempts to lift utilisation through communications and outreach activity and enabling services to register as being available to host a practicum placement, without requiring a reciprocal exchange (detailed in Implementation).[46] These

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[41] Department of Education. 2023. *Project Management Plan.*

[42] Department of Education. 2023. *Project Management Plan.*

[43] Department of Education. 2023. *Project Management Plan.*

[44] Australian Government Department of Education. N.d. *ECEC Workforce Measures Evaluation Strategy.*

[45] Australian Government Department of Education. N.d. *ECEC Workforce Measures Evaluation Strategy.*

[46] Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). August 2022. *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce 2022–2031* (Sydney: ACECQA)

efforts were unsuccessful at promoting sustained uptake and the website was decommissioned in September 2025, almost a year after launch.

3. Implementation of the Measures

This chapter outlines:

- How the Workforce Measures Package was implemented
- The implementation of each of the three initiatives: the PD, PP, PEN (including PELA)

Its key findings include:

- **Overall implementation of the Measures:** The package was stood up and delivered at pace in a challenging operating environment, with the Department adapting internal processes and then outsourcing grant administration to meet demand. Implementation improved over time, remaining adaptive rather than stable, with changing eligibility requirements and a persistent administration burden on providers and services.
- **PD implementation:** PD's implementation was enabled by relatively simple eligibility requirements, repeatable grant rounds, incremental improvements in guidance, portal functionality and acquittals. However, internal Department resourcing was not adequately matched to its manual administration. Engagement with PD, though relatively broad, was uneven across the sector.
- **PP implementation:** Initial PP uptake was lower than expected, with some funding remaining unspent and later repurposed. Eligibility requirements changed as employers and the Department learned from early experience. The requirement for employers to apply, manage paperwork, and pay the gap in the remaining practicum related costs meant that PP was more complex and less accessible in practice, particularly for some FDC, OSHC and IHC services, despite adaptive administration.
- **PEN and PELA implementation:** Delayed PEN and PELA implementation reinforced that the new platform (and associated ICT capability requirements) had not been adequately scoped. Low engagement and limited website traction persisted even after boosted communications efforts, and the decision to close the platform and reallocate remaining funds was ultimately a pragmatic response to low uptake.

3.1 Implementation of the Measures overall

The Workforce Measures package was delivered at pace with the Department adapting their delivery approach and then outsourcing grant administration.

The Measures were broadly delivered within the required policy windows and continued to operate across successive rounds. Initial delivery of the PD and PP subsidies relied on the Department's heavily manual, in-house processes.

Several interviewees described the first year as resource intensive, with manual administration increasing the likelihood of payment errors, inconsistent decisions and poor-quality recordkeeping. What emerges from the evidence is not a story of smooth delivery, but of a team that was able to keep the package operational by progressively strengthening systems, bringing in new capability and refining processes in real time.

The shift from manual Departmental administration to a central grants model supported by Deloitte appears to have been a critical inflection point in implementation. Departmental and delivery interviews suggest this model improved consistency, portal functionality, help desk support, acquittal processes and workflow management, and enabled a more standardised approach from the 2024–25 grant rounds onwards. It also helped move the programs from an administratively intensive, spreadsheet-based model to something more structured and scalable, contributing to more reliable year-on-year delivery.

At the same time, outsourcing did not remove the Department's hand in implementation: approvals, compliance oversight, risk management and audit functions remained the responsibility of the Department. The outsourced model therefore improved delivery discipline and timeliness, but the Department continued to drive the overall governance and accountability of the programs.

Implementation was shaped by both internal capability and capacity constraints and a difficult external operating environment.

The context within which the Department was operating influenced implementation. Interviewees described a Department that was building capability in grants administration, dealing with split IT responsibilities, and working within a shifting policy environment.

External context mattered just as much. The Measures were delivered to a sector under acute workforce pressure, low administrative headroom and increasing regulatory burden, including heightened focus on child-safety compliance.[47] These conditions increased demand for support,

[47] ACECQA. December 2023. *Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the national Quality Framework.* https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-

but also reduced the sector's capacity to engage with the programs, particularly in smaller or more remote services. In this sense, implementation was shaped not only by the design of the Measures themselves, but by the fact they were being delivered into an overstretched system already managing multiple competing reforms and obligations.

Administrative requirements on providers were a consistent and often demanding feature of implementation, but seen to generally be proportionate to comparable grants initiatives.

Services' experiences of the administration requirements varied according to their capability, system maturity, timing and clarity of guidance.

Across interviews, providers described a real administrative ask, but many accepted this as an inherent consequence of applying for and acquitting public funds. The intensity of the burden varied markedly by context: where there wasn't the system capability, providers faced substantial workload due to the scale and complexity of managing applications, payroll adjustments and line-by-line acquittals for many staff, while smaller, community-based, home-based and less systematised services were more likely to find that effort outweighed the perceived benefit, especially for smaller grant amounts.

'Because I am so busy in my role… when I actually opened up the acquittal stuff, I went, "oh my goodness, that's going to take me a really long time".' — Service provider

'I think if they did this again […] It would be nice if there was less of an administrative burden, but maybe that's always going to be necessary because we're using public funds.' — Service provider

Service and provider experience of administering the Measures was impacted by design choices, provider characteristics and their system features, and how communication practices interacted.

Manual and fragmented processes, including spreadsheet workarounds, limited bulk upload functionality, and portal constraints such as single-user access, further amplified effort, particularly in the early phases of implementation.

Service and providers found the timing of the grant administration requirements impacted their ability to align program processes with operational realities such as PD course availability, backfill availability, and PP logistics. Timing also impacted how providers experienced the administration burden. For providers and services without compatible administrative systems, retrospective

12/Review%20of%20Child%20Safety%20Arrangements%20under%20the%20National%20Quality%20Framework-full_report.pdf

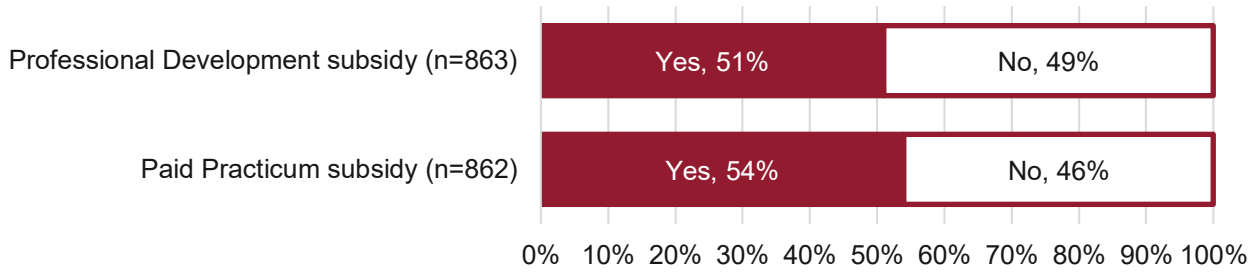
payment, delays between activity and approval, and acquittal timeframes increased perceived reconciliation work for providers.

A recurring theme was that necessary administrative commitment was shaped as much by clarity of communication as by volume of requirements. Misunderstanding of guidelines, application forms and acquittal expectations, and perceived late or ambiguous communication about evidence requirements, often required providers to go back and collect missing information, adding avoidable rework. Once providers were familiar with the portal and requirements, administration was more straightforward.

Awareness and understanding of the Measures were uneven across the sector, and this shaped who could realistically engage with the programs.

Awareness of the PD and PP subsidies was not widespread. An online survey of ECEC service representatives found approximately half were aware of either subsidy (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Service representative awareness of the PD and PP subsidies[48]



Interview evidence indicates that some providers first heard about PD and PP through Departmental emails, guidelines and peak-body communications, and were able to quickly understand the basic offer and incorporate it into their planning. Others, particularly smaller, non-centre-based and more remote services, reported either limited awareness of the Measures or uncertainty about how they applied in practice to their service type, staffing patterns and existing training or practicum arrangements.

‘Yeah, absolutely. I mean, more than the professional development that was sort of, we could have made much better use of that, but we didn't really sort of, because at that time, we didn't sort of really grasp in terms of what was required because we are used to funding our training in-house and things like that, so didn't pay too much attention to it only towards the end of the financial year, we realised we could make the most of it and did that.’ — Service provider

[48]ORIMA Research (on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education). 2025. *Online Service Survey on Supporting Professional Development and Practicums in the ECEC Sector.*

Survey evidence aligns with this, as most ECEC staff members reported hearing about the PD and PP subsidies through their service leadership (see Figure 2 and

Figure 3 below). After service leadership, staff that had experience with PD were next most likely to have heard about the program through social media networks, and staff with experience of PP were next most likely to have heard about it through sector emails or a peer or colleague.

Figure 2: How ECEC service staff and leaders found out about the Professional Development subsidy

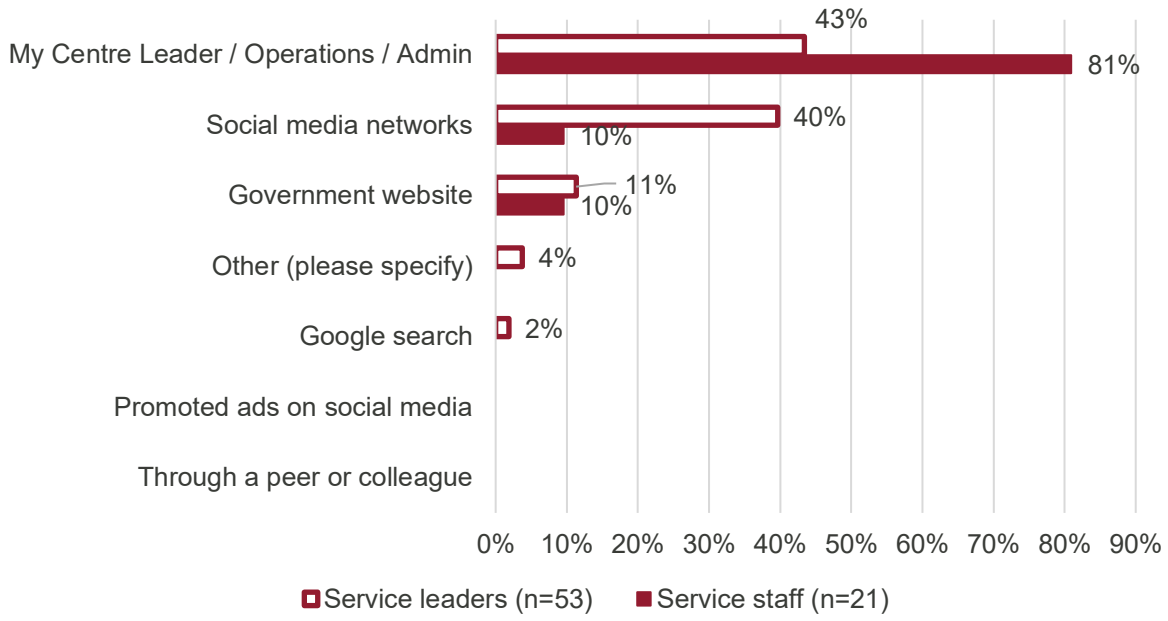
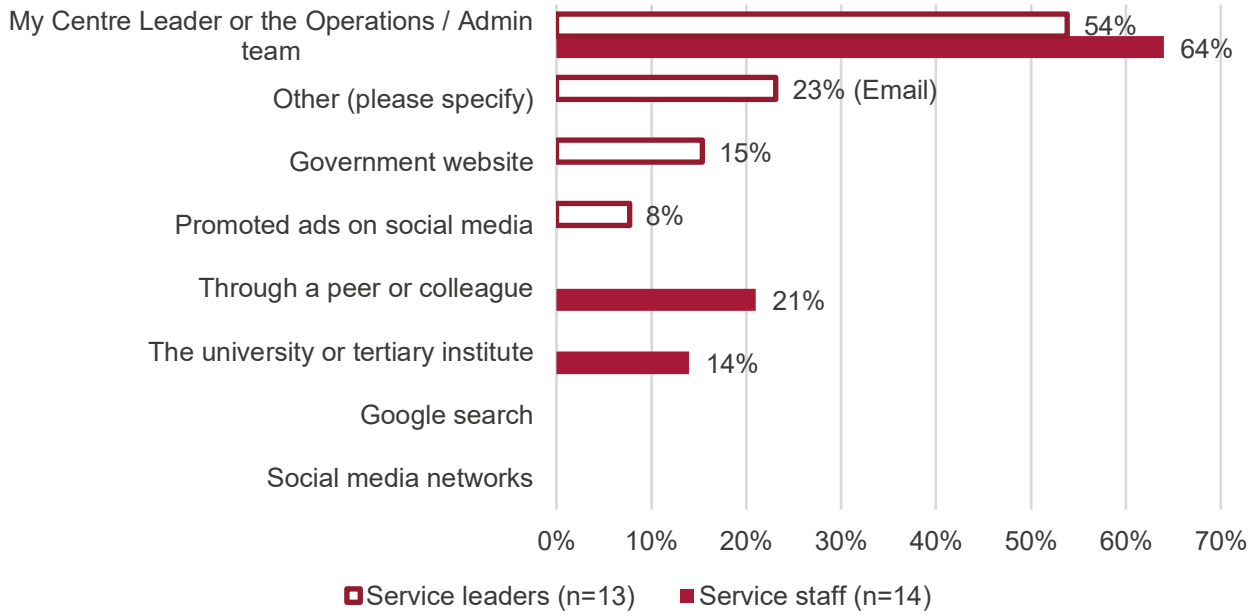


Figure 3: How ECEC service staff and leaders found out about the Paid Practicum subsidy



These findings point towards service leadership playing a central role in promoting awareness of the subsidies. Secondary communication pathways vary by program type, where PD is perhaps

more visible through informal professional networks and PP may rely more on formal sector communication and word-of-mouth within services.

Several stakeholders noted that guidance and the included examples tended to assume a centre-based model, and that communications did not always spell out clearly how FDC, in-home care or other service types could use the subsidies, which contributed to lower practical visibility in those parts of the sector. [49, 50, 51]

‘It would be very uncommon to backfill a staff member in outside school hours care to undertake training when they work split shifts and there's an entire day between 9:00am and 3:00pm where they don't need to be backfilled and they can undertake training. So if the perception is you can only be funded if you're backfilling, they may think we're not eligible, which isn't necessarily the case, but because of the way in which the sector works, they don't necessarily see how these programs will work for them.’ — Peak body

‘I think even just a section that says specific for FDC... that FDC services and educators are eligible would be good.’ — Service provider

‘They were talking about mostly centres and employees. For FDC, it's quite a bit of a challenge.’ — Service provider

‘If I had known what I know now, then we would have done a much better planning to make use of it for most of our staff and educators as well.’ — Service provider

Over successive rounds, the Department refined guidelines, FAQs and helpdesk support, and peak organisations also played a role in amplifying messages, such as through communication with its members. However, these improvements did not fully resolve awareness gaps or perception that the programs were ‘not for us’ in some service contexts.

‘We got sort of a mixed response with regards to awareness. I think what I could say anecdotally is that the sector will disengage immediately. They realise that this is not a FDC program or that it is an employee based design program. When you talk about things like backfilling, paid practicum….you can't backfill an educator in their own home who is a contractor. So that they will just tune out, disengage.’ — Peak body

[49] Australian Government Department of Education. June 2023. *Professional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidy 2023-2024 Program guidelines*

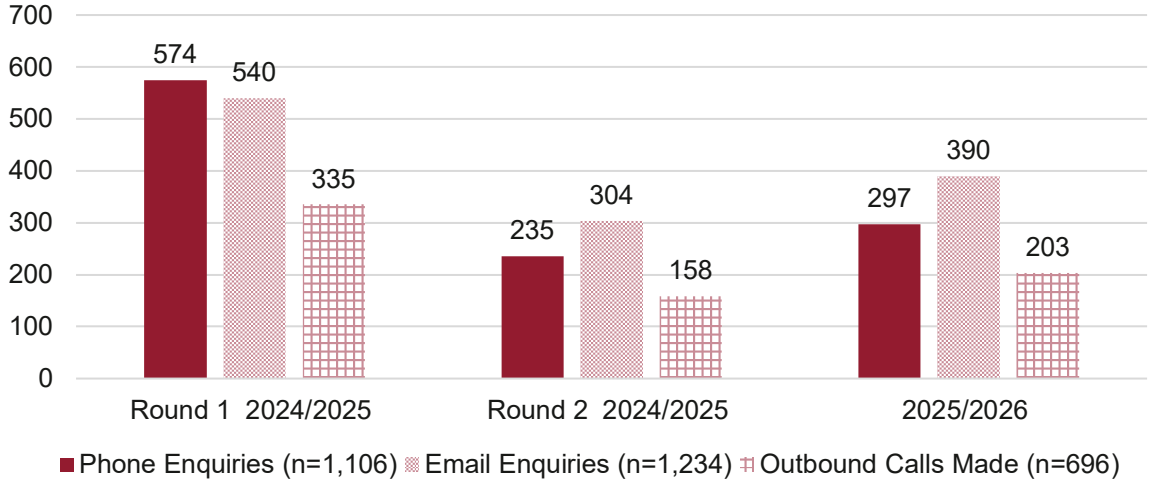
[50] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2024. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Professional Development and Paid Practicum Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2024-2025)*

[51] Australian Government Department of Education. July 2025. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Professional Development and Paid Practicum Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2025-2026)*

Helpdesk activity shows that many providers required intensive, round-by-round support to navigate the Measures in practice.

Across application rounds in 2024–25 and 2025–26, the ECEC Workforce Development Grants helpdesk handled between 700 and 1,500 calls and email enquiries per round, alongside additional outbound calls to applicants. There was, however, a decrease in enquiries over time, reflecting increased understanding of the sector combined with improved administrative processes within the Department, following initial implementation (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Number of helpdesk enquiries by funding round (2024-2026)



The most common queries related to clarifying eligibility requirements, locating or confirming Customer Reference Numbers for application submission and resolving issues with application inputs, alongside a smaller number of extension requests.

Recorded complaints and feedback point to recurring concerns: limited visibility for educators over the status of applications submitted by providers, frustration about outcome notifications arriving after practicums had commenced and provider concerns about the administrative and financial implications of applying, particularly for PP where wage gaps, superannuation and other on-costs had to be covered. Together, these patterns suggest that, even where basic awareness was present, the Measures, particularly PP, remained complex enough in practice to require sustained, joint support from the Department and Deloitte to ensure providers understood how the programs applied to them.

‘I think maybe make it not through Deloitte. They’re not always very helpful… they just sort of parrot back to you what the guidelines say, which is obviously what we’ve already read.’ — Service provider

‘Recently when we wanted to apply for this current round that's coming up with the Gecko training, for example, we sent an email, but the email response was very like copy and paste. So it actually

didn't address some of our questions. We just had to fill in the gaps ourselves and guess what they were trying to say.' — Service provider

'I think it's the delay in the time, because we had to use the time to explain everything in writing for the question that we're asking and then wait for a response. And then we get that response and they give to the best of their ability responding on that, but then you might have another question that you need to ask and then it's that same process again.' — Service provider

Implementation adapted over time, with settings and processes changing across grant rounds.

We heard that implementation evolved over time as the Department incorporated feedback or adjusted to micro-policy settings such as the redistribution and tapering of funding allocations. The Department adjusted eligibility settings, targeting parameters, communications, platform functionality, acquittal processes and training categorisation as it learned more about demand, system constraints and provider behaviour. This adaptability was often described positively by interviewees, particularly where it reflected responsiveness to real-world issues such as low initial uptake in priority cohorts or confusion over subsidy logic.

'If I talk about the larger providers and the change in eligibility requirement for this, for what I understand is the next round of funding, that particularly for the child safety training to compensate providers for paying their staff time for that, that has a really significant impact.' — Peak body

'In the practicalities, it has been great having the opportunity for the application for the bulk upload for large organisations.' — Large service provider

However, it also had costs. We heard feedback that frequent changes created uncertainty for providers, increased the learning burden and made the programs harder to understand and plan around, especially for organisations with less capacity to track shifting requirements. In this sense, adaptation was necessary and often constructive, but it also reflected the extent to which implementation had commenced before many operational settings for the Department's administration of the subsidies had stabilised, especially in the 2023–24 round compared with the more standardised 2024–25 and 2025-26 subsidies.

Governance and accountability arrangements strengthened over time, but were not fully mature at the outset.

Early implementation appears to have been under-governed relative to the complexity and risk of the Measures, with weak standardisation, inconsistent quality assurance and gaps in the design of the full grants lifecycle. Later implementation benefited from clearer roles within the grants team, stronger procedures, improved audit and acquittal arrangements, and the introduction of staff with more relevant grants, risk, finance and data expertise.

The resulting model was more robust, but also more resource intensive than initially envisaged, requiring a larger Departmental staffing profile and more structured engagement with Deloitte than originally planned. There was evidence of a regular cycle of Project Board meetings and progress reporting, and closer oversight and leadership in the later stages of implementation. This suggests that appropriate governance and accountability oversight developed over time.

Risk management matured over time, and many risks were mitigated as they were identified.

In the first year, manual processing and systems combined with the rapid rollout meant that there were heightened risks of payment error, inconsistent decisions, data gaps and non-compliance with grant obligations. From 2024, a revised Risk Management Plan was put in place and regularly updated as the Measures evolved, articulating risks including the launch and cessation of PEN, the engagement of Deloitte for grants administration, and the refocus of PD to fund mandatory Child Safety Training.[52]

Multiple, layered mitigations addressed risks relating to finance, delivery, information and integrity.[53] These included stronger pre-payment checks, centralised issue registers, targeted audits, guideline amendments, eligibility changes; improved data collection, and tighter privacy controls such as training, secure file transfer and confidentiality requirements.[54] Taken together, this suggests that the Department progressively identified, monitored and managed risks deliberately as implementation unfolded.

The Department streamlined monitoring, evaluation and learning arrangements over time to become part of routine delivery.

Early implementation monitoring processes were initially manual and required additional effort by Departmental staff to ensure that recordkeeping was accurate. Over time, the shift to a portal-based model and more structured acquittal and audit requirements improved the quality and accessibility of administrative data, while helpdesk interactions, provider queries and feedback provided practical insight into emerging implementation issues.

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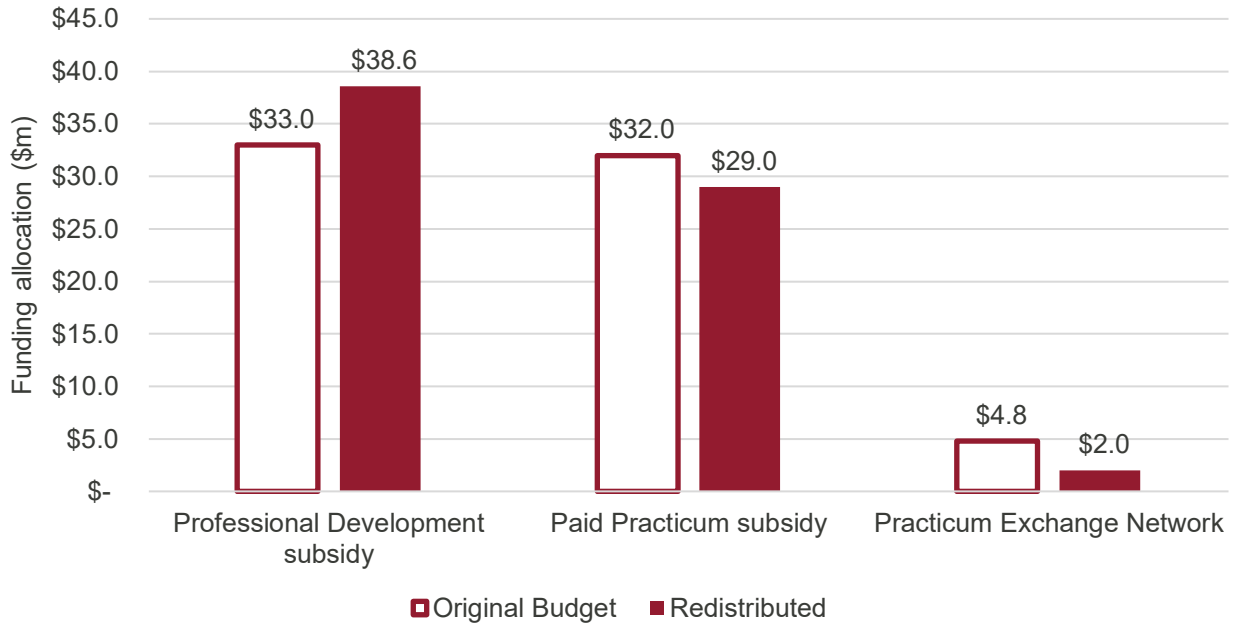
[52] Australian Government Department of Education. February 2024. *Risk Management Plan, ECEC Workforce Professional Development, Paid Practicum and Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Program*
[53] Australian Government Department of Education. February 2024. *Risk Management Plan, ECEC Workforce Professional Development, Paid Practicum and Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Program*
[54] Australian Government Department of Education. February 2024. *Risk Management Plan, ECEC Workforce Professional Development, Paid Practicum and Practicum Exchange Living Allowance Program*

The Department adjusted guidelines, refined eligibility settings, changed training categorisation, broadened eligibility criteria, and reallocated budgets between measures, indicating that the Department was receptive and incorporated feedback.

The package remained within a broadly manageable funding envelope, but budget use shifted materially across the programs.

Available evidence suggests that the Measures remained within overall funding envelope but not in the proportions originally anticipated. PD attracted stronger and more sustained demand over time, while PP was slower to scale and PEN / PELA remained significantly under-utilised, leading to funding reallocations across the package, including movement of underspend from PEN and PP towards PD (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Original budget for the Measures vs redistributed funding, by program



These reallocations appear to have been a pragmatic response to emerging demand patterns and a sensible way to preserve value from the package overall, while maintaining delivery within the broader budget envelope. At the same time, they also signal that implementation diverged from original expectations about coverage, timing and scale of the individual programs.

Unintended implementation consequences were identified and addressed, but not always fully mitigated.

Key unintended implementation effects included disproportionate perceived burden on providers with weaker administrative systems, lower practical accessibility for educators whose employers would not or could not apply, and a drift of PD usage towards mandatory child-safety and

compliance content at the expense of broader professional learning. For PEN and PELA, tying the living allowance to participation in a low-uptake platform meant that a potentially useful support for regional practicums was effectively inaccessible to most educators.

‘I think we ended up paying her to travel as if she was coming to work at the service to the school and then back here rather than going through any other grant process.’ — Service provider

The Department responded to these patterns by refining guidelines, clarifying subsidy logic, strengthening support via the helpdesk, adjusting eligibility and training categories, and ultimately decommissioning PEN when further mitigation was unlikely to change uptake. These actions were generally effective in stabilising delivery and clarifying the model, but they did not completely remove inequities in access for types of services or with specific constraints or context. The range of access is discussed in the Outputs and Impacts chapters.

3.2 Implementation of the PD subsidy

PD rounds ran broadly to schedule and quickly became the most established part of the package.

Despite a first year of manual administration, the Department was able to open, assess and pay PD rounds within the expected policy windows and maintain delivery across successive years. Given the programs were designed and implemented very quickly, this process of refinement was necessary. As systems and processes stabilised, PD evolved into a predictable, recurring offer that many services factored into their planning.

Relatively simple settings, broad eligibility and clear use cases made PD easier to implement than the other Measures.

From an operational perspective, PD was the most straightforward program: initially a two day subsidy in 2023-24, revised to one day from the 2024-25 period, to help release educators for training or backfill their roles. The rules were simpler than PP and did not require complex alignment with university timetables or individual placement structures. This relative simplicity, combined with broad eligibility across service types, made PD easier for services to understand and apply for, even while the Department team was still refining systems in real time (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).

Figure 6: Service leaders views on the ease of applying for the Professional Development subsidy

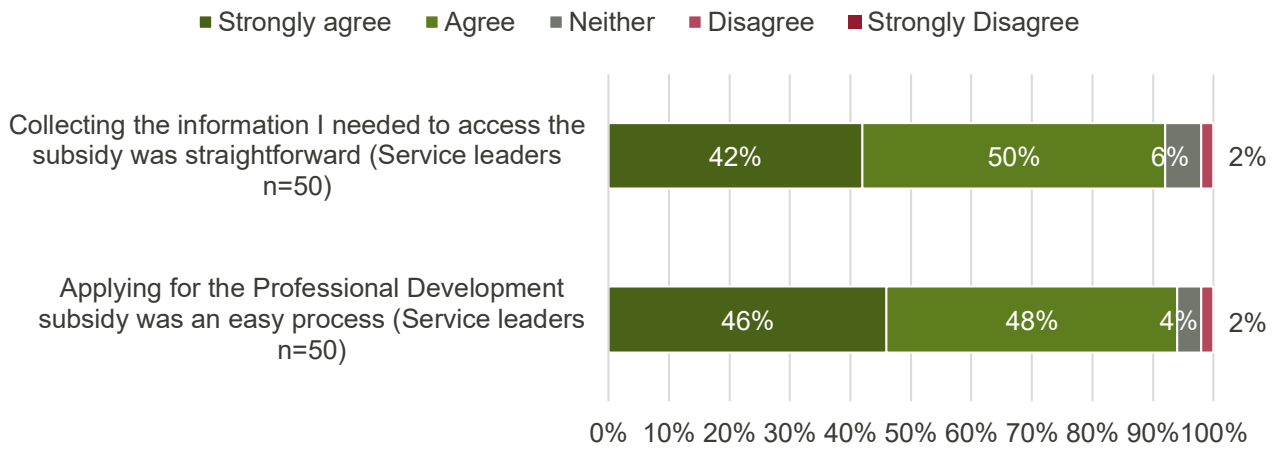
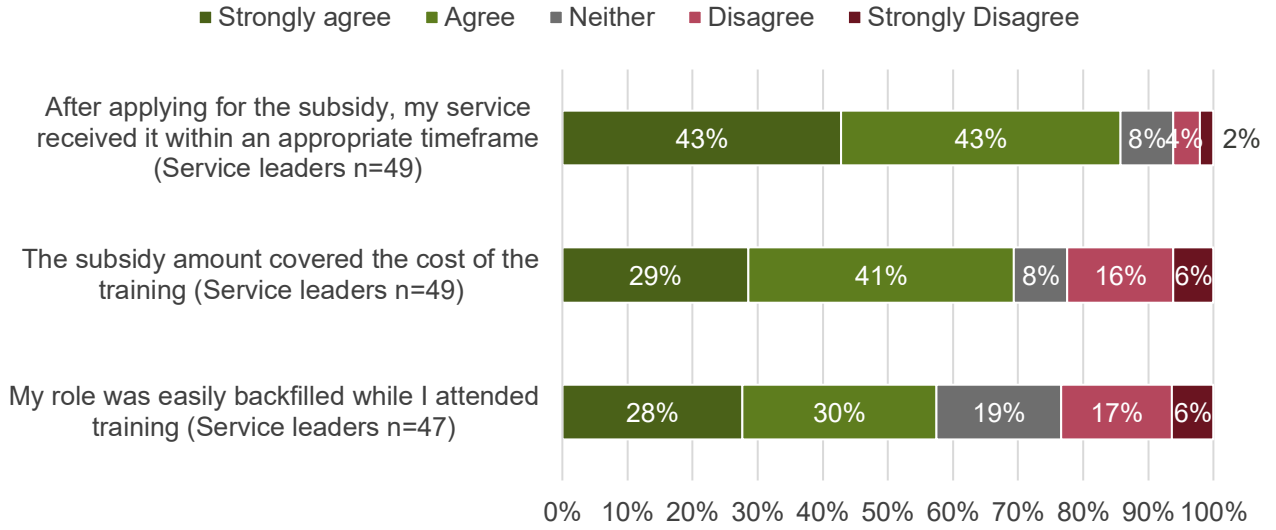


Figure 7: Service leaders views on the implementation of the Professional Development subsidy



Targeting settings shifted over time as the Department responded to low early demand in priority cohorts.

Early PD rounds were more tightly targeted, particularly toward First Nations and regional services, but uptake in those cohorts was lower in volume than expected. In the 2024-25 period, the Department broadened eligibility to include a wider range of services, while still encouraging applications from priority groups. This helped increase overall participation and reduced underspend, but it also meant the program operated less as a sharply targeted intervention and more as a general-purpose subsidy that any eligible service could draw on (refer to the Outputs chapter for further information).

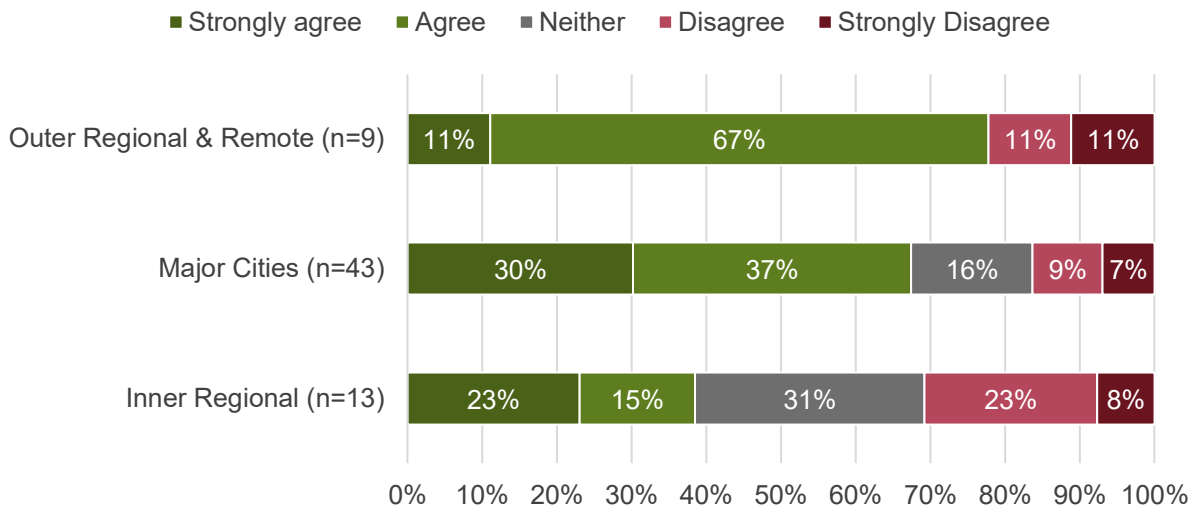
Successive rounds saw improvements in guidance, portal functionality and acquittal processes, which strengthened delivery but did not remove the administrative ask on providers.

As the programs moved from manual spreadsheets to a grants portal, overseen by Deloitte, and as guidance was refined, services reported clearer instructions, better categorisation of training types and more structured acquittal processes. These changes reduced some of the confusion and manual rework that characterised the first year. However, they did not eliminate the need for providers to gather data, submit applications and reconcile payments, and PD remained a meaningful piece of work for administrators, particularly in organisations without the internal capability or capacity to manage high volumes of applications.

Service context and capacity strongly influenced how PD was used and who could use it most easily.

Large, systematised providers with dedicated HR or workforce teams were generally able to embed PD into their annual training plans and make regular use of the subsidy. Smaller services, regional or rural services, community-based organisations, and settings such as FDC and in-home care were more likely to face trade-offs: some engaged actively, while others used PD sporadically or not at all because the paperwork and planning felt disproportionate to the benefit (See Figure 8 for variability in perceptions of the ease of backfilling). This meant that, while PD was technically available across service types, it was easier to access more consistently in some contexts than others.

Figure 8: ECEC staff agreement of whether their role was easily backfilled while attending training through the Professional Development subsidy, by regionality



PD's implementation strengths therefore lie in establishing a simple, repeatable grants process with broad reach, rather than in delivering a tightly targeted or uniform pattern of use across the sector.

The Department succeeded in turning PD into a functioning, widely used subsidy within a short timeframe, and in improving delivery settings across rounds. At the same time, the way PD was implemented and used varied across service types and locations. This is discussed in the Outputs chapter.

3.3 Implementation of the PP subsidy

PP rounds ran broadly to schedule, but early uptake was lower than expected and some funding remained unspent.

The Department launched the first PP rounds within the planned policy windows and kept the program running across successive years. However, applications were slower and smaller in volume than anticipated, particularly in the first year, and funding did not flow at the pace or scale originally forecast. In response, the Department broadened eligibility to include Diploma-level qualification types and extended the maximum number of weeks of supported practicums from four to eight per practicum, while still operating within the overall budget.

Operational rules were clarified and broadened over time as the Department and employers learned from early rounds.

In the first phase, employers had many questions about which courses were eligible, how many weeks of practicum could be supported and how PP interacted with existing leave policies and pay rates. The Department refined guidance, updated guidelines and worked with the grants administrator to address common scenarios. Over time, these changes made PP easier to understand and use for employers that had the capacity to engage.

The shift to more formal acquittal and quality-assurance processes strengthened oversight but added extra steps for employers.

PP moved from a largely manual first year into a portal-based model with clearer acquittal and evidence requirements. This improved the Department's oversight of how funds were used and reduced risks of error and non-compliance. For employers, it meant more structured documentation and reconciliation on top of existing payroll, rostering and HR processes. Large, multi-site providers with strong internal systems were often able to absorb this, though it still added workload.

The need for employers to apply, cover some costs and handle extra paperwork meant PP did not reach as many people as planned.

By design, PP funding flowed through services rather than directly to individual education professionals. This supported accountability and aligned with general grants practice, but it also meant employers had to manage the wage gap above the subsidy and the practicalities of releasing staff from their usual roles. In some instances, for services with tight margins or above-award pay structures, PP was therefore financially unattractive or unworkable, even when staff were eligible and interested.

'It's not productive for a business. We are taking on costs for them to do the placement in order to have that. In the ideal world, and if this was to present again, we would not take a student for a paid practicum.' — Service provider

'We're here to support, we're always going to be like a training space for people, but it can't be at the detriment to running a business like that.' — Service provider

PP required optimal timing and administrative effort for use as a workforce tool.

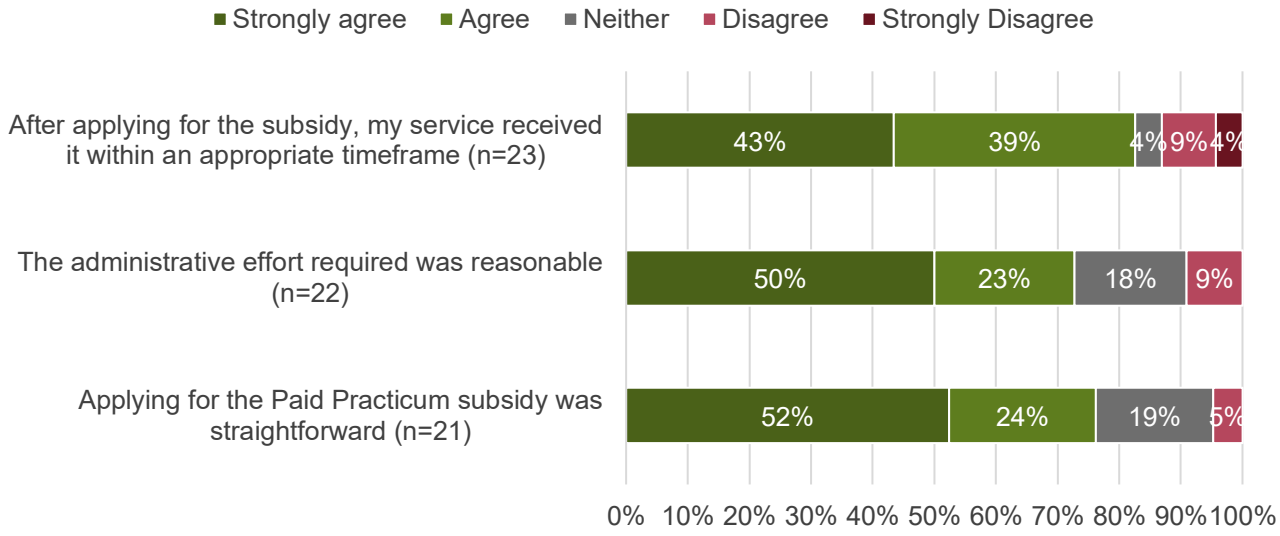
Stakeholders noted that PP rounds and approval timeframes did not always line up neatly with university or higher-education practicum periods. This created uncertainty about whether a given

placement would be covered, and in some cases required payroll adjustments and reconciliations long after the practicum had finished. When combined with the effort required to collect information, submit applications, adjust payroll and complete acquittals, this made it hard for some services to build PP into standard workforce planning. Instead, use tended to be ad-hoc, depending on whether a particular placement happened to fit the timing and an employer had the capacity to meet the administrative and financial requirements.

'Knowing who's been approved before the period starts, so we can set up a model to keep track of the training for those particular staff members. And the clarity before we begin the period as to what evidence is going to be required... we need to know that at the beginning.' — Service provider

The administrative efforts required were also perceived differently across services. Some stakeholders saw the process as substantial, particularly for large providers managing high staff volumes, while others considered it reasonable (see Figure 9: ECEC staff perceptions of the implementation of the Paid Practicum subsidy below).

Figure 9: ECEC staff perceptions of the implementation of the Paid Practicum subsidy[55]



PP's design and communication were largely framed around Centre-Based Day Care services, and did not translate well to Family Day Care, Outside School Hours Care, and In Home Care.

The practical examples and assumptions around staffing and rostering were a better fit for centre-based models than for FDC, OSHC and IHC. FDC and IHC services often found it hard to see how PP would work in their context, and many did not consider themselves realistic users of

[55] Note on this chart: to preserve sample size, we have included perspectives from both service staff (ECTs, educators) and service leaders (nominated supervisors and other leadership positions) on behalf of their service.

the programs. In OSHC, the translation was slightly different, as staff in many states can work without a qualification, so access to paid practicums was not generally seen as a key barrier to qualification completion. For some stakeholders, this felt like a missed opportunity for the Department to show that it understood and was designing for the full diversity of the ECEC sector, not just centre-based services.

'We often sit in meetings thinking this support is for long daycare and it's not necessarily going to meet the needs of our sector.' — Peak body

'If the Department is genuine about supporting the intent in the FDC context, it needs to be designed with the FDC context in mind. You can't retrofit something of this nature to a model that is so fundamentally different.' — Peak body

On balance, PP's implementation was credible and adaptive, but the model remained complex and less accessible in practice.

The Department put PP in place quickly, kept it running, and responded to low uptake and implementation problems by adjusting eligibility, practicum duration and guidance, and by improving systems and acquittal processes. These changes made the program more workable in some settings, particularly larger, better-resourced providers, or those with existing paid practicum offerings.

'The process itself was not too bad to applicate. We've just got a lot of sites, so it was good that we were able to use the bulk template, which was very helpful. When we were successful and we had to then acquit it, that was a bit more difficult, me having to go in into every single staff member and fill out every single line. For me, because such a big provider, that was very time consuming. So then altogether that took me about 12 hours to do, which was a very, a lot of time.' — Service provider

'Smaller providers find it harder to access these sort of things just because they don't have specialists who are solely responsible for applying for these things.' — Service provider

However, they could not fully resolve the structural tensions in the delivery model. The need for employers to apply, share costs and manage complex payroll and timing issues meant PP remained difficult to use systematically, especially for smaller, financially stretched or non-centre-based services. PP was therefore implemented with a great deal of administrative effort from the Department and commitment to improving access, but was not as widely accessed as PD.

3.4 Implementation of the PEN and PELA

The implementation of the PEN and PELA highlight the importance of early scoping before proposing a new practicum placement matching system and payment to students.

PEN and PELA were built around a novel policy idea without a needs assessment, and were designed with contributions from an established SRG with experience of practicums.[56] While consultation was employed at the PEN and PELA's design, more thorough scoping at the onset may have identified practical barriers to the PEN and PELA earlier. For example, these may have included whether ECEC staff and services would likely use a placement-matching website and whether a living allowance should be made part of using the website to find a practicum host.

'How do we ensure that all rural remote community services… are genuinely prioritised in this way?' — Peak body

The PELA was not considered as a standalone component of the measure and was largely constrained by its reliance on the PEN.

The design and delivery of the PEN and PELA focused primarily on the establishment of the website, with limited attention to the role or potential of the living allowance beyond its connection to platform-facilitated matches. As a result, the implementation of the PELA was affected by and effectively assessed through the lens of PEN's performance, despite it addressing a distinct financial barrier for students. This suggests a missed opportunity to explore alternative delivery approaches for the allowance that may have achieved greater reach and impact.

Delays to standing up the PEN were attributable to its resourcing and procurement challenges.

The website was originally scheduled to launch in the first half of 2024. It was initially planned as an in-house build, but capacity constraints made this unfeasible, requiring the Department to begin an ICT procurement in December 2023 to engage a third-party supplier. ICT procurement process took longer than expected and the work order for the external supplier was not executed until 1 May 2024, following procurement, consultation and privacy processes.

The website then launched on 18 October 2024.

[56] Australian Government Department of Education. June 2024. *Outcomes from first Practicum Exchange Website Stakeholder Meeting*

The Department responded to low PEN and PELA uptake with a concerted communications effort, to boost traffic to the website.

Over the next six months, the website encountered minimal engagement and exchange matches despite being advertised through the Department's regular channels, including sector newsletters, social media, and through the Department's website. In April 2025, the Department commissioned a survey into the PD, PP and PEN, and found that there was low awareness of the PEN and associated living allowance (PELA).

In June 2025, the Department responded by implementing a concerted communications strategy to increase awareness and engagement with the website.

The communication strategy included additional efforts to the Department's regular channels and included:

- Paid google search advertising
- Direct mail to regional and remote services
- Distribution of communication toolkits through state governments and sector networks and broadcasting on their websites
- Provision of a stakeholder kit to the Early Childhood Education and Care Reference Group (ECECRG) which includes representatives from the sector as well as Departmental colleagues in Higher Education, Research and International (HERI) for distribution among their working group members which includes major universities, regional universities and education providers.

These efforts showed that awareness could be improved through targeted promotion.

Even with stronger promotion via communications, the website did not gain traction, likely due to established placement systems or approaches.

The Department's communication campaign resulted in a large increase in traffic to the website, including a rise in social media visits and in registrations and match requests. However, this did not translate into sustained uptake, as registrations remained low despite this activity, with the social media team documenting that the results of their campaign drew into question the website's positioning and effectiveness. This suggests that low utilisation of the PEN was not driven by awareness alone, but by the limited alignment of the platform with existing practicum placement arrangements already used across the sector.

The decision to close the website and redistribute remaining PEN and PELA funds was sensible given unsuccessful efforts to boost uptake and the cost of maintaining the website.

The Practicum Exchange Network, including the website, closed on 22 September 2025. At closure, 164 services or providers and 80 educators had registered, but only 8 confirmed matches were facilitated through the platform and only 1 eligible PELA application was paid in 2025–26. These achievements were well below the targets of 50 matches for practicum placements and 50 students to be paid the PELA. The decommissioning of the website was a sensible response since chiefly, the PEN had not been taken up at scale and required ongoing external technical, privacy and cyber security support. This also created an opportunity for the $2.6 million in remaining funding to be directed to PD, which had stronger demand and which was able to be fully distributed to providers.

4. What was delivered by the Measures (Outputs)

This chapter outlines:

- The outputs of the delivery of the PD subsidy
- The outputs of the delivery of the PP subsidy
- The outputs of the delivery of both the PEN and the PELA

Its key findings include:

- **Overall outputs across the Measures:** The Measures operated across the workforce pipeline as intended, with uptake clustered in the PD program, also reflecting funding reallocation choices. Most funding was used as planned, with only a small proportion returned or recovered.
- **PD outputs:** The PD subsidy reached a fair share of ECEC services and a broad cross-section of the ECEC workforce, with uptake spanning diverse settings and increasing markedly after eligibility was widened. PD uptake became more concentrated in mandatory training but also supported other highly recommended training.
- **PP outputs:** Uptake increased after eligibility was expanded to Diploma-level qualifications and the support cap per educator was raised, demonstrating that design tweaks could unlock latent demand. Even so, PP uptake was modest overall and was concentrated among educators and services best able to navigate the program model.
- **PEN and PELA outputs:** PEN and PELA participation remained low throughout the pilot, with PEN participation rising only marginally following a targeted communications campaign. Spend on the PEN was disproportionately high, indicating that the return on investment for PEN and PELA was negligible, compared with PD and PP, making the reallocation to PD appropriate.

Data availability and limitations

This analysis draws primarily on grant administration data for 2023–24, 2024–25 and current figures for 2025–26. Interpretation of trends across years requires caution, however, because the 2023–24 data were collected differently to the 2024–25 and 2025–26 data. In addition, the 2025–26 figures are not yet complete because delivery and acquittal activity was still ongoing at the time of this report. Accordingly, the 2023–24 and 2025–26 figures are best treated as indicative or estimated, while 2024–25 provides the strongest basis for analysis. Together, these sources can

support high level observations about scale, distribution and workforce coverage. However, they do not provide an entirely consistent and complete basis for precise year-on-year comparison or definitive final conclusions, at this stage (also noting that PP will still be delivered until mid–2027, and PD will be delivered until mid 2029). The exception to this is the PEN and PELA, which have since been disestablished.

At a program level, the data enables us to report on applications, approvals and expenditure for PD and PP, including breakdowns by jurisdiction, remoteness and service type (CBDC (inclusive of CBDC and integrated CBDC with Kindergarten services), FDC, IHC, OSHC). We can also identify how many ECEC services and staff have been supported, and how this has changed over time. However, the available administrative data does not currently include:

- Service size bands (for example, by enrolment or staffing), so we cannot assess whether participation or support is systematically higher or lower for small vs. large services.
- Detailed workforce characteristics beyond role or employment level, remoteness and First Nations identification (for example, employment arrangement as either full or part-time or casual across all programs, experience, pay level, age or gender).
- Activity-level information on the type, mode or duration of PD undertaken specifically, nor on the precise structure of practicums (funded by PP) beyond headline qualification categories.
- Information on how services allocate funding (how providers decided which staff to nominate, or whether all eligible staff within a service were offered support).

4.1 What the Measures delivered overall (Outputs)

The outputs data substantiates the view that the Measures are working together to support different points in the workforce pipeline, but the design shifts over time have directed the focus towards PD.

Opening the PD and PP programs to all CCS-approved services expanded the potential pool of applicants, but PD's simple structure made it more suitable for scaling than multi-week practicum support. Subsequent budget re-weighting in favour of PD reinforced this pattern, so that most of the people and services touched by the Measures are doing so via PD, with PP operating as a smaller, qualification-focused complement.

PD provides broad, episodic support for existing staff to access formal training, while PP concentrates on supporting practicum completion for a small group progressing through key qualification pathways. This 'broad but shallow' (PD) plus 'deep but narrow' (PP) combination is

emerging because of the design decisions made across rounds, rather than something that was explicitly articulated at the outset.

Finally, the combined data show that delivery of the Measures to priority cohorts is largely driven by participation in PD, simply because PD accounts for most of the activity. Both streams include regional, rural and remote and First Nations staff among their participants, consistent with prioritisation rules, but at package level, the profile of who benefits reflects PD's broad participation spread more than PP's more limited reach.

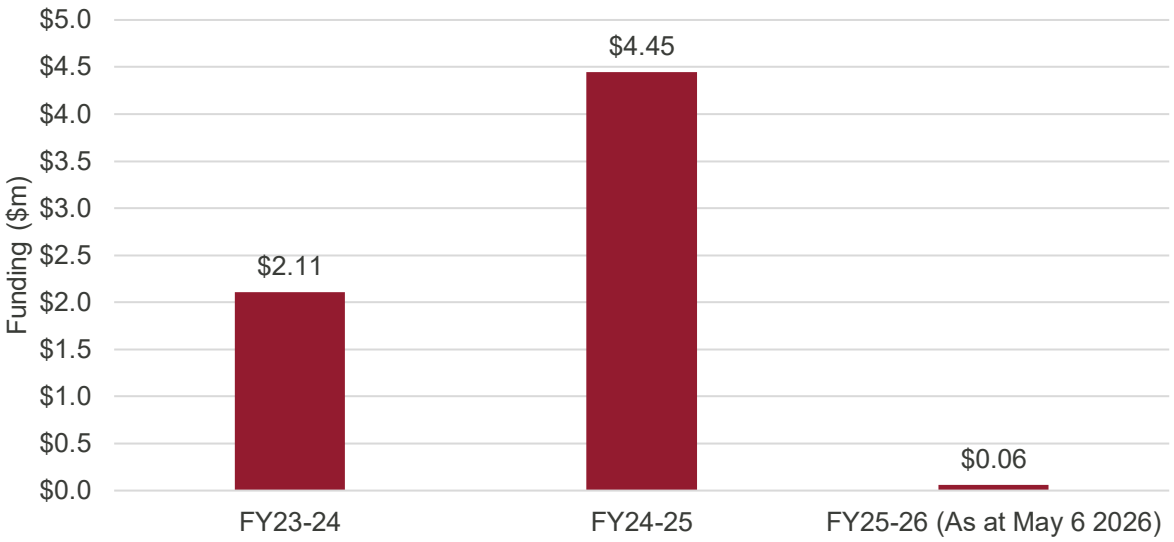
The contribution of the PEN and PELA to the overall outputs of the Measures was negligible, reflecting low uptake.

While most funds were used as intended, a consistently small amount was returned or recovered due to timing and structural constraints.

Across the Measures as a whole, available acquittal data indicate that most approved allocations were ultimately used as intended, but a consistent minority were returned or recovered. Acquittals completed in 2023–24 and 2024–25 show that several million dollars in funding across programs were recovered, primarily where services closed, lost CCS approval, staff left, or activities could not proceed within the permitted timeframes (see Figure 10 below).

Only a small fraction of applications returned the full amount, but a larger proportion involved partial recovery of unused funds (noting that 2025–26 grants remain open and that acquittal activities were ongoing at the time of this report). Taken together, these patterns point to high utilisation overall, while also highlighting that timing constraints, sector churn and the need to align placements, payroll and service operations limited some services' ability to fully deploy their allocations across the package.

Figure 10: Amount of PD and PP subsidy funding recovered per financial year



4.2 What the PD subsidy delivered (Outputs)

The PD subsidy has supported a significant share of ECEC services and a reasonable cross-section of the ECEC workforce.

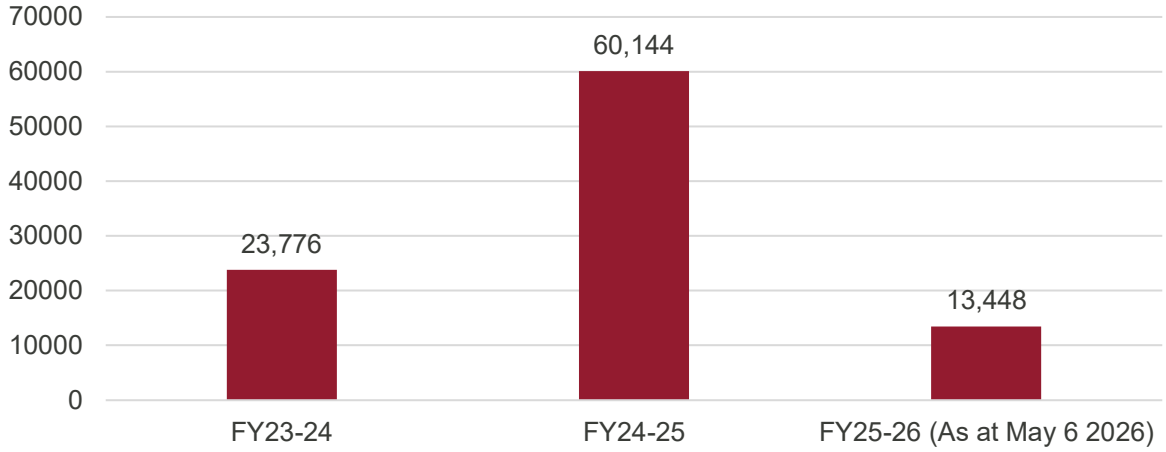
To date, the PD subsidy has supported staff from services across 2,870 providers. Given the CCS-approved service base of over 15,000 services nationally at the time, this means roughly two in three services have benefited from PD funding.[57]

Cumulatively, over 97,000 staff have been supported by the subsidy (see Figure 11 below), representing 36% of the total ECEC workforce, based on an estimated 270,100 workers nationally.[58] Overall, eligibility rates have been consistent, with 94% of applicants eligible for funding in 2024–25, and 95% eligible for the 2025–26 period to date.

[57] Productivity Commission. 10 February 2026. *Report on Government Services.* https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care/

[58] Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2026. *Labour Account Australia, December 2025*. Cat. no. 6150.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/labour-accounts/labour-account-australia/latest-release (accessed April 29, 2026).

Figure 11: Number of PD approved staff members per financial year

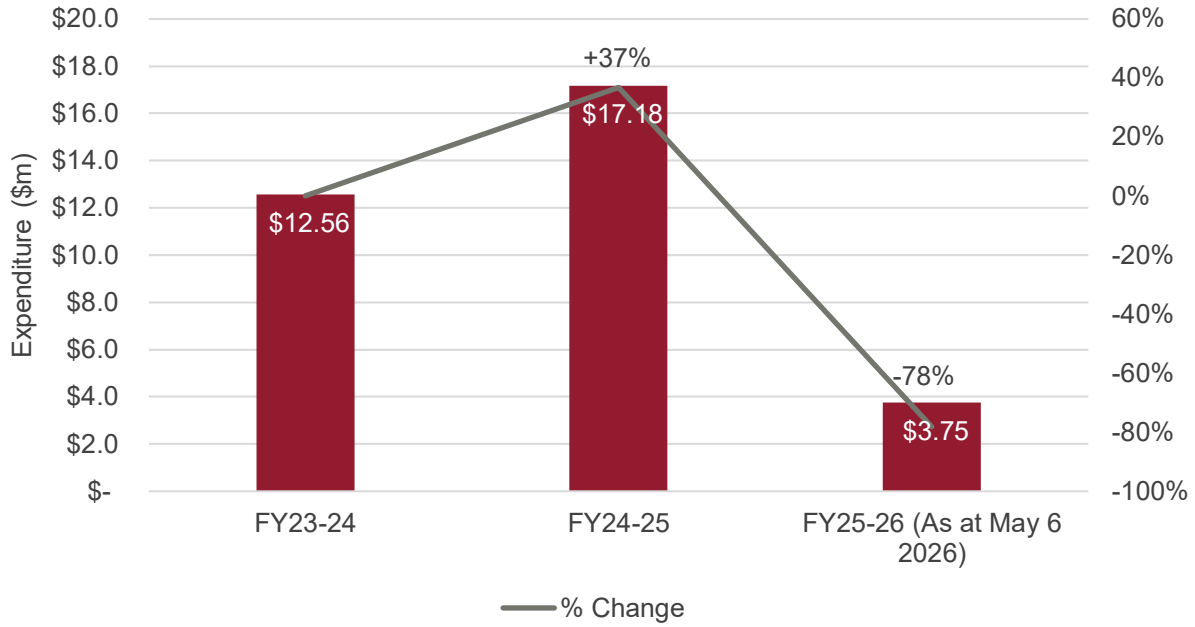


On average, each PD-funded service had 10 staff supported, suggesting that, where used, the subsidy benefits multiple staff within a single service, rather than a single individual.

The original PD budget for 2024–25 was increased from $11.6 million to $14.6 million via a transfer from the PP stream. With $2.6 million in PEN and PELA funding also redistributed to PD, expenditure reached approximately $17.2 million, by the end of 2025.[59] Overspend was offset by underspend in PP, meaning around 93% of the combined Measures budget for that year was utilised (see Figure 12 below).

[59] Australian Government Department of Education. November 2025. *2025 - 2026 Supplementary Budget Estimates - Division Brief.*

Figure 12: PD expenditure per financial year

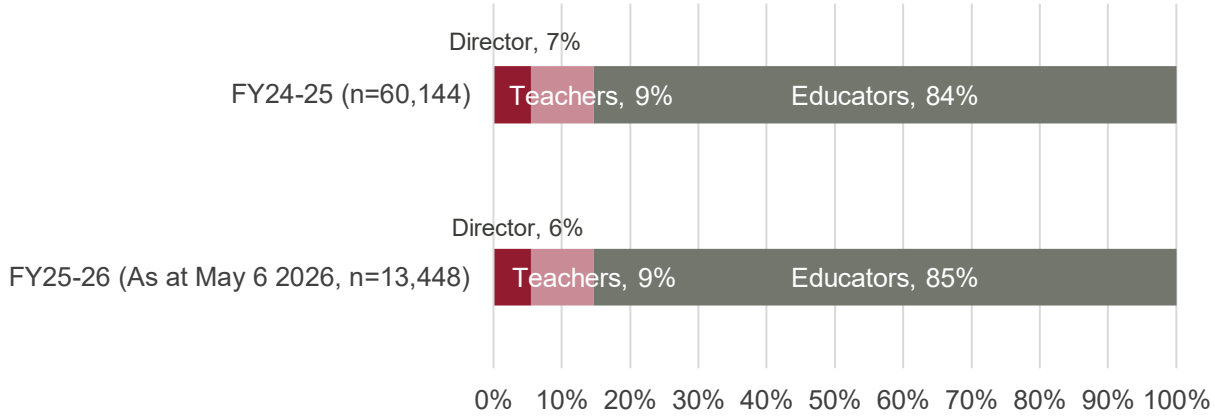


The reduction in expenditure from the 2024–25 to 2025–26 periods is in line with the original intention to be responsive to demand. Approximately $3.8 million has been allocated to PD expenditure for the 2025–26 period (as of 6 May 2026) with applications heavily oversubscribed. While the 2025–26 figures are provisional and will change as further rounds are processed and acquittals are finalised, they suggest that PD has continued to account for a substantial share of overall Measures program activity and remains a major channel through which funding is translated into workforce development opportunities.

PD was taken up by services and staff across a range of settings and contexts, but the decision to expand the scope of eligibility criteria had a substantial impact on overall participation.

By role: Most of those supported were educators (around four in five), with smaller but still material proportions of ECTs and directors or centre managers (See Figure 13: Proportion of ECEC staff supported by the PD subsidy per financial year, by role).

Figure 13: Proportion of ECEC staff supported by the PD subsidy per financial year, by role[60]



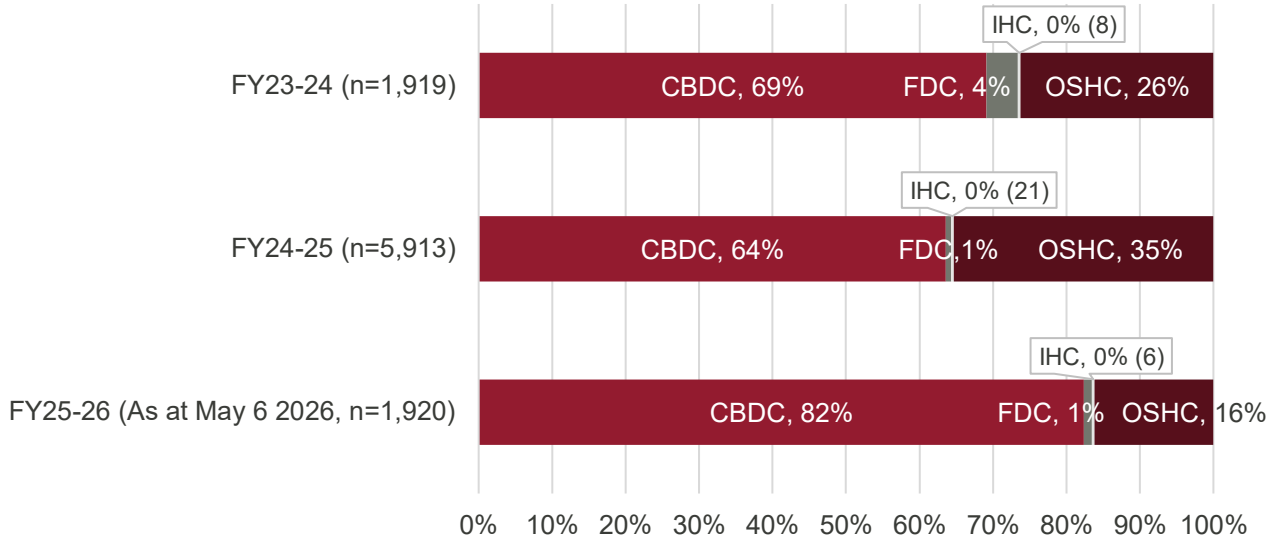
This suggests the subsidy predominantly supports staff with lower qualification levels, while also reaching some of those in pedagogical and leadership roles.

By service type: The subsidy has reached all major CCS service types, but has been most heavily concentrated in CBDC services (See Figure 14 below). OSHC, FDC and IHC services have also participated, albeit at lower volumes, indicating that while PD is well suited to centre-based models, it is not entirely confined to those CBDC services. When compared with national CCS service mix data, the distribution of PD-funded services by type broadly aligns with the underlying sector distribution, with centre-based day care services slightly over-represented, and FDC and IHC somewhat under-represented relative to their share of all CCS-approved services.[61]

[60] Note: Data by role is unavailable for the 2023-24 period.

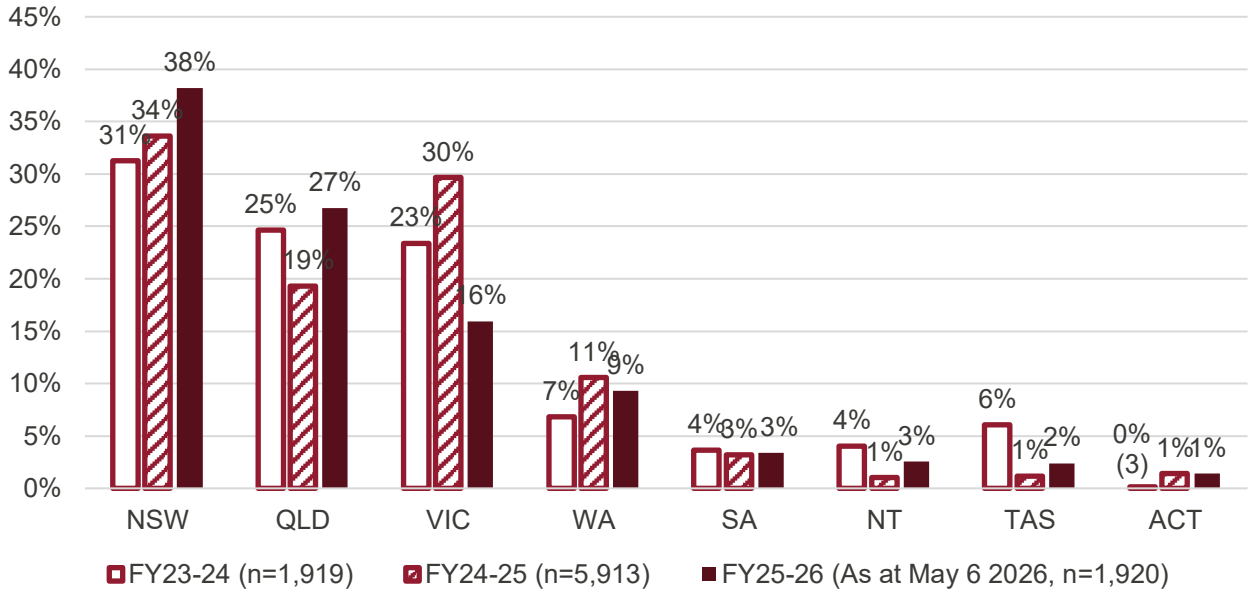
[61] Australian Government Department of Education. June 2025. *Child Care Subsidy data report – March quarter 2025.* https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/about/data-and-reports/quarterly-reports/child-care-subsidy-data-report-march-quarter-2025. As of March 2025, CCS approved service types: CDBC 63.6%, OSHC 33.9%, FDC 2.3%, IHC 0.2%

Figure 14: Proportion of PD services per financial year, by service type



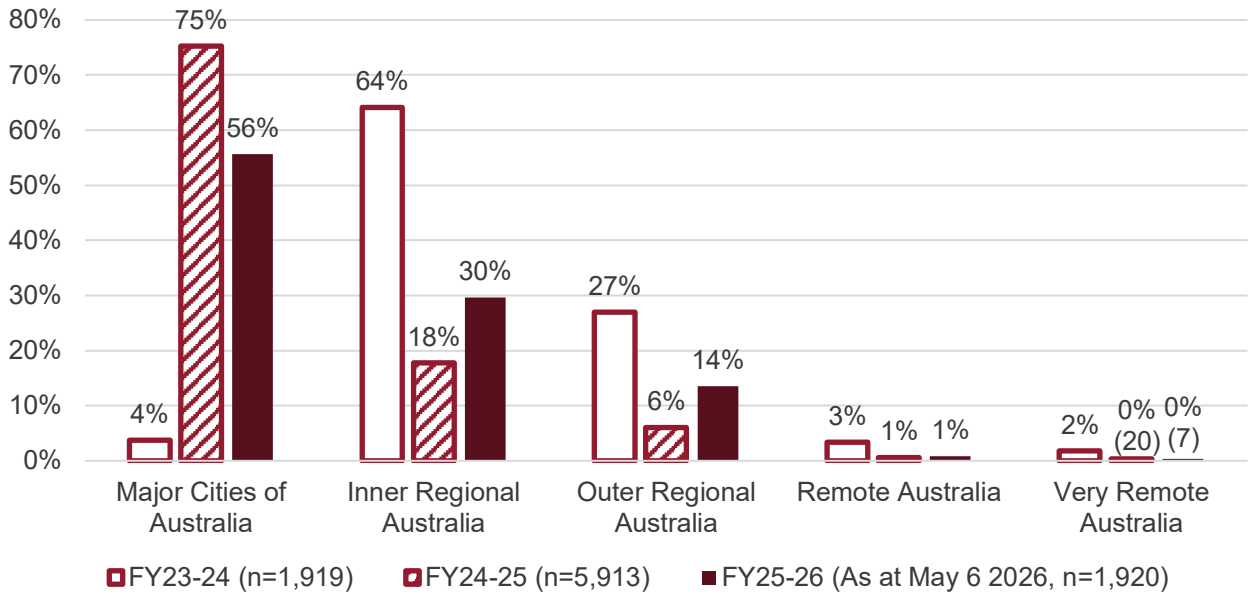
By jurisdiction: PD was taken up by services and staff in every state and territory. Large jurisdictions including New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria accounted for the largest share of funding and staff supported, followed by Western Australia. Smaller but still material allocations went to services in South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory (see Figure 15 below).

Figure 15: Proportion of PD approved services per financial year, by jurisdiction



By regionality: PD was initially targeted towards regional and remote services in 2023–24, before the guidelines were broadened to encourage uptake in subsequent years (see Figure 16 below).

Figure 16: Proportion of PD subsidies approved per financial year, by regionality



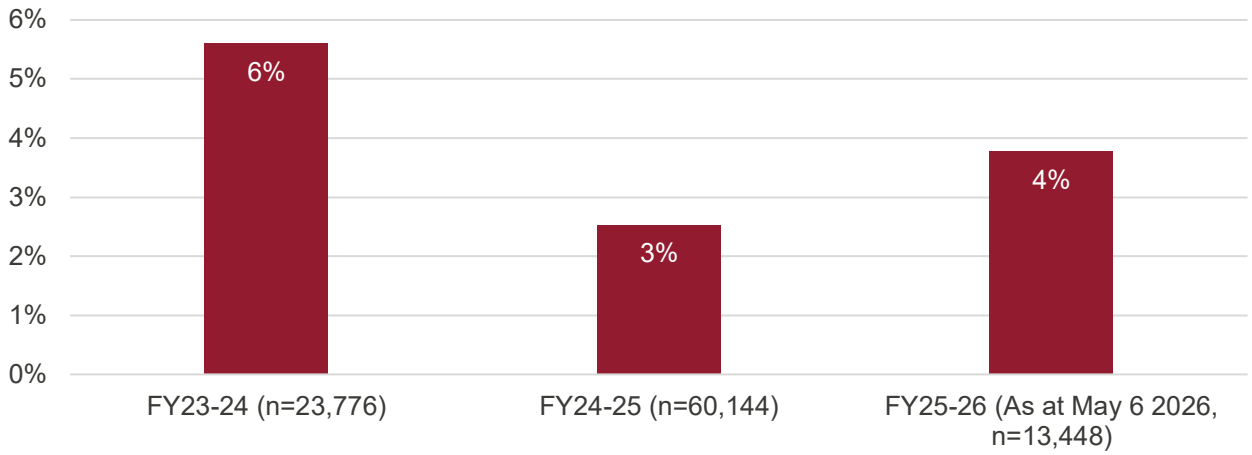
This change in criteria is reflected by the very low proportion of subsidies approved in major cities during 2023–24 and then a sharp increase in proportion for 2024–25 and 2025–26. From 2024–2025 onwards, most support went to major cities. In total, as of 6 May 2026, just over 40% of PD-supported staff were based in regional or remote communities, with 117 individual PD subsidies provided to remote services and 61 provided to very remote services.

By First Nations status: Similarly to regionality, the initial round was tightly targeted to preference First Nations staff. As the eligibility criteria broadened in 2024–25 and 2025–26, the proportion of overall approved staff who identified as First Nations decreased (See Figure 17). That being said, representation among supported staff (~5%) exceeds the proportion of First Nations people in the broader ECEC workforce (approximately 3%).[62,63]

[62] Social Research Centre (on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education). 2022. *2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census.* https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/sites/b2023-538/b2023-538-submissions-uwu-annexure-1.pdf

[63] Australian Government Department of Education. 2025. *2024 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census report*

Figure 17: Proportion of PD approved staff that identify as First Nations, by financial year



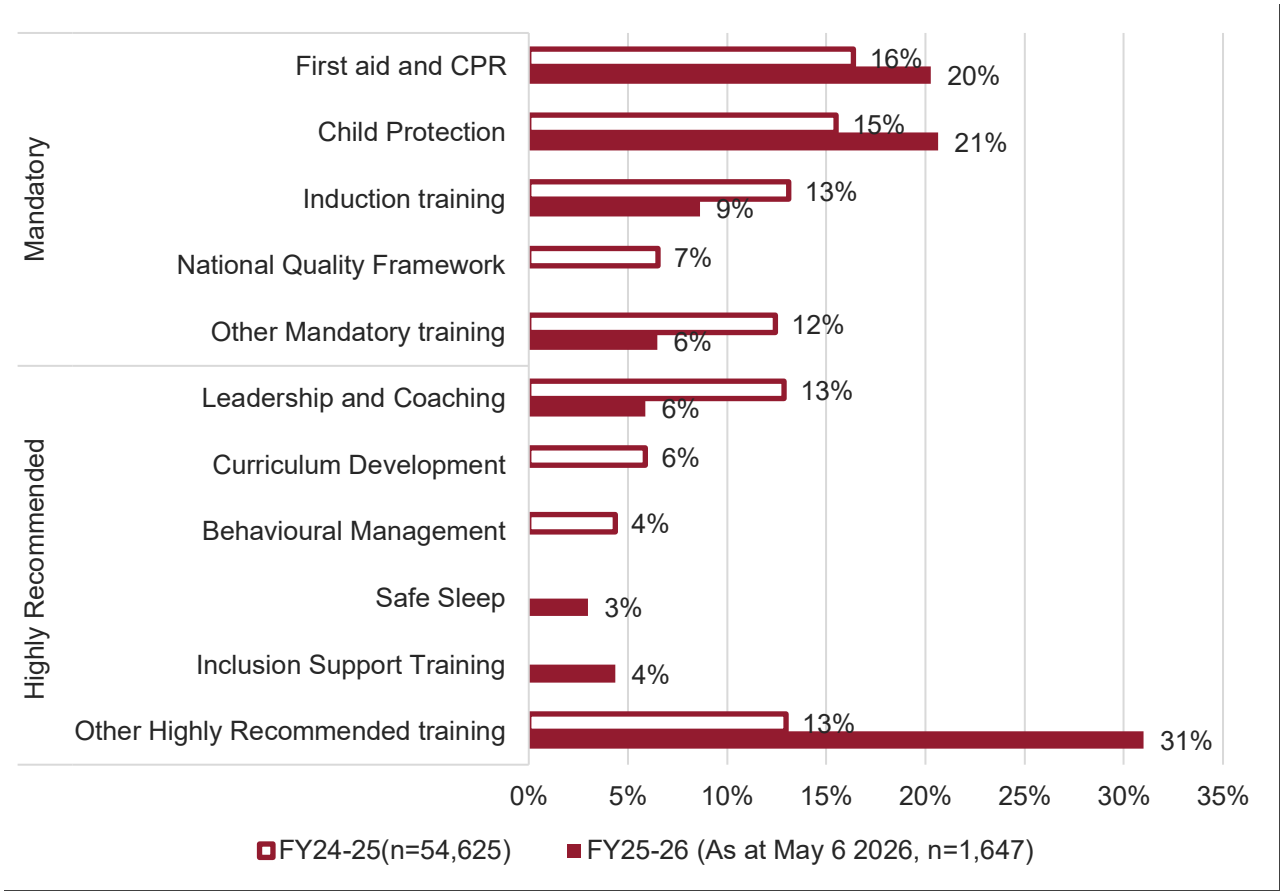
The PD subsidy has funded a large volume of professional development, with activity focused on both mandatory and compliance-related training.

The funding for PD has covered both mandatory and highly recommended training. In 2023-24, the funding most commonly funded First Aid and CPR training, Child Protection training, food handling training, leadership training and coaching.[64] In 2024–25, the majority of recorded professional development activity fell into mandatory categories such as First Aid and CPR, Child Protection, induction, and National Quality Framework training, while a smaller but still important share supported highly recommended courses such as leadership and coaching, curriculum development and behavioural management (See Figure 18: Distribution of PD subsidy funded training, by training type, by financial year below).

The type of training is included in acquittal data which is due closer to the close of the financial year. This means that we only have an estimate of what types of training the subsidy supported in 2025–26 as a large portion of the acquittal data was outstanding at the time of this report. Further discussion about mandatory and highly recommended training is in the Impacts chapter.

[64] Precise data on number and proportion of training and training types is not available for 2023-24 due to systematic data limitations.

Figure 18: Distribution of PD subsidy funded training, by training type, by financial year[65]



4.3 What the PP subsidy delivered (Outputs)

The PP subsidy is operating at a smaller scale than the PD subsidy, but this is broadly consistent with its design intent as a targeted contribution towards practicum-related wage costs for a smaller segment of the sector than those targeted to receive the PD subsidy.

At the individual level, 3,473 staff applications for PP support have been approved to date (see Figure 19 below). These were distributed across 2,346 services and 1,376 providers, with providers typically applying for one staff member per service.

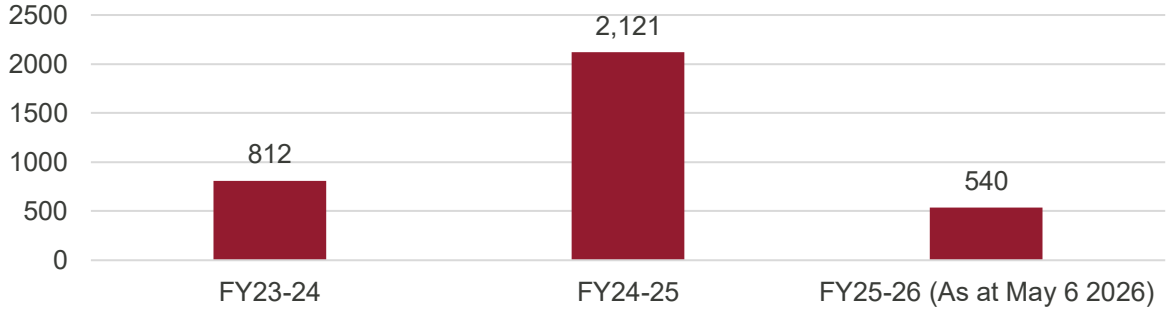
Eligibility rates have been high across rounds. In Rounds 1 and 2 of FY2024–25, 87% of applicants (n=2,439) were eligible, with 13% ineligible. This has increased for the 2025–26 period, where 99%

[65] Note: This chart represents estimate proportions of common trainings funded by PD, based on summary data provided by the Department.

of applicants were eligible for funding and only 1% were deemed ineligible, likely due to a surge in applications in the 2024–25 period and change in handling processes.

The number of applications rose substantially in the 2024–25 period when eligibility broadened to include additional Diploma-level qualifications and doubling the maximum number of weeks of supported practicum (see Figure 19 below).

Figure 19: Number of PP approved staff per financial year (n=3,473)

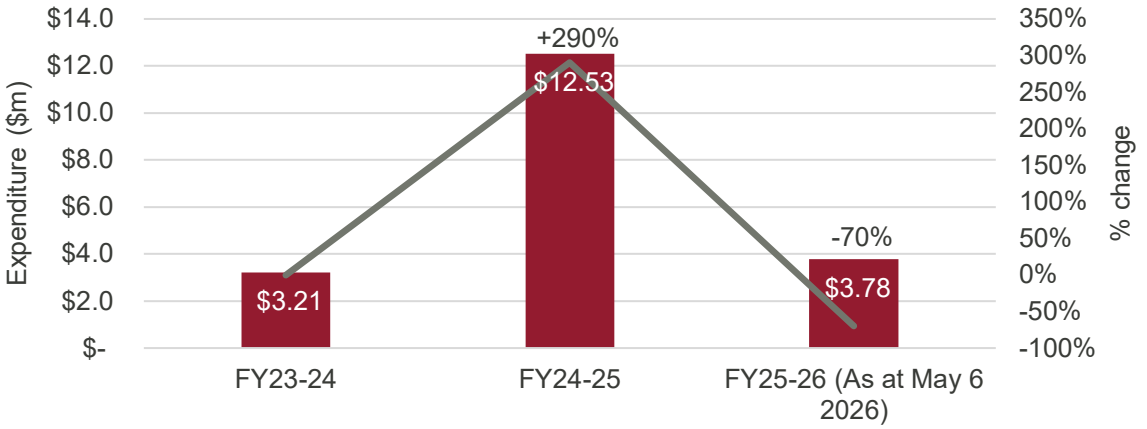


The 2024–25 decision to expand PP eligibility to Diploma-level qualifications and to increase the cap for maximum supported practicum period per educator enabled a large increase in uptake.

Between 2023–24 and 2024–25, the number of staff supported by PP rose from around 800 to more than 2,100, and expenditure increased from about $3.2 million to $12.5 million (See Figure 20). This suggests that the broader eligibility scope and more generous funding caps made it easier for services to use the subsidy to support both degree-level and Diploma-level practicums.

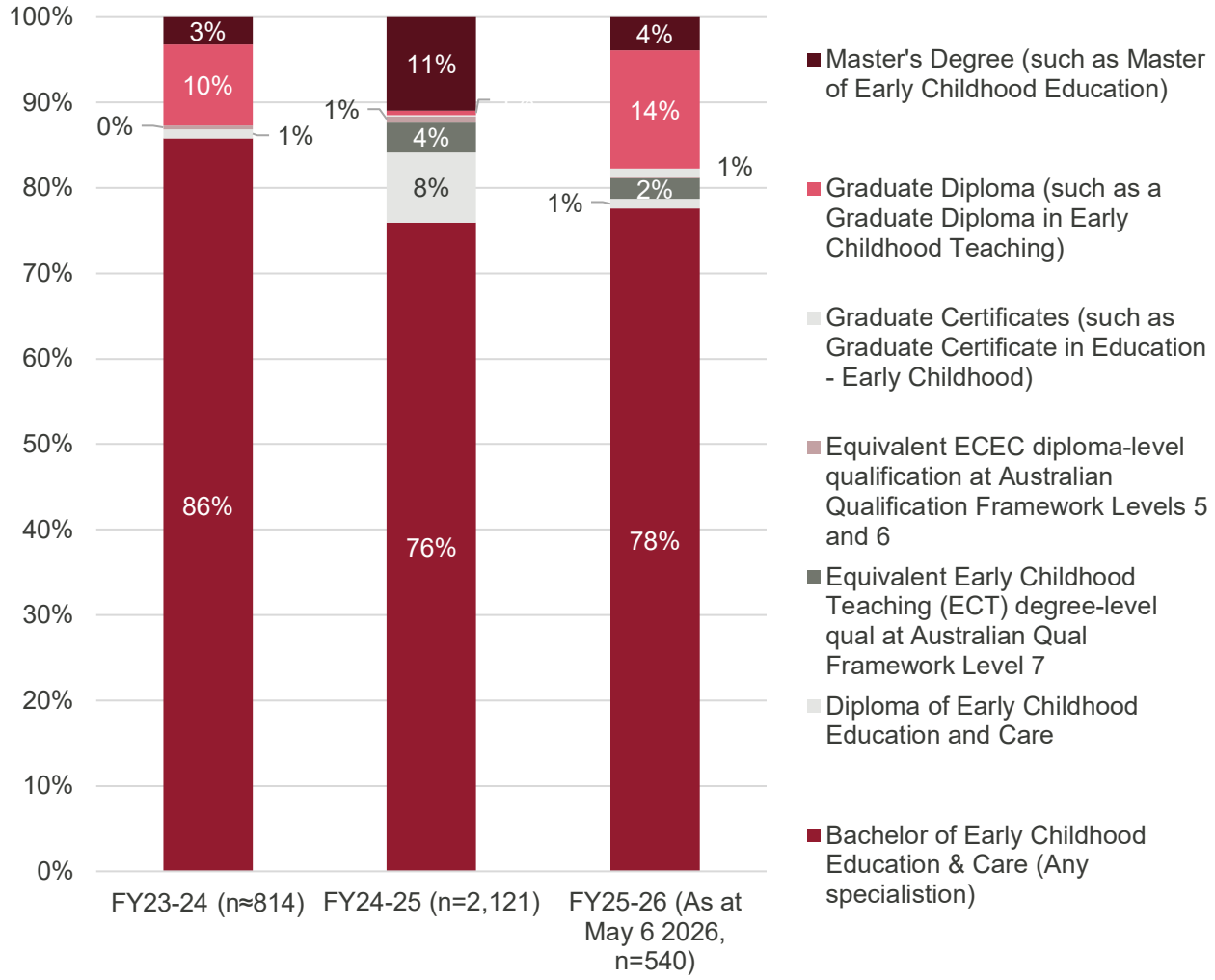
Despite the expanded scope, PP did not fully utilise its revised 2024–25 allocation. A $3 million transfer from PP to PD was approved in 2024 to meet stronger PD demand, and PP ultimately spent around $12.5 million of its original $17.4 million budget, with its underspend offsetting PD's overspend within the combined allocation. This pattern indicates that, after design changes, PP became a smaller and targeted component of the Measures package, while PD absorbed higher levels of demand and funding.

Figure 20: PP expenditure per financial year



Most participants in PP were completing degree-level teaching programs and applying from CBDC services, noting there was also some reach into regional and priority cohorts. Around three-quarters of supported practicum placements were in ECT degree programs, with a smaller share in Diploma-level and additional postgraduate ECT qualifications, consistent with the program's focus on ECT pathways and higher-level qualifications (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Proportion of qualifications supported by PP by financial year, by qualification type[66]

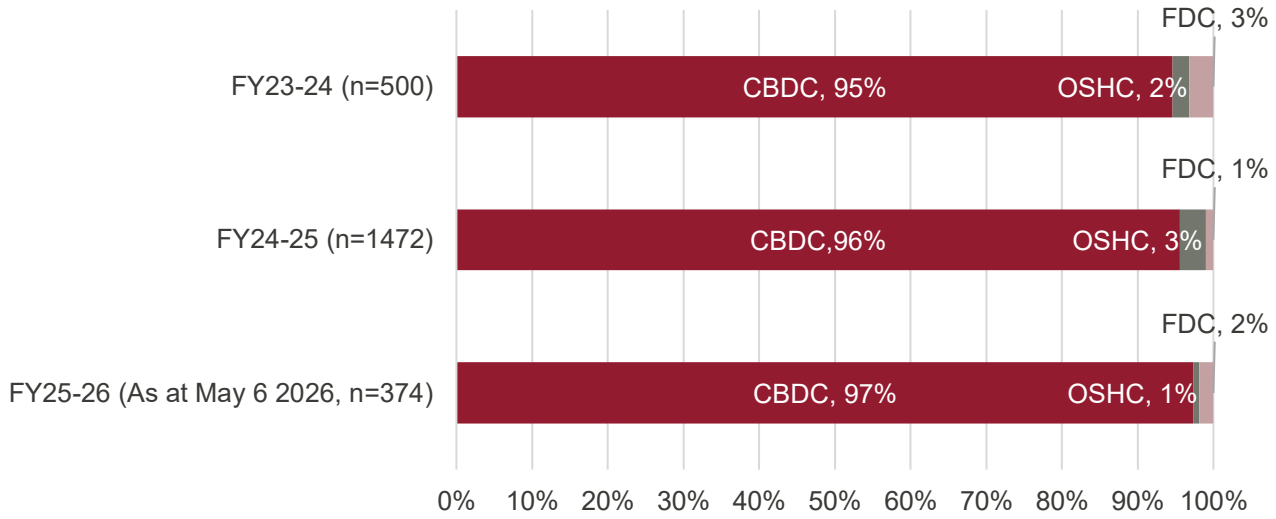


To date, PP has reached services and staff across a variety of settings.

By service type: PP has been heavily concentrated in CBDC services, with limited participation from other CCS-approved types (see Figure 22 below).

[66] Note on this chart: due to data quality limitations, proportions are estimated and should be treated as indicative.

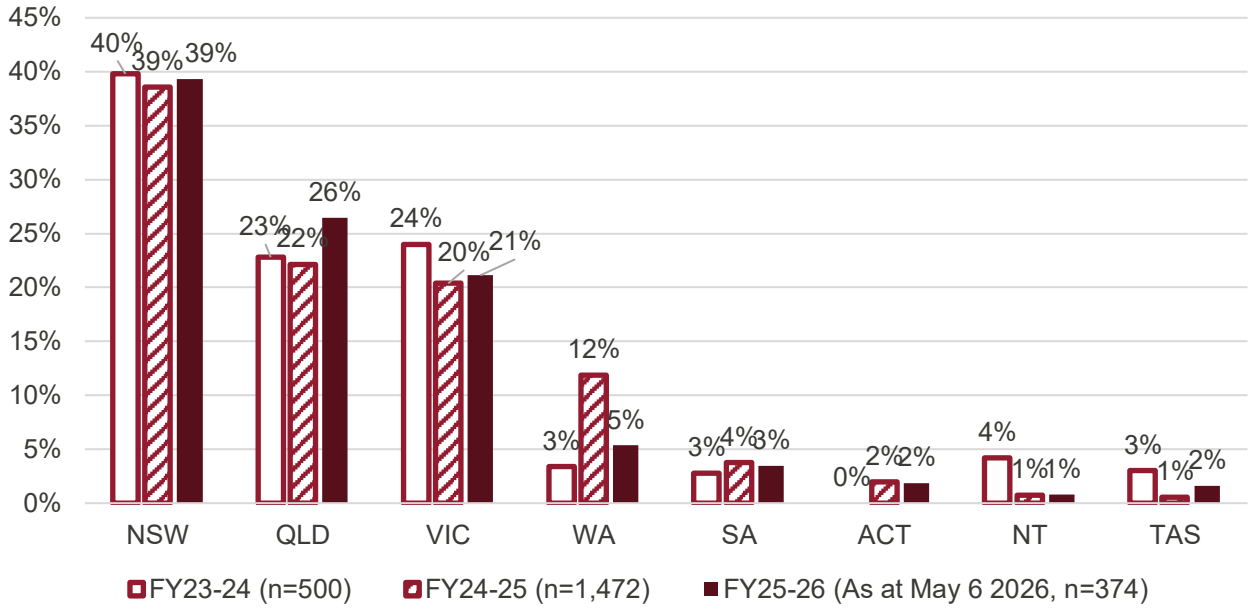
Figure 22: Proportion of PP approved services by financial year, by service type



This reflects the fact that practicum pathways are more commonly embedded in CBDC settings and that it is operationally more straightforward for those services to release staff for multi-week practicums than, for example, FDC. FDC services have been much less likely to participate (1%–3%) and IHC has not participated in PP, consistent with the implementation finding that the model is not well tailored to their operating realities. The OSHC sector exemption of allowing non-qualified educators to work in services means that many individuals completing their practicum are often doing so at their own services and being paid by the services.

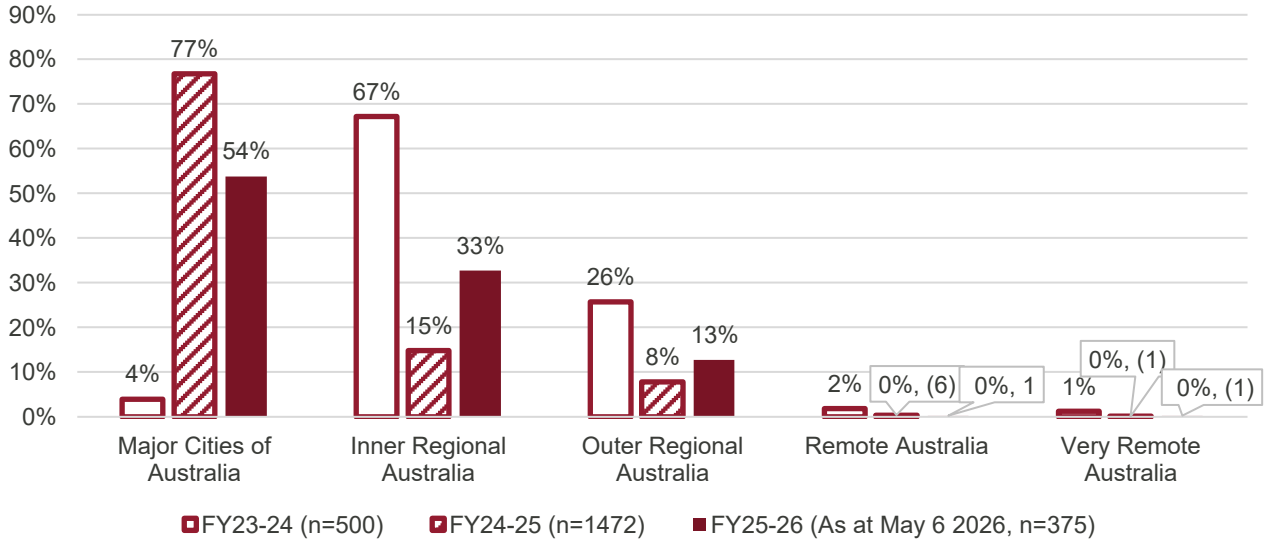
By jurisdiction: New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria again accounted for the largest coverage of funding, followed by Western Australia, with smaller allocations in South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory (see Figure 23 below).

Figure 23: Proportion of PP approved services per financial year, by jurisdiction



By regionality: Regional and remote services (that is, services outside major cities) represented 96% of PP supported services in the 2023–24 period, which reduced to 23% and 46% for the 2024–25 and 2025–26 period respectively (see Figure 24 below).

Figure 24: Proportion of PP approved services per financial year, by regionality



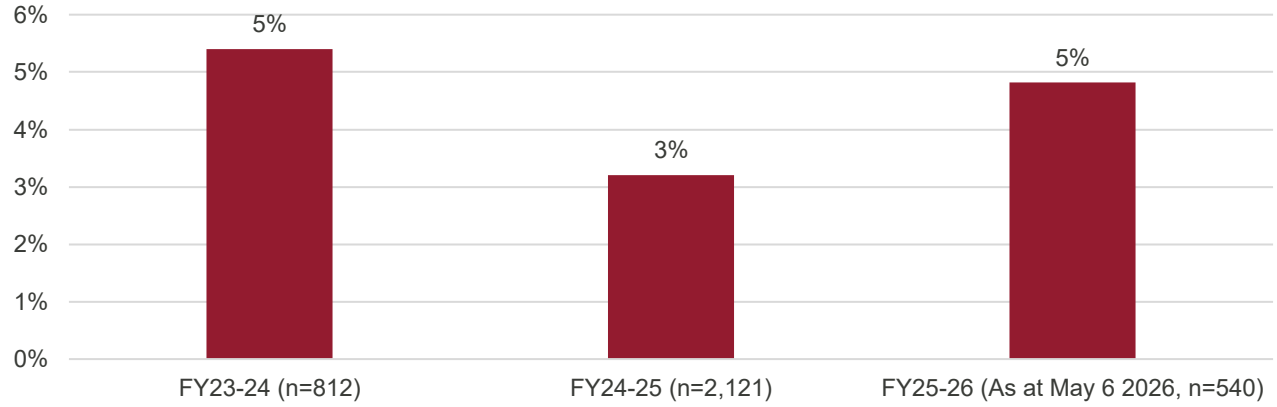
As was the case for the PD subsidy, this reflects the change in eligibility criteria for the 2024–25 financial year.

By First Nations status: A decent proportion of staff accessing the PP program identified as First Nations (see Figure 25 below), and this remained relatively stable even after eligibility expanded in the 2024–25 financial year. Representation among supported ECEC staff (~5%) exceeds the proportion of First Nations people in the broader ECEC workforce (approximately 3%), reflecting the program's initial intent of targeting subsidies towards equity groups.[67,68]

[67] Social Research Centre (on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education). 2022. *2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census.* https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/sites/b2023-538/b2023-538-submissions-uwu-annexure-1.pdf

[68] Australian Government Department of Education. 2025. *2024 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census report*

Figure 25: Proportion of staff receiving PP subsidy who identified as First Nations, per financial year



This suggests that prioritisation settings have delivered some support to target cohorts, especially in 2023–2024. However, across the full administration period to date, this has been on a modest scale given the changes to eligibility on the overall size of PP program uptake and the concentration of placements in metropolitan, centre-based settings.

Taken together, PP's outputs highlight modest benefits for educators and services that can navigate the program model.

In practice, the PP subsidy has delivered targeted support for a relatively small group of educators, mainly existing staff progressing towards ECT qualifications and, increasingly, higher-level Diplomas. It has helped these individuals to undertake practicums they might otherwise have delayed, extended or found financially challenging, and has been valued by services able to navigate the model effectively. At the same time, its overall scale and consistency of use have been constrained by employer-mediated delivery, cost-sharing requirements and timing and administrative burdens, meaning that PP's outputs are best understood as more narrow contributions within the broader package rather than a wide-ranging system support.

4.4 What the PEN and the PELA delivered (Outputs)

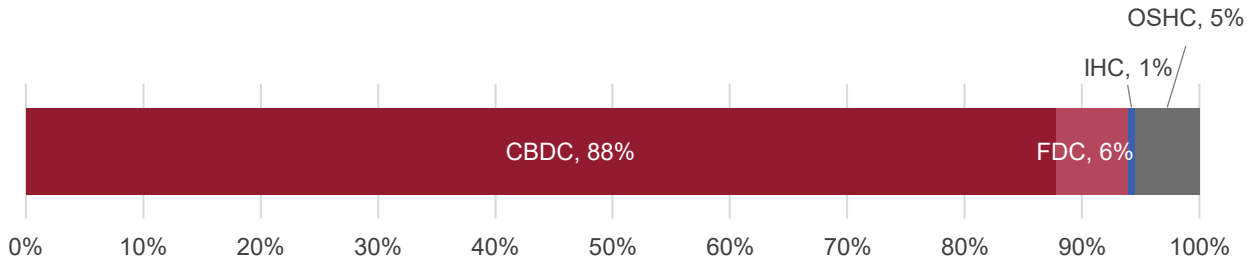
Across the pilot for the PEN, uptake was low.

Overall, PEN registrations from services offering to host practicums exceeded registrations from individual staff, with 164 services compared with 80 individual staff over the course of the pilot.

Service registration data shows that despite low volumes, PEN and PELA reached services and staff across a variety of settings.

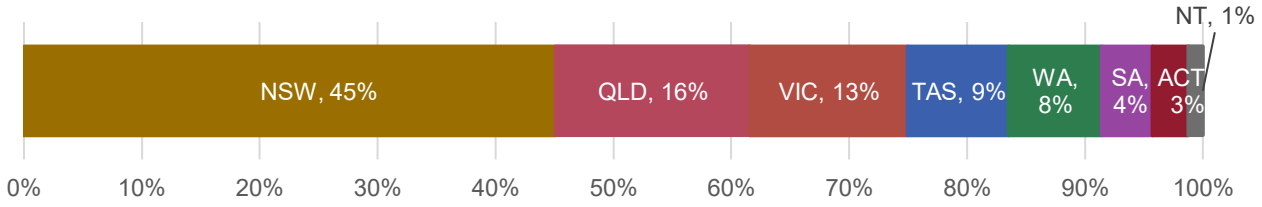
By service type: most registrations were made by CBDC services, followed by FDC, OSHC, and IHC services (see Figure 26 below).

Figure 26: Service registrations to PEN by service type (n=164)



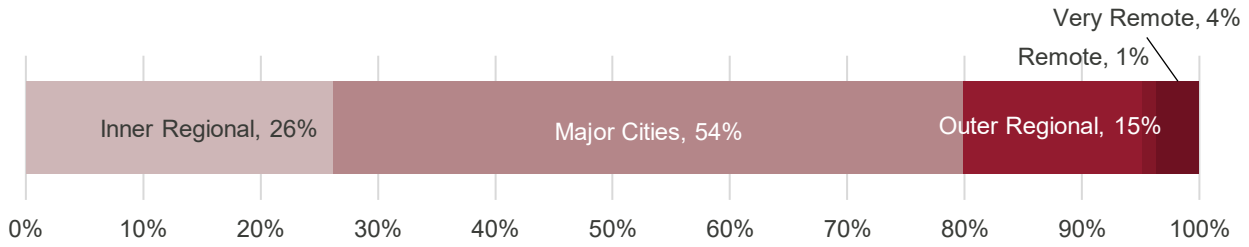
By jurisdiction: uptake was highest for services from New South Wales, followed by Queensland, and Victoria (see Figure 27 below).

Figure 27: Service registrations to PEN by jurisdiction (n=164)



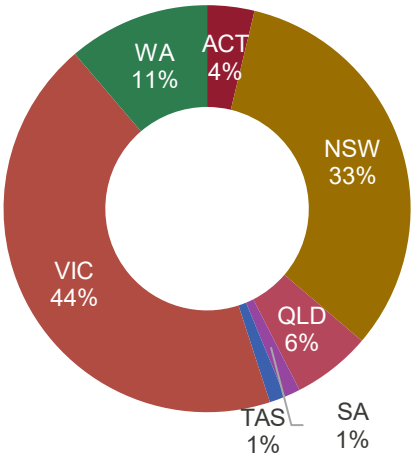
By remoteness: uptake was highest for services from major cities, followed by inner regional, outer regional, very remote, and remote areas (see Figure 28 below).

Figure 28: Service registrations to PEN by remoteness (n=164)



Individual employee registrations were highest for staff from Victoria and New South Wales, followed by Western Australia, and were lowest in Queensland, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, and Tasmania (see Figure 29 below).

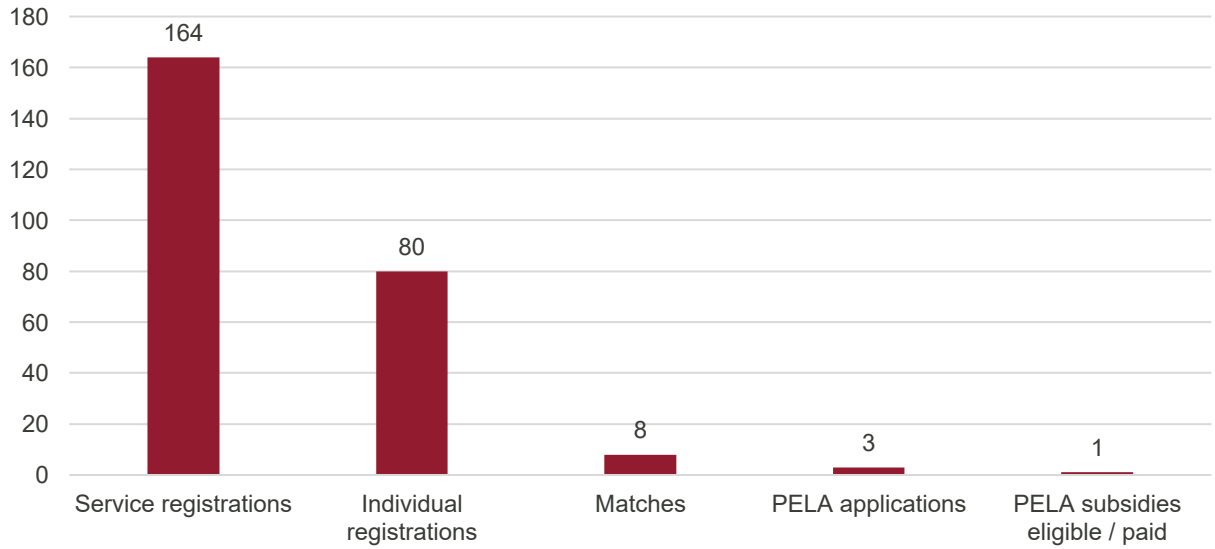
Figure 29: ECEC staff PEN registrations by jurisdiction (n=80)



Based on the eight practicum placement matches facilitated through the PEN platform, and typical placement lengths of 1–4 weeks, the PEN is estimated to have supported approximately 8–32 weeks of practicum time in total.

Three services applied for the PELA in Round 1, but all were deemed ineligible for funding because their staff were not matched through the PEN. One eligible PELA payment was ultimately made in the 2025–2026 round (see Figure 30 below).

Figure 30: Final website metrics for the Practicum Exchange Network as at September 2025

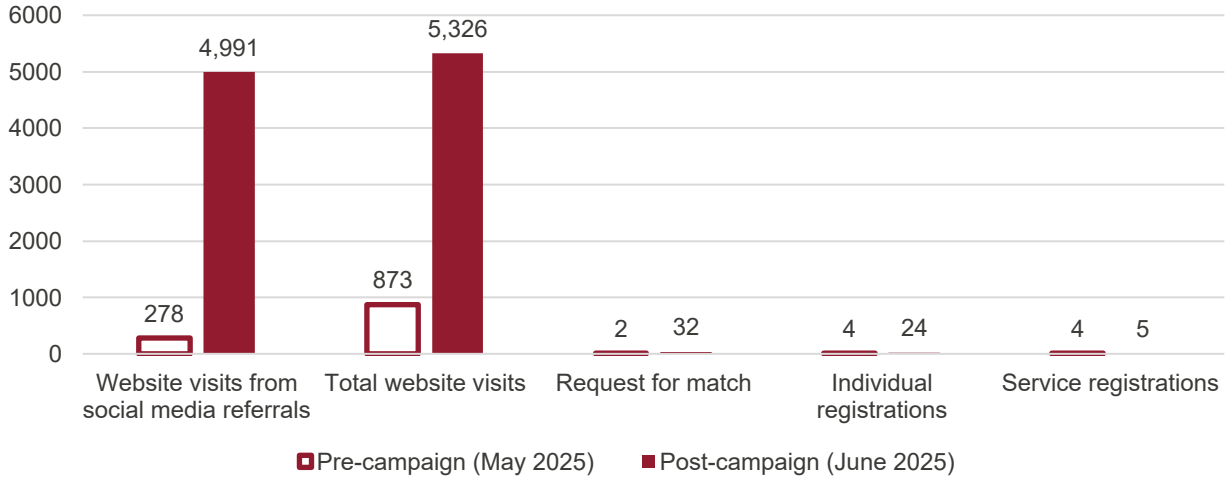


The Department's concerted communications campaign lifted PEN participation over time, but only to a small degree.

As previously discussed, the Department attempted to combat the low utilisation of the PEN during the pilot period through targeted communication activities intended to increase awareness and encourage uptake.

The before-and-after figures below provide an indication of changes in levels of engagement with the platform (website traffic, match requests and registrations) following these communications activities, but this did not translate into a sustained increase in completed matches or PELA payments over the remainder of the pilot period (see Figure 31 below).

Figure 31: PEN engagement pre and post concerted communications campaign



Although a communications campaign increased website traffic, this did not translate into sustained uptake, suggesting that limited uptake was not driven by poor awareness alone, but with the broader misalignment of the PEN's offering with the practicum pathways ECEC services already used.[69]

The spend on the program was disproportionate to its ultimate level of uptake.

As mentioned in the Design chapter, compressed design timelines and limited upfront consultation may have constrained alignment between the chosen online PEN platform mechanism and how individuals and services typically facilitate and access practicum placements.

This misalignment translated into poor value for money, with approximately $2 million spent of the $4.8 million allocated to the PEN and PELA in the forward estimates. At the time of its closure, this

[69] Department of Education. N.d. *Decommissioning of the Practicum Exchange Website.*

equated to an indicative cost of around $250,000 per completed match over the PEN pilot period. The remaining $2.6 million within the PEN and PELA allocation was redistributed to the PD program.[70]

[70] Australian Government Department of Education. N.d. *Ministerial Submission.*

5. Impacts of the Measures

This chapter outlines:

- The impacts of the Measures as an overall suite
- The impacts of the PD subsidy
- The impacts of the PP subsidy
- The impacts of both the PEN and the PELA

Its key findings include:

- **PD outcomes:** PD increased access to training and reduced immediate financial and backfill barriers for many educators. In some services it enabled extra or higher-quality PD that would not otherwise have occurred, while in others it mainly funded mandatory or compliance training that providers would have delivered anyway. Some providers and services were better positioned to ensure PD delivered the greatest additional benefit to staff.
- **PP outcomes:** When PP was useful for both the educator and the service, it was perceived as highly valuable and reducing financial stress for students during their practicum. However, the extent of these benefits depended on employers' willingness and ability to participate.
- **PEN and PELA outcomes:** The PEN and PELA had minimal impact on placement access or completion, due to low uptake and weak conversion into actual practicum exchanges and next to no payments under the PELA. The underlying need for financial support with practicum placements was genuine, but tying the PELA to the PEN constrained access and prevented the support from reaching many students who could have likely benefited from it.
- **Overall outcomes across the Measures:** Taken together, the Measures provided valued supports whose strongest effects were at the individual educator, service and provider level. Its impact on system-wide workforce retention was modest, but the Measures were mostly received as a gesture of recognition for the ECEC sector. If funding ceases, the sharpest impacts are likely to be for services least able to absorb PD and practicum costs.

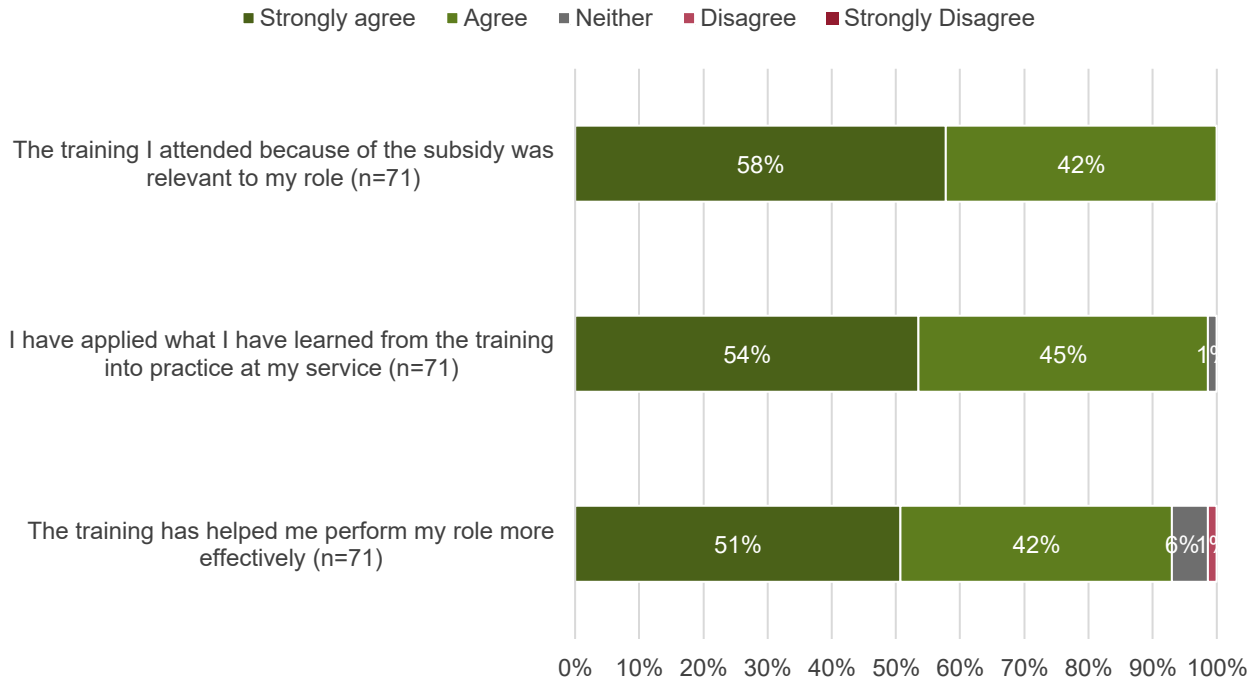
5.1 Impact of PD

PD appears to have increased access to training and reduced some of the immediate barriers that would otherwise prevent educators from participating.

We heard that the subsidy was seen to address a real cost and backfill barrier for services, with interviewees commonly describing the subsidy as making it more feasible to release staff for training during paid time, rather than expecting educators to attend in their own time, use leave, or forgo income. Service staff also expressed that it enabled them to attend training that was relevant to their role, that they could apply into their practice, and that has helped them perform their role more effectively (see Figure 32).

‘The professional practice team… said the biggest increase was the access… the fact that the grant covered backfill meant that more staff were able to do it, even though were the grant not available we still would have said this is worthwhile… the grant meant they actually did do it for more staff rather than just if there was time or if it was a quiet day.’ — Service provider

Figure 32: ECEC staff perceptions of the impacts of the Professional Development subsidy



Across provider, peak and service interviews, we did hear stakeholders link funded PD to stronger professional competence, increased confidence, and better application of learning in practice, with some describing visible improvements in the quality of service delivery rather than simply increased participation in training. This reported pattern is especially important because it aligns closely with the program logic in the evaluation strategy, which identifies increased skills, wellbeing and professional recognition as intended medium-term outcomes of the Measures. For some service staff, funded PD created opportunities to deepen knowledge, broaden role readiness, and

pursue learning that may otherwise have been delayed or deprioritised under current operational pressures.

‘In terms of method, we opted for face-to-face [child protection]… to have the engagement and learnings to make sure they had the opportunity to ask questions… Better engagement because it was done at a good time, also added benefit of accessing quality PD as well as PD at all.’ — Service provider

‘We really try to invest in quality training so that it is worthwhile and then does make a difference in their day-to-day practice… leaders see the benefits that’s bringing to them, the team, and then others are keen to do it as well.’ — Service provider

‘Some of the fantastic things with last year, with autonomy, they could choose topics they felt passionate about… Those types of targeted trainings give them the opportunity to go off… very motivating and confidence-boosting… It just builds them up – their confidence, their practice… It just makes them grow, just makes so much difference.’ — Service provider

PD generated genuine additional training in some settings, while in others it often covered or reshaped training that would have occurred anyway.

For many FDC and IHC services, the subsidy appears to have been strongly additional. Several interviewees stated that, without the subsidy, many sole trader and contractor educators would simply not have undertaken extra PD, given the need to complete training in their own time and at their own cost. One FDC director commented that, absent of the subsidy, educators ‘would not have participated’ and that the grant was ‘the difference with some of our educators hanging in there and continuing to develop, and possibly leaving.’ In these contexts, the subsidy increased both the volume and feasibility of PD, rather than just substituting for existing expenditure.

‘They probably would not have participated… with everything that has come into place for family daycare, they would have just said, ‘we’re not doing it’… we would have lost more educators because it’s just like, what else do they want from us.’ — Service provider

In other services, particularly larger, better resourced providers with established PD cultures, leaders reported that they would have delivered core PD regardless of the subsidy. These organisations described the PD subsidy as primarily offsetting costs for training they already considered non-negotiable, such as mandatory updates and targeted capability building for key staff. One provider noted that the subsidy ‘made no difference because we would have been doing it anyway,’ though it allowed them to focus PD more on ‘filling gaps’ in required training than on broader developmental learning. In these cases, the additionality lay more in financial relief than in absolute PD volume.

‘We do a lot of learning and development across the country with all roles, not just teachers… my team are in an around-centre support role and really support the team [with PD].’ — Service provider

‘For them at their level makes no difference, we would have been doing it anyway.’ — Service provider

Across both groups, there is evidence of more subtle forms of additionality. Services reported that the subsidy enabled more educators to attend high quality, tailored PD, allowed training to occur in paid work time rather than unpaid personal time, and brought forward training that might otherwise have been delayed. Several interviewees emphasised that the subsidy ‘incentivised’ participation, particularly for contractors and casuals, and supported educator level conferences and interest-based workshops that would not have been prioritised within existing budgets. Overall, PD appears to have made the biggest difference to overall PD participation for smaller, less resourced and contractor-based services, while functioning more as a cost sharing mechanism for larger providers that already invest heavily in PD.

‘Sometimes it was a struggle to get educators to do professional development. And because they are contractors, it’s very hard for us to enforce that… Uptake would be lower. Would require more coaching and mentoring to get them to do the training.’ — Service provider

‘We still would have invested in our in-home care educators with the paid training. I guess the [PD] incentivised educators to complete the training. But even though we paid for the training, they were rewarded for doing the training by getting that PD grant.’ — Service provider

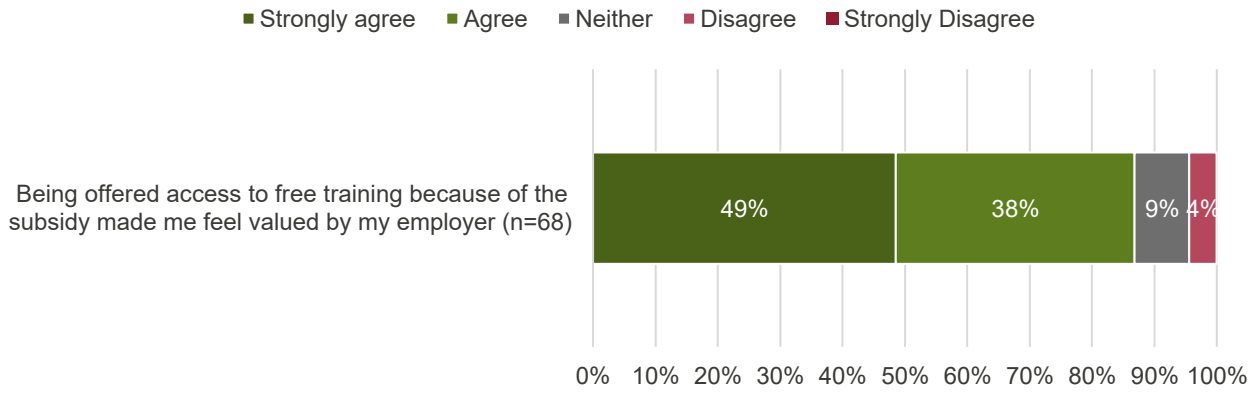
A notable outcome of the PD subsidy was that it made educators feel recognised, valued and treated as professionals.

This theme emerged consistently across different provider types, including settings where the financial benefit of the subsidy itself was not transformative, suggesting that the symbolic effect of the program mattered alongside its practical support. In a workforce where many stakeholders described educators as feeling overlooked or undervalued, this recognition effect appears to have been a meaningful outcome in its own right (see Figure 33).

‘We felt that it was a great initiative… because our educators are sole workers in a home environment… any of the professional development that they do… has to be outside their work hours… So it was a great opportunity for them to actually feel very valued and part of a bigger sector, being part of this initiative where… they were doing professional development, but they were also getting a subsidy to compensate their time….’ — Service provider

‘For some educators… even centre-based staff find that being recognised as a professional is a big thing… They need to be recognised. They are able to go off the floor, able to do bigger training, got to leave the service and be with other educators – we are part of a bigger professional network.’ — Service provider

Figure 33: ECEC staff perceptions on whether access to PD through the PD subsidy made them feel valued[71]



The impact of the PD subsidy appears to have depended on provider capability and service context, unintentionally reinforcing existing differences in organisational capability.

Large providers and services with centralised HR, payroll or learning systems were often better able to access the subsidy at scale, whereas some smaller community services, FDC schemes and IHC providers were more likely to report barriers related to awareness, administrative burden, confidence and fit with their operating model. As a result, the benefits of PD were real but unevenly distributed, raising the possibility that the subsidy may in some cases have reinforced existing differences in organisational capability rather than consistently reaching those with the greatest unmet need.

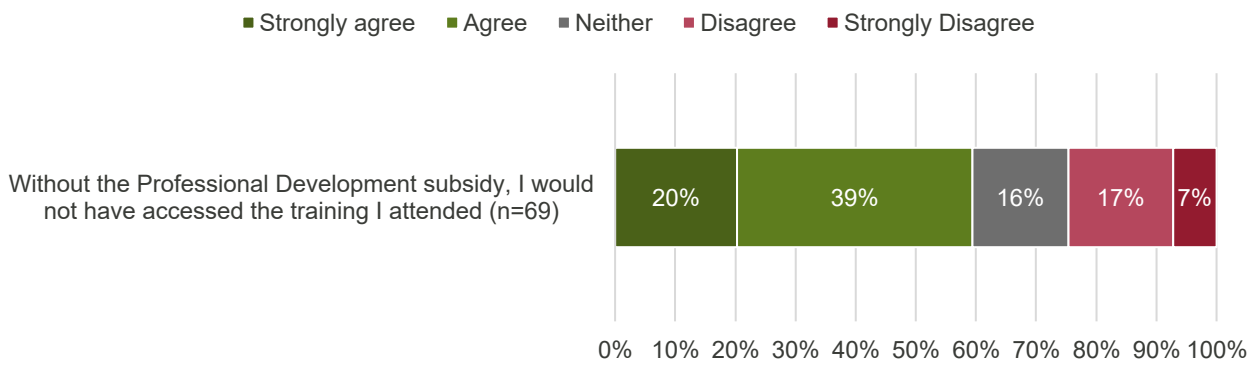
‘I didn’t reapply… because it is an admin nightmare. If I was to get audited, there would be gaps in my systems.’ — Service provider

On average, 59% of survey respondents believed that without the subsidy, they would not have accessed the training they attended (see Figure 34). This is consistent across priority cohorts, and with the demand for the subsidy over the last two financial years,[72] and with overall positive reception of the subsidy from provider and peak body interviews.

[71] Note: This question could be seen to misinterpret the use of PD subsidy to be facilitating ‘free training’ for ECEC staff, rather than providing either a wage subsidy for staff to complete training outside of hours, or to cover the cost of backfilling a staff member that completes training within working hours. To address this limitation, findings have been triangulated with service interviews.

[72] At the time of writing, the Professional Development Subsidy has been refocused to support the National Child Safety Training in 2026-27 and has been extended until mid-2029. See: Australian Government Department of Education, April 2026, *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Workforce Professional Development National Child Safety Training Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2026-2027))*

Figure 34: ECEC staff perceptions of access to professional development without the PD subsidy



The evidence also suggests that the PD subsidy often supported compliance and mandatory training rather than broader developmental learning.

In many interviews, stakeholders described a shift toward mandatory or child safety-related training, which was seen as necessary and valuable, but also as narrowing the scope for deeper pedagogical or transformational capability development. On balance, this suggests the PD subsidy was a tool to encourage an uplift in capability with limited impact on the broader professional learning agenda than may originally have been envisaged, and potentially co-opted as a vehicle for adjacent policy aims.

‘Everybody is so focused on this child safe training, which is great, but then other areas are getting forgotten as well.’ — Service provider

‘The compliance expectations that the governments are putting on to early childhood centres and educators is ridiculous... What I would love to be able to do is spend more time mentoring educators and spend more time on the floor... But it gets swallowed up by all of the things like... this register and it’s this bit of paperwork... paperwork doesn’t protect children, people protect children. And I think that’s perhaps getting a little bit lost at the moment.’ — Service provider

‘The early childhood sector has become sort of too focused on regulation and regulatory measures and sort of the regulation focus training and so on. Now it is all about compliance. It’s not about performance and it’s not about sort of... focusing on what can we do better and how can we can make a difference in a child’s life.’ — Service provider

5.2 Impact of PP

PP is seen as valuable when it works for both the individual and service.

The PP subsidy appears to have supported qualification completion by making practicum participation more financially and operationally feasible for some students already in the workforce. We heard that for some participants the subsidy was decisive in allowing placements to go ahead,

continue, or be completed on time. Stakeholders commonly described practicums as a period of acute financial pressure, particularly for those balancing study, work and caring responsibilities, and saw the subsidy as directly addressing that barrier.

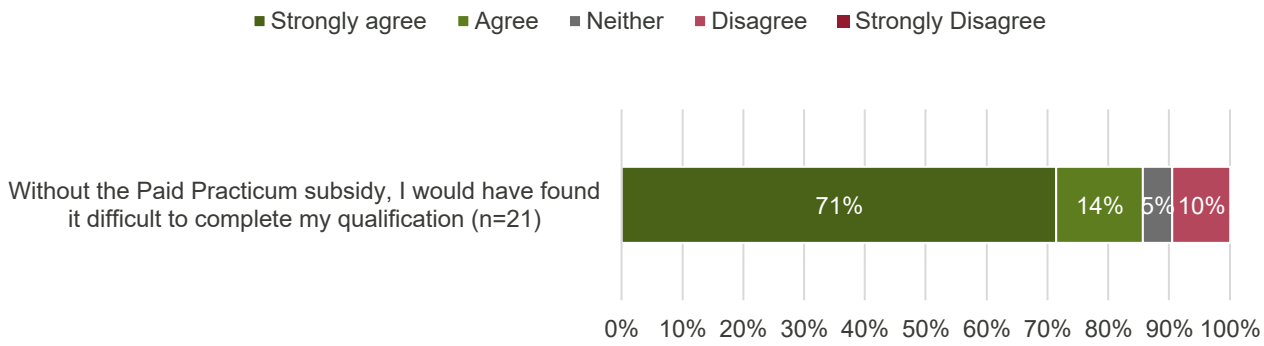
‘We have had one educator that was studying her Bachelor of Teaching, and we've applied for the paid practicum grant for her. And it's really helpful for her because she doesn't get leave like you do in a childcare centre. You don't get study leave, annual leave, sick leave, anything like that. So it's been extremely helpful for her. She's a single mum trying to better herself and I think it's really assisted her in being able to complete a practicum.’ — Service provider

The clearest outcome of PP was reduced financial stress for students during their practicum.

Interviewees described the subsidy as helping ECEC workers avoid taking unpaid leave, absorb the income shock associated with placements, and complete their required practicum with greater stability than would otherwise have been possible. This was particularly salient for existing employees and for participants with limited household flexibility, where even a partial subsidy could make the difference between continuing and deferring study. The benefits of PP appear to have been very significant for a small group of participants. Several interviewees described PP as the factor that ‘got someone through’ their practicum or enabled an ECT to complete a key requirement without severe financial strain, suggesting a high-intensity effect at the individual level (see Figure 35).

‘To her, that made the world of difference… as a sole trader that, you know, you rely on that money each week from your families. To commit to that six weeks would have been really difficult for her without having that payment.’ — Service provider

Figure 35: ECEC staff perceptions of access to practicums without the Paid Practicum subsidy



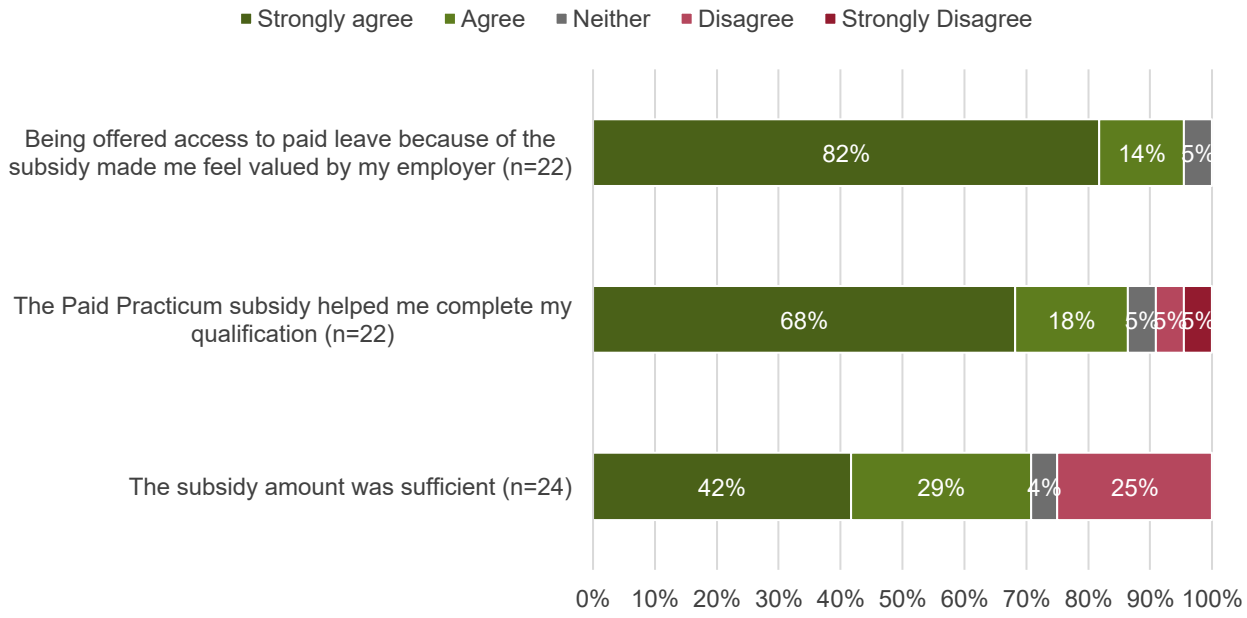
Host services also reported some service-level benefits from subsidised practicum placements, particularly where placements strengthened internal capability or created a pipeline into future

employment. Even so, these service-level benefits were not universal, and some services also described the hosting model as administratively complex or operationally difficult, especially where the placement created additional backfill, administrative, or cost pressures.

‘It’s challenging for a centre leader… it was messy and it was a lot of clean-up… driven by the retrospective payment structure.’ — Service provider

ECEC staff that had experience with the PP reported that it made them feel valued and helped them complete their qualification (see Figure 36). A small number of staff expressed dissatisfaction with the subsidy amount, but did not explicitly address this in the free response section of the survey. Possible reasons for dissatisfaction may have been in reference to the weeks covered, the fact that it was only a subsidy, or availability of the subsidy in general.

Figure 36: ECEC staff perceptions on the impacts of the Paid Practicum subsidy



The evidence for broader workforce pipeline and retention effects from PP is promising but remains limited. Interviewees generally saw PP as aligned with an important barrier in the ECT pathway, but most stopped short of claiming that it had materially changed the overall supply of qualified staff at sector level. This suggests PP has likely made a meaningful contribution to qualification completion and progression for participating individuals, while having only a modest observable effect on wider workforce shortages at its current scale.

5.3 Impacts of the PEN and the PELA

Misalignment of the PEN with sector needs and priorities limited its impact.

When surveyed about the PEN, two thirds of ECEC service representatives did not know or were not sure that the PEN had made it easier for staff to find and organise practicums.[73] In interviews, service stakeholders shared that the impact of a swap or finding a match would have been disproportionate to the challenges administering the arrangement, citing that:

- They needed confidence in the fit, capability and readiness of ECEC workers entering their service.
- There would be added administrative burden for the service to create an online profile and monitor the website for matches, create contact-sharing arrangements and follow child safety obligations.
- A practicum exchange is incompatible with the sole contractor model used in FDC and IHC.

‘I have not had anybody in our sector tell me that that has been helpful to them or that they've utilised that.’ — Peak body

‘The practicum exchange network just doesn't work at all in the FDC context.’ — Peak body

‘I get apprehensive about having other people from a different service [come in]…it makes it difficult to take the risk of someone else's behaviours or methods into a service.’ — Service provider

‘I am aware of it, but no, we definitely haven’t accessed it. And for us, it’s hard enough releasing staff for a day to be out of service… to have someone then go on practicum exchange would be very tricky to navigate.’ — Service provider

Among those with awareness of the PEN, but had not necessarily used it, only 37% agreed that the PEN is an effective way for services to find and offer placements and only 22% agreed that it had made it easier for staff to find and organise practicums.[74] These findings indicate that the idea of a practicum exchange may have been initially appealing but not useful for most of the sector.

For these reasons, the practical appeal and utility of the PEN to the ECEC sector was minimal.

[73] ORIMA Research (on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education). 2025. *Online Service Survey on Supporting Professional Development and Practicums in the ECEC Sector.*
[74] ORIMA Research (on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education). 2025. *Online Service Survey on Supporting Professional Development and Practicums in the ECEC Sector.*

The outcomes from PEN and PELA were limited due to their low uptake and weak conversion into practicum exchanges.

For those who did engage with the PEN, administrative data shows a clear funnel effect, with modest initial interest but little conversion to matches. As mentioned in the Outputs chapter, by decommissioning, 164 services or providers and 80 educators had registered. However, only 8 confirmed matches were facilitated through the platform, and only 1 eligible PELA payment was made in 2025–26. These findings indicate that the program made only a very limited contribution to improving access to practicums or reducing financial barriers.

The need for financial support (through the PELA) was genuine but was constrained by being tied to the PEN.

Considered separately from the PEN, the underlying policy problem for the PELA was genuine. When surveyed about the PEN and PELA, whether they had used it or not, 45% of ECEC service representatives agreed that the living and travel allowance effectively reduces financial barriers for students, and 49% neither agreed nor disagreed.[75] These views were more positive than views on PEN itself, suggesting that the allowance demonstrated higher value than the PEN, but is still a low indication of appeal. Possible reasons for the low appeal of the living allowance were shared by stakeholders, including availability of accommodation near the location of the practicum placement, and other barriers associated with temporarily relocating to complete a placement (such as caring responsibilities and access to transport).

‘If it was fuel and or bus fares and that sort of day to day getting them there while they're there, rather than rent or accommodation, I definitely would have looked into that because I do think that when we get into the accommodation side of things, it becomes really difficult. There's not a lot of placements here to be able to actually either rent or go to a hotel.’ — Service provider

However, because access to the PELA depended on a match through the PEN, its reach was affected by the delay in launch, performance, and closure of the platform. The allowance may have had a greater impact on its target audience of those completing qualifications, and the ECEC sector more broadly if delivered through a simpler and more flexible model.

[75] ORIMA Research (on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education). 2025. *Online Service Survey on Supporting Professional Development and Practicums in the ECEC Sector.*

5.4 Overall assessment of the impact of the Measures

Overall, the Measures delivered useful and valued supports, but their effects were strongest at micro level rather than system level.

Overall, the evidence suggests the Measures generated the clearest outcomes at the individual and service levels, rather than at the level of the ECEC system as a whole. Across interviews, stakeholders most consistently linked the Measures to improved access to professional development and practicum participation and a meaningful sense that educators and teachers were being recognised and supported. These are meaningful outcomes, and across interviews stakeholders generally regarded the Measures, with the exception of the PEN, as useful, worthwhile and aligned with real workforce pressures, including the cost of PD, the burden of unpaid practicum placements, and the need for educators to feel valued. At the same time, most interviewees viewed the Measures as modest relative to the scale of workforce pressures, particularly wages, workload and broader conditions, and therefore unlikely on their own to materially shift sector-wide supply, overall uplift in quality or retention. The overall pattern of evidence indicates that the Measures functioned primarily as complementary supports rather than as system-level interventions.

‘Yeah, it was good to have, it doesn’t address the bigger issues, but it does help.’ — Service provider

In practice, the Measures function less as levers on retention and more as a visible vote of confidence in the workforce, especially for ECEC staff working in OSHC, FDC and IHC.

The Measures generated a clear recognition effect that should be treated as a substantive outcome rather than a peripheral one. Services and educators often interpreted the subsidies as a sign that government and employers were investing in them as professionals, which mattered in a sector where many interviewees described stress, scrutiny and undervaluation. While symbolic recognition does not substitute for wages or structural reform, it appears to have made a positive contribution to morale and engagement for those who accessed the program, as well as those who were aware of its delivery.

‘For some educators… even centre-based staff find that being recognised as a professional is a big thing… they don’t have that engrained sense of pride in the profession… They need to be recognised. They are able to go off the floor, able to do bigger training.’ — Service provider

‘I was really excited because I thought for the first time family daycare educators are being recognised as professionals in the industry that also need to keep up to date. And I thought it was a really, really great opportunity for us to support our educators.’ — Service provider

‘It’s not just childcare in the home. Being a sole trader within a premises in isolation, having this PD available to them has given them that sense of worth… that they’ve been noticed.’ — Service provider

This interpretation is moderated when the PD subsidy changed focus to child safety training, where stakeholders expressed that the change became less about uplifting the sector and more about compliance.

‘We’re deeply concerned about all of our training is now on compliance and child safety implementation and very, very little on pedagogy, very little. And that’s deeply concerning and this doesn’t seem to be going away.’ — Peak body

‘[In 2024–25] having autonomy, they could choose topics they felt passionate about… very motivating and confidence-boosting… This year… having a national mandatory training… it’s… not an exciting training, it’s important and serious and [an] emotional burden on educators.’ — Service provider

The contribution of the Measures to retention appears plausible but limited, and mostly indirect. Stakeholders often described pathways through which the Measures could support retention, including reducing financial strain, making professional development more accessible, supporting career progression and helping educators feel valued, but few were prepared to attribute large-scale retention shifts directly to the Measures. This suggests retention should be framed as a secondary or downstream effect, rather than as the most visible or strongly evidenced outcome.

If funding ceases for PD or PP, the sharpest impacts would likely fall on the services least able to absorb the costs.

In the absence of the Measures, it is likely that less discretionary PD would have occurred, more educators would have completed training in their own time or at their own cost, and some practicums would have been delayed, reduced or forgone altogether. The same cannot necessarily be said for mandatory training, given that this would have been a requirement regardless of whether the Measures were available to support its uptake.

‘What would have happened without it?… They probably would not have participated… with everything that has come into place for family daycare, they would have just said, ‘we’re not doing it… what else do they want from us.’ — Service provider

‘Participants described the practicum as… unpaid placement… we have students who have deferred qualifications going from a four-year degree to actually an eight-year degree just because of the cost of the placement.’ — Service provider

Interview evidence suggests the Measures often changed the affordability and feasibility of specific training or placements, even where they did not fundamentally alter broader service operating models or labour market conditions. The most credible counterfactual is therefore not that these activities would never have happened, but that fewer would have happened or over a longer time horizon (in the case of some mandatory trainings), and that they would have been more burdensome, or more unevenly distributed without the subsidies.

If funding were to cease, the immediate effect would likely be a reduction in participation in discretionary PD, greater reliance on unpaid or own-time training, and renewed financial pressure on educators undertaking practicum placements. Smaller and less well-resourced services would likely be most exposed, as they have fewer internal resources to absorb release costs, cover placements or subsidise participation themselves. Funding cessation would also remove a visible signal that the workforce is being supported, which many stakeholders considered meaningful in itself.

6. Lessons learnt and application of findings

This chapter outlines:

- Implications for future ECEC workforce policy design and delivery
- Considerations for future adaptations to the Measures, or similar grants

Its key findings, informed by our evaluation findings and practical lessons from similar workforce programs (including our five nominated case studies – the LAMP, QPP, SRF, TWDSP and 'Flying Start'), include:

- Implications for future ECEC workforce policy design and delivery, with recommendations being that:
  - The Australian Government should establish a clear position on its role and strategic priorities in strengthening the ECEC workforce in order to help determine the direction, focus and impact of workforce initiatives.
  - The Australian Government should avoid providing stop-start, one-off, time limited grants in future and instead focus on offering sustained grant funding to better support and recognise the ECEC workforce.
  - If the Australian Government intends to continue investing in access to professional learning and support for upskilling, it should direct funding to high-quality programs that:
    - For professional learning: are based on a whole-of-service approach, are consistent with clear Australian Government objectives or identified priorities for practice quality uplift, and take an active approach to building the supply and validating the effectiveness of high-quality professional learning
    - For upskilling programs: are paired with wraparound supports that address the barriers to qualification or training completion for the target cohorts
- Considerations for future adaptations to the Measures, or similar grants:
  - Across the Measures, the Australian Government should improve its approach to external communications with the ECEC sector and adjust the ECEC user experience of program administration.

- For PD, the Australian Government should target subsidies towards programs that align with best practice evidence and Australian Government priorities for the ECEC sector, and continue to proactively manage the transition of the program's focus to be on mandatory child safety training.
- For PP, clearer targeting and communication within the sector and adjusted delivery models are needed if Government wants all parts of the workforce to benefit. Paid practicum approaches should also be complemented by other stipends or supports that recognise multiple barriers to qualification completion.
- There is no pressing need to stand the PELA or PEN up again. For any future practicum living allowance supports (such as the PELA), it would be better to use a simpler mechanism that is not linked to a bespoke placement platform (like the PEN). It could also be promoted alongside programs like the PP.

6.1 Implications for future ECEC workforce policy design and delivery

The Measures are consistent with previous Australian Government approaches to ECEC workforce investment in that they reflect a relatively minimalist role for government and maintain a primary role for employers in building workforce capability. One-off, time-limited grants have traditionally been well-received by the workforce and the wider sector, in the absence of other sources of investment and support, and our evaluation found that many individuals benefited from training that they may not have been able to access otherwise.

However, this minimalist approach is insufficient for addressing the scale and extent of gaps and challenges across all stages of the ECEC workforce pipeline (see Figure 37 below), including:

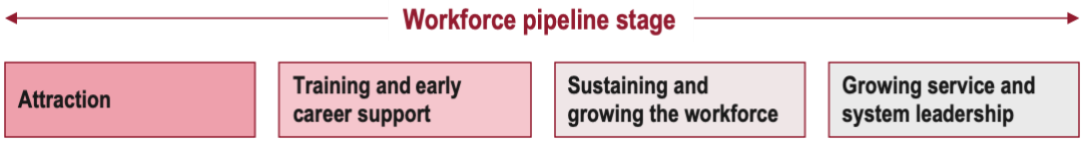
- **Attraction**: addressing workforce shortages by better identifying and attracting potential teachers and educators to the ECEC sector, including by lifting the profile of the profession
- **Training and early career support**: lifting the quality and effectiveness of initial teacher education (ITE) and vocational programs, including by addressing challenges associated with delivering and accessing meaningful placements. It is also a priority to address high rates of attrition and stress for early career teachers and educators by better supporting their transition into the profession. Such supports include the provision of effective induction and lifting the capability and expectation for services to intentionally scaffold the development of foundational workplace skills for new teachers and educators
- **Sustaining and growing the workforce**: addressing high rates of attrition, variable quality in practice, low levels of access to either on-the-job or external professional

learning opportunities, and a perception that the workforce is not valued. There is a clear need to shift how the sector scaffolds the development of professional capabilities across a career, including:

  - Embedded, sustained and evidence-based models of professional development (consistent with the evidence that a mix of on-the-job learning, coaching or reflective practice, and external training – ideally at a whole-of-team level, is most effective), and
  - Recognising or cultivating areas of expertise (such as in inclusion, oral language or STEM)

- **Growing service and system leadership**: addressing the low levels of support and scaffolding for highly complex leadership roles in the system, and flow on effects to poor workplace cultures, poor quality practice and child safety risks. This can be achieved by investing in the operational, people and pedagogical skills of centre leadership teams and more explicitly building and cultivating a leadership pathway in ECEC

Figure 37: Workforce pipeline stage



In the absence of a clear role and focus, there is a risk of poorly targeted, ineffective initiatives that do not lead to meaningful change nor represent good value for money. The level of scrutiny on investment in effective programs and policies is also higher in an increasingly tight fiscal environment. As such, we have three key recommendations:

The Australian Government should establish a clear position on its role and strategic priorities in strengthening the ECEC workforce in order to help determine the direction, focus and impact of workforce initiatives.

The Australian Government should avoid providing stop-start, one-off, time limited grants in future and instead focus on offering sustained grant funding to better support and recognise the ECEC workforce.

If the Australian Government intends to continue investing in access to professional learning and support for upskilling, it should direct funding to high-quality programs that:

For professional learning: are based on a whole-of-service approach, are consistent with clear Australian Government objectives or identified priorities for practice quality uplift, and take an

active approach to building the supply and validating the effectiveness of high-quality professional learning.

For upskilling programs: are paired with wraparound supports that address the barriers to qualification or training completion for the target cohorts

Our recommendations are informed by findings from our evaluation, practical lessons from similar initiatives (as outlined in our case studies at Appendix 4) and our extensive experience across relevant ECEC and human services workforce engagements.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should establish a clear position on its role and strategic priorities in strengthening the ECEC workforce in order to help determine the direction, focus and impact of workforce initiatives.

The Australian Government should take adequate time to consider its logical role in supporting ECEC workforce capacity building in future, and to identify gaps in the supports being offered by different systems and jurisdictions prior to investing in future interventions. It should examine how its role aligns with others' responsibilities when it comes to the ECEC workforce, including those of employers, state and territory governments, training providers and others.

Taking a stewardship approach to the ECEC workforce would require the Australian Government to determine the outcomes it seeks for the ECEC workforce, the specific role it intends to play in achieving those outcomes and levers available to the Australian Government and how it intends to exercise them.

In the context of the Measures, the Australian Government has used funding and – in the case of the Practicum Exchange Network – direct provision of a program. While direct provision (of services and programs) and funding are two significant levers available to government, the Australian Government can look beyond these in re-imagining its role in relation to the ECEC workforce. Instead, the Australian Government should examine other opportunities including:

- **Regulation and accountability**: setting standards and best practice, and adopting a clear regulatory posture, such as by setting and monitoring clear expectations for the role of employers in supporting professional development for their staff.
- **Information collection and sharing**: systematic and strategic approaches to systems intelligence, including collection of data and insights to inform policy adoption and to support engagement with services. This could include benchmarking employer investments in professional learning, showcasing good practice models of delivery, or more explicitly monitoring provider-level investments in workforce professional development.

- **Market development**: cultivating and incentivising providers, engaging in market shaping activities. This is particularly relevant in the context of professional learning, as there is currently a relatively thin market for high quality, evidence-based professional learning in the ECEC sector. Incentivising or enabling the development of a high-quality supplier market has been central in the jurisdictions that have invested heavily in supporting access to professional learning.
- **Service and provider capacity building**: supporting the skills and capabilities of key actors within the system, including the provision of technical assistance, access to information and resources, and commissioning the development of evidence-based models.
- **Vision and leadership**: setting a vision, shaping 'mental models' and setting expectations, including communicating a view of what good practice involves in priority areas (in this case, high-quality professional learning and paid practicum to enable qualification completion) and an ambition for the ECEC workforce.
- **Workforce planning**: active coordination and convening of the range of actors responsible for the ECEC workforce to build coherence and cohesion across policy settings and initiatives across the pipeline.

This shortlist of levers (see Figure 38 below) for the Australian Government to support the ECEC system has been informed through dandolo's extensive experience designing and evaluating programs and policies that seek to support workforces across different jurisdictions and human services systems.

Figure 38: Australian Government Zone of Influence



Recommendation 2: The Australian Government should avoid providing stop-start, one-off, time limited grants in future and instead focus on offering sustained grant funding to better support and recognise the ECEC workforce.

Genuine, sustained investment in ECEC workforce capability uplift will be more impactful than time-limited grants, as it allows services (and systems) to link the participation in such programs with broader strategic planning for the development of the ECEC workforce. Future Australian Government workforce initiatives should be:

- Designed with stronger sector consultation,
- Mindful of overlap with existing state, territory and national programs, and
- Supported by communication strategies that recognise the relational nature of ECEC workforce engagement, particularly in regional, remote and First Nations led services.

One-off, time-limited grants are less powerful than sustained, strategic investment in workforce professional identity and leadership. While they may aid in a sense of professional recognition, time-limited grant investments into the ECEC workforce are unlikely to make a significant or sustained improvement in:

- Addressing workforce shortages and retraining skilled teachers and educators, influenced by the extent to which the workforce feel recognised and valued;

- Lifting the skill and capability of the ECEC workforce, including the core skills of effective pedagogy and practice and delivering safe and high-quality services;
- Building the leadership capability at service level that creates the conditions for effective professional practice and growth; and/or
- Contributing to lifting the quality of the ECEC system as a whole, ensuring the significant spend on ECEC delivers the intended outcomes of boosting workforce participation and improving children's learning and development.

While targeted grants-based funding may be appropriate as a once-off intervention in response to particularly acute workforce crisis conditions (as was the case in 2023), the Australian Government should avoid using those mechanisms as its default approach to addressing sector needs going forward. Instead, it should offer sustained grant funding aligned with Australian Government priorities or the evidence about priority workforce gaps. This aligns with best practice embodied by programs offered at the jurisdictional level that are genuinely connected to a broader workforce strategy.[76]

If the Australian Government seeks to make the workforce feel valued and recognised, without a sustained role in workforce quality uplift, there are less administratively burdensome options for doing so. These approaches could be spearheaded directly by government, through programs, or indirectly through its oversight of services who are responsible for recognising and valuing their employees every day. These could include:

- Providing free access to existing training, for example, access to ECA's training hub or training hosted by trusted providers like Gowrie.
- Partnering with peaks and providers to design models of delivery that reduce the burden on services while maintaining appropriate accountability for government – difficult when grants are targeted at individual educators in individual services.
- Celebrating the achievements and contributions of the workforce through public-facing and sector-wide communications or good practice awards.
- Establishing 'centres of excellence' who play a role in modelling good practice and providing service leaders, teachers and educators the opportunity to observe good practice in action.

[76] For example, see LAMP and QPP in Appendix 4: Case Studies.

Recommendation 3: If the Australian Government intends to continue investing in access to professional learning and support for upskilling, it should direct funding to high-quality programs that:

For professional learning: are based on a whole-of-service approach, are consistent with clear Australian Government objectives or identified priorities for quality uplift, and take an active approach to building the supply of and validating the effectiveness of high-quality professional learning.

For upskilling programs: are paired with wraparound supports that address the barriers to qualification or training completion for the target cohorts.

Professional development and support for upskilling are reasonable and evidence-based areas for investment and an appropriate role for the Australian Government. However, while the design and administration of the Measures was as optimised as possible, within the set scope and budget, their design is not aligned with either best practice nationally or the evidence-base about what builds and sustains the capabilities of teachers and educators.

Instead, the Australian Government should ensure funding only flows to high quality, vetted programs offered by credible suppliers who have demonstrated knowledge of the ECEC sector. It should:

- Focus on whole teams rather than individual teacher or educator preferences
- Ensure that upskilling programs come with comprehensive wrap-around supports

Other jurisdictions have taken specific approaches to embedding the professional development opportunities made available to the ECEC workforce at scale that prioritise sustained engagement, responsive funding models and evidence-based interventions. Examples of these include the Leadership and Management Program (Queensland), Qualification Pathways Program (Queensland), School Readiness Funding (Victoria), Tasmanian Workforce Development Scholarship Program (Tasmania) and the Flying Start Workforce Grants (South Australia). Whilst each respond to a specific system context, they offer useful insights for developing future ECEC workforce initiatives.[77]

The evidence around effective professional development for teachers and educators emphasises learning that is evidence-informed, practical, sustained, collaborative, whole-of service, coupled

[77] A summary of the context, design features, implementation challenges and lessons learned of each can be found in Appendix 4 – Case Studies.

with support for application in practice.[78] One-off training undertaken by individual educators does not align with this evidence-base. The eligibility of programs for subsidising should reflect deliberate Department decision making around what it wishes to prioritise. Leading professional development investments in the ECEC sector nationally are characterised by:

- A focus on building the market of suppliers and assessing the evidence base behind high-quality PD program
- Balancing service agency with likely impact by offering a menu or shortlist of programs that have a demonstrated track record of improving workforce capability[79]
- Aligning investment with clear priorities linked with intended outcomes (for example, strengthening inclusive practice, supporting families experiencing disadvantage and effective leadership practice)

Similarly, precedent from best practice initiatives to support the ECEC workforce to upskill is clear that investments into paid practicum programs or equivalent need to proactively address barriers to studying and accessing practicums. A subsidy that supplements income without additional supports or stipends (such as for equipment) can neglect real barriers preventing participants from completing qualifications. Programs should facilitate more than just training, by improving access to mentoring, outreach and wellbeing support.[80]

6.2 Considerations for future adaptations to the Measures or similar grants

The Measures were intended to be delivered as pilot programs, in response to an acute workforce crisis, but Australian Government decisions about their future continuation, scaling or adaptation beyond mid-2027 are evolving. We note that, for example, the PD program has been extended until mid-2029, with a specific focus on the national child safety training.

If the Australian Government does intend to continue or extend the Measures in their current form, our evaluation reveals clear opportunities for improvement to elevate their positive impact on the ECEC workforce. Regardless of their future, there were clear lessons learned about the Measures as programs and as an overall package. Our recommended changes for the Measures, or future workforce grants that target similar areas, fall into two areas: improving external communications

[78] Education Endowment Fund. 2021.*What are the Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.* Found at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/teacher-professional-development-characteristics

[79] See our case study of Victoria's SRF program, located in Appendix 4: Case Studies.

[80] See our case studies of the LAMP, QPP, TWDSP and 'Flying Start' programs, located in Appendix 4: Case Studies.

with the ECEC sector and making administrative changes to improve user experience for ECEC staff.

Across all programs, the Australian Government should improve external communications with the ECEC sector by:

- Investing in adequate sector consultation during the design stage to ensure any future programs are genuinely responsive to sector needs (or even necessary) and to promote sector trust and buy-in. This must include consultation with smaller parts of the overall ECEC sector (for example, sub-sectors that service a smaller but nonetheless important cohort of families).[81]
- Exercising discretion and being transparent about amendments to eligibility criteria while programs are live, to avoid confusion among users, reduce the impost on the Department when responding to questions, and minimise the potential negative impact of rapid changes in focus on training uptake and the sector's sense of being valued.
- Maintaining an active dialogue with peak bodies and local organisations to ensure that programs remain fit for purpose, can address genuine place-specific needs and that improvements can be more immediate.[82]
- Strengthening existing efforts to deliver consistent messaging to the ECEC sector around who is eligible for the programs, what is required to apply, when application deadlines are, where support can be sought out and what are the benefits of the Measures.
- Continuing to deliver frequent communications campaigns to raise awareness and target uptake across the ECEC sector, reflecting its strong relational dynamic. The Department must maintain a focus on pre-empting and delivering communications that are tailored to regional, remote and First Nations service needs to support program uptake by equity groups.

We would also recommend the following changes to improve the user experience of program administration for ECEC staff, across the Measures:

- Investigate appropriate linkages between grants systems to support ECEC services to have a more streamlined application and tracking user experience. This includes seeking opportunities for services to access funding through fewer pathways or interfaces.

[81] Similar practical lessons from our case studies of the LAMP, QPP and TWDSP are located in Appendix 4: Case Studies.
[82] Similar practical lessons from our case studies of the QPP, TWDSP and 'Flying Start' are located in Appendix 4: Case Studies.

    - We heard that services would love a combined 'front door' but recognise that this might not be available or an appropriate role for the Australian Government to take.
- Continue to offer structural supports that recognise the service delivery environment and workforce capacity, like the provision of release time and helpdesk functions to enable better participation in the programs.[83]
- Pair workforce development programs with adaptable funding settings that respond to emergent needs that are raised by the sector, where appropriate.[84] For example, the Australian Government may wish to revisit whether funding should be attached to the service, the individual ECEC staff member (i.e., 'follow the person' funding) or the child and family, noting there is a preference among some services for greater autonomy for educators to take charge of the subsidies made available to them.
    - While we heard there's a strong appetite for individuals to be able to select their own PD without the service being involved, this was largely driven by the desire to avoid burden, lack of recognition about government's granting constraints, and potentially a limited understanding of the evidence base that emphasises the value of whole-of-service PD rather than one-off individual training sessions.
- Review the data provision demands on services to confirm that the specific details requested are strictly necessary to assess eligibility, direct funding allocations and enable ongoing monitoring. Ensure that any further requests for information consider impacts on service workload and individual privacy (for example, avoid asking for consent to collect if demographic information if not strictly necessary). This will allow services to reduce administrative burden and focus on delivery.[85]
- Identify opportunities to streamline the functionality of the grants portal to strengthen user experience. This will benefit larger ECEC providers by being able to efficiently submit 'bulk applications' at scale, to avoid duplicated effort and allow for economies of scale (where appropriate).
    - We heard that there can be an imbalance between available operational resourcing and the requirement to submit individual applications for each staff member across all service types – including small services with limited in-house administration capacity.

[83] For examples of where this has also been done in the LAMP, SRF and TWDSP programs, refer to Appendix 4: Case Studies.

[84] The TWDSP offers an instructive example of where this has been done effectively. For further information, refer to Appendix 4: Case Studies.

[85] See our case studies of the LAMP, SRF and TWDSP in Appendix 4: Case Studies.

We have also identified specific changes that we would recommend for each of the individual Measures programs, or future workforce initiatives or grant programs that resemble the Measures.

Table 2: Recommended changes specific to the Measures

Focus	Recommendations
PD (or similar)	• Recognise that the focus of future PD delivery on mandatory child safety training alone (centring on compliance) is a departure from the original PD program's intent and will likely require clear messaging around the link between safety and quality. • Prepare for potential sector perceptions of ECEC staff having less agency over their learning or not having their professional judgement being trusted or practices valued by government, as a result of the shift of scope of the PD subsidy. • Spotlight or support existing schemes that contribute to ECEC staff professional development that focus on practice quality uplift, to support sector engagement. This is because sector staff tell us that PD programs give participants choice about the development activities or training they do promote better participant motivation and perceptions of increased confidence and practice quality. • For any future PD-like programs, ensure there is a clear design choice around the relative prioritisation of mandatory vs. non-mandatory training, given the impacts on how providers plan and allocate resourcing to have staff complete training. • Take on a more active role in curating or vetting the programs eligible for future PD subsidies to ensure that they have a demonstrated track record of improving workforce capability and align with Australian Government policy priorities. • In future programs where services are given choice over how they spend a PD-like subsidy to address individual or service-wide needs, continue to quality assure or regulate the shortlist of evidence-based interventions available in a currently developed training market.

Focus	Recommendations
PP (or similar)	• Address misinterpretations of the availability of the PP to different service types by reaching out to peak bodies to understand the source of confusion. • Determine the extent to which the Department intends for smaller parts of the sector to be the target audience for the PP. • Ensure that the PP is available to all target segments of the sector in practice as well as in principle, by adjusting the model so that it is compatible with how services in smaller parts of the sector operate, such as in FDC. • In situations where the PP is not genuinely accessible for certain parts of the sector (or there is a perception that it is not), amplify sector awareness of alternative paid traineeship-style pathways being offered by providers already to increase access to paid practicum style programs. • Invest in more in-depth, wraparound supports (such as coaching or mentoring) to complement the role of placement payments in supporting the overall upskilling of individuals as ECEC professionals and emerging leaders. • Offer complementary subsidies or stipends that address other costs associated with completing practicum, such as for equipment, and attach these to completion milestones where relevant, to support qualification completion.
PEN / PELA (or similar)	• Whilst there is mild appetite for a living allowance to support paid practicum, our evaluation did not reveal a pressing need to re-initiate a specific payment for those completing practicum in rural and remote areas. • Do not stand up a bespoke platform for any future living allowance payments made available to students undertaking paid practicum in ECEC. • In future, invest in adequate design work and needs assessment prior to investing in standing up individual technology solutions.

Focus	Recommendations
	• In the event of reinvestment into a similar living allowance, scope opportunities for it to be connected the PP program, subject to funding priorities and allocations. • Placement exchanges alone are unlikely to explicitly support growth in individuals' professional identity or practice-based connections between services without ongoing outreach and reflective activities, such as through an ongoing sequence of workshops.

6.3 Practical lessons from similar programs

Our fieldwork for this evaluation has included 'case studies' of five programs that offer practical lessons to the Department in the context of delivering the Measures, or similar programs in future. These included the:

- Leadership and Management Program / LAMP (Queensland)
- Qualification Pathways Program / QPP (Queensland)
- School Readiness Funding / SRF (Victoria)
- Tasmanian Workforce Development Scholarship Program / TWDSP (Tasmania)
- Flying Start Workforce Grants / 'Flying Start' (South Australia)

In addition to earlier references, a summary of the key practical lessons for each individual initiative can be found below.

Table 3: Case studies: Key Practical Lessons

Case Study	Key Practical Lessons
Leadership and Management Program (LAMP) - Queensland	• Programs are more effective when shaped through consultation with sector leaders, ensuring they meet real provider and workforce needs rather than applying a generic model • Longer-duration programs with peer interaction create opportunities for reflection, practice change, and ongoing engagement beyond one-off training

Case Study	Key Practical Lessons
	• Workforce capacity significantly affects uptake and retention, even when programs are free. This is especially the case for those with limited release time in smaller service contexts
Qualification Pathways Program (QPP) - Queensland	• Completing ongoing sector engagement and data gathering activities enables more responsive program design and more immediate program improvements • Allocating sufficient staffing to mentoring, outreach and wellbeing support – alongside core qualification activities – assists with participant retention and completion • Workforce initiatives should not operate in isolation or be seen simply as standalone programs; rather, they should be embedded within a broader workforce strategy
School Readiness Funding (SRF) - Victoria	• Combining needs-based funding and local flexibility with a curated, evidence-informed menu helps guide high-quality decisions • However, effective implementation of these initiatives requires strong quality assurance and ongoing administrative support – especially for smaller services or those with less internal capacity to implement evidence-based programs • Services feel more confident to use a subsidy if they have a sense of what are the higher quality options available to choose from, including in geographical areas or focus areas where there may be a drought of high-quality offerings available • Providing choice within a shortlist of well-evidenced programs is an effective way to afford services autonomy and convey respect of their professional judgement, whilst also allowing for funders to be more confident in the potential of purchased programs to support capability uplift
Tasmanian Workforce Development	• Even well-designed programs can struggle to facilitate expected levels of workforce uptake due to complex

Case Study	Key Practical Lessons
Scholarship Program (TWDSP) - Tasmania	application processes, limited provider capacity, and the additional effort required to reach small or remote services • Partnerships with peak bodies and local organisations are a significant enabler of participant engagement with programs and perceptions of trust among the sector • Adaptable funding settings support more effective targeting of workforce programs to genuine need, which can be repeatedly identified through workforce data, sector consultation, and direct feedback from services and educators • Workforce development works best when funding is paired with wraparound supports (such as mentoring and wellbeing services), highlighting that participation barriers go beyond cost alone
Flying Start Workforce Grants ('Flying Start') - South Australia	• Grants that are be spent on locally prioritised programs that are grounded in insights derived from stakeholder engagement can enable genuinely place-based approaches • It can be helpful for smaller services with reduced operational capacity to streamline reporting requirements (where deemed to be excessive) to allow them to better focus on delivery

Appendices

The Appendices contain:

1. Our detailed evaluation framework
2. An overview of the stakeholder consultation completed for this project
3. Our evaluation methodology
4. Five short jurisdictional case studies, including:
    - Leadership and Management Program / LAMP (Queensland)
    - Qualification Pathways Program / QPP (Queensland)
    - School Readiness Funding / SRF (Victoria)
    - Tasmanian Workforce Development Scholarship Program / TWDSP (Tasmania)
    - Flying Start Workforce Grants / 'Flying Start' (South Australia)

Appendix 1: Evaluation framework

The below evaluation framework assessed the Professional Development Subsidy, Paid Practicum Subsidy and Practicum Exchange Network, individually and combined.

Design: Did the Measures' design set them up for success? Is it still appropriate?

- Was there a clear problem definition and logical rationale for the Australian Government to develop and deliver the Measures?
- Did the design of the Measures reflect the available evidence?
- Were stakeholders (including services, educators, students and peak bodies) consulted in the design process, and how was their input used?
- Did the design address the varying needs and contexts of the sector (e.g. service types, locations, priority cohorts)?
- Was there a reasonable approach to resourcing, including time available for design, funding levels and administrative support?
- Were governance and reporting arrangements clearly defined and fit for purpose?
- Was the grants administration model (eligibility, application, assessment, and payment processes) appropriately designed?
- Was the planned approach to IT commissioning effective in supporting program objectives?
- Was there a clear plan for measuring implementation quality, outputs and outcomes?
- To what extent did internal and external changes and context impact design?

Implementation: How well were the Measures administered and delivered?

- Were the Measures delivered on time and within budget?
- To what extent were the Measures implemented as intended (coverage, timing, targeting, and delivery mode)? If not, why not?
- Was the approach to IT commissioning effective in practice / did it occur in practice?
- Were governance, reporting and accountability arrangements implemented as planned? If not, why not?
- Were risks identified, monitored and managed effectively?
- What actions were taken to mitigate unintended consequences, and how effective were these actions?

- Were processes for monitoring, evaluation and learning implemented as intended, and how were insights used to adjust delivery?
- To what extent did internal and external changes and context impact implementation?
- To what extent did implementation change over time (e.g., implementation of 2023–24 subsidies versus 2024–25 subsidies)?

Outputs: What have the measures produced?

What has the Professional Development Subsidy delivered?

- Number of applications received and successful; number where funding has been fully utilised (by jurisdiction, service type, size, and location).
- Number and characteristics of services participating.
- Number and characteristics of educators, teachers and leaders who accessed PD using the subsidy.
- Types, duration and modes of PD accessed.

What has the Paid Practicum Subsidy delivered?

- Number of applications received and successful; number where funding has been fully utilised (by jurisdiction, service type, size, and location).
- Number and characteristics of services applying and participating.
- Number and characteristics of educators and students receiving paid practicum support.
- Volume and duration of practicum time supported.

What has the Practicum Exchange Network delivered?

- Number of applications received and successful; number where funding has been fully utilised (by jurisdiction, service type, size, and location).
- Number and characteristics of services applying and participating.
- Number and characteristics of educators and students receiving paid practicum support.
- Volume and duration of practicum time supported.

Outcomes: What impacts have the Measures had?

For the Professional Development Subsidy, to what extent:

- Has the subsidy increased access to and uptake of high-quality PD?
- Have services used the subsidy to release educators for PD in a way that reduces the need for educators to use leave, attend in their own time, or forgo income?
- Have participating educators, teachers and centre directors reported improved knowledge, confidence and skills?
- Has the subsidy supported career development?
- Have services reported reduced financial and operational barriers to releasing staff for PD?

For the Paid Practicum Subsidy, to what extent:

- Has the subsidy supported completion of ECEC qualifications (including timely completion)?
- Has students' financial stress during practicum been reduced?
- Have services reported benefits from hosting subsidised practicum students (e.g. pipeline into employment)?

For the Practicum Exchange Network, to what extent:

- Has the network increased students' access to, and engagement with, practicum placements, particularly in priority locations or settings?
- Have students accessed more diverse or higher-quality placement opportunities than would otherwise have been possible?
- Has the allowance reduced financial barriers to undertaking placements that require travel or living away from home?

Overall: How effective were the Measures?

- Did they work / have they contributed to increased supply, retention, capability and capacity of quality ECEC staff (relative to what would likely have happened without them)?
- What would have happened in the absence of the Measures?
- What would the impact be if program funding were to cease?
- What lessons do these Measures offer for future or revised ECEC and policy design?

Lenses for analysis (across design, implementation, outputs and outcomes)

Priority cohorts:

- How have the benefits of the measures been distributed (e.g. across regional, rural and remote and First Nations cohorts)?
- Did any groups benefit more or less than others? If so, how?

Efficiency

- Are the Measures generating the most benefit from the available resources?
- Can the impact of the Measures be extended and increased? If so, how?

Appendix 2: Stakeholder consultation overview

Table 4: Stakeholder consultation overview

Category	Stakeholder	Rationale	Format
Relevant state and territories[86]	• Queensland Government (Qualification Pathways Program) • Government of South Australia (Flying Start Workforce Grants) • Early Childhood Australia (Tasmanian Workforce Development Program) • A large provider of the Queensland Leadership and Management Program (LAMP)	The selected case studies provided practice-based insights into the design, implementation and observed outcomes of comparable workforce initiatives in other jurisdictions, and to identify transferable lessons and design features that can inform assessment of the Workforce Measures and future policy development.	4 x 45 – 60-minute small group interviews

[86] The Victorian Government Department of Education was also included in our consultation plan to construct a case study for School Readiness Funding but were unable to consult with dandolo directly. To supplement, the case study on School Readiness Funding was compiled through desktop research.

Category	Stakeholder	Rationale	Format
Departmental and policy area staff	• Policy team • Grants team (externally sourced to Deloitte)	The Department and policy area staff provided a clear understanding of the design, implementation (administration and delivery), outputs and outcomes. This includes barriers and enablers to delivery.	4 x 45 - 60-minute interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams
ECEC service staff	• ECEC Centre Directors (may be Head Office staff in larger services) • OSHC Coordinators • FDC Coordination Units • IHC Agencies	These stakeholders provided key and detailed insights into how effectively the Measures are working for the workforce, including: • The perceived adequacy of the payments • Satisfaction with the application process and ease of receiving payment	14 x 60-minute individual or small group interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams
ECEC peak bodies	• Early Childhood Australia (ECA) • Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) • Australian Childcare Alliance • SNAICC	These organisations are key representatives of who the Measures are supposed to work for, and they provided a 'birds eye' view of whether the Measures are working and what the major issues are.	4 x 45 - 60-minute individual and group interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams.

Category	Stakeholder	Rationale	Format
	• Family Day Care Australia (FDC-A) • National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA)		
Educators and teachers	• Recipients of the Paid Practicum subsidy • Recipients of the Professional Development subsidy	We captured targeted insights on: • What recipients would likely have done in the absence of payments (we see the survey as a critical input for this particular insight) • Impact of the payments (e.g., did it enable people to complete their qualifications and are they still in the workforce) • Any suggestions to improve the Measures	A short survey built in Qualtrics.

Appendix 3: Evaluation methodology

Table 5: Evaluation methodology

Stage	Timeframe	Activity or output	Description
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Kick-off meeting	Confirm the project context, scope, objectives, deliverables and ways of working.
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Document and data request	Submit a formal request for the key information required to undertake the evaluation.
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Evaluation framework workshop	Refine the evaluation framework and agree on a theory of change or program logic, establishing a shared understanding of the intention and outcomes of the measures.
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Evaluation strategy and data matrix	Set out how each key evaluation question will be answered and the data that will be used, incorporating updates from the evaluation framework workshop.
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Evaluation plan and timeline	Set out the evaluation scope and questions, methodologies, milestones, costs and team responsibilities.

Stage	Timeframe	Activity or output	Description
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Consultation plan	Set out the timing and methods for consultation and the proposed stakeholder groups.
Stage 1: Project initiation	November 2025 to January 2026	Outputs	Evaluation strategy and data matrix; evaluation plan and timeline; consultation plan.
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Document review	Review documents provided by the Department and relevant publicly available information about the measures.
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Data analysis	Analyse administrative, financial and survey data to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the measures.
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Initial evaluation report	Produce an initial evaluation report covering emerging insights and recommendations.
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Jurisdictional scan	Review relevant State and Territory, international and adjacent workforce measures to identify policy lessons and comparators. Develop up to five case studies, including interviews with relevant jurisdictions.

Stage	Timeframe	Activity or output	Description
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Stakeholder interviews	Conduct around 30 semi-structured small-group or one-to-one interviews with Departmental staff, ECEC centre directors, FDC coordination units, OSHC providers, IHC agencies and ECEC peak bodies.
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Survey	Survey recipients of the paid practicum subsidy and practicum exchange support about their experiences, potential impacts and what may have happened without the measures.
Stage 2: Fieldwork and early findings	January 2026 to May 2026	Output	Initial evaluation report.
Stage 3: Reporting	May 2026 to June 2026	Draft evaluation report	Report on the evaluation against its objectives, implementation, impacts and outcomes, and provide advice on future policy development.
Stage 3: Reporting	May 2026 to June 2026	Findings workshop	Workshop draft findings with Departmental staff, the grants team and other relevant stakeholders, and seek feedback.
Stage 3: Reporting	May 2026 to June 2026	Final evaluation report	Refine the draft evaluation report based on feedback from the findings workshop and prepare the final report.

Stage	Timeframe	Activity or output	Description
Stage 3: Reporting	May 2026 to June 2026	Outputs	Draft evaluation report; final evaluation report.

Appendix 4: Case Studies

This chapter will cover insights from selected jurisdictional initiatives examined through an initial jurisdictional scan and presented as individual case studies, drawing out:

- An overview of the initiative
- The context in which it operates
- Its key design features
- Any initial (or emerging) impacts of the initiative
- Any lessons learned for the Measures or broader ECEC workforce policy

Initiatives include the:

- Leadership and Management Program (LAMP) – Queensland, which highlights the benefit of longer-term leadership development programs that are co-produced with the sector and accompanied by structures (such as increased release time) that support participants to immerse themselves in learning
- Qualification Pathways Program (QPP) – Queensland, which underscores the importance of the relational levers of mentoring, outreach and wellbeing support in strengthening qualification completions
- School Readiness Funding (SRF) – Victoria, which demonstrates an appropriate balance between offering a menu of evidence-based programs to improve outcomes for children, staff and services
- Tasmanian Workforce Development Scholarship Program (TWDSP), which showcases the central role that partnerships with peak bodies and local organisations in elevating the capacity and will of potential participants to engage in further learning
- Flying Start Workforce Grants – South Australia, which provides insight into improving access for staff to locally prioritised programs enabled by proportionate reporting requirements and responsive processes

Leadership and Management Program (LAMP), Queensland[87]

This case study examines Queensland's Leadership and Management Program (LAMP), drawing on an interview with a large not-for-profit ECEC provider and publicly available information from the

[87] Note on this case study: Insights may be specific to this providers iteration and delivery of the LAMP, and may not reflect how LAMP is delivered by other funded intermediary organisations.

Queensland Government. As this case reflects one provider's delivery experience within a broader statewide program, some implementation insights may not apply to all funded delivery partners.

Rationale

The Queensland Government funded program responds to a recognised need for stronger service-level leadership capability in a context of growing quality, regulatory and workforce expectations, including continuous improvement and workforce sustainability pressures identified in the draft.

By strengthening the capability and confidence of current and emerging leaders, the program is intended to support workforce sustainability, promote positive workplace culture, build educators' capacity to lead and develop teams, and drive continuous improvement within services.

Key design choices

LAMP is delivered through selected sector organisations, each of which tailors delivery to the needs and context of its services and networks. This design reflects the practical reality that leadership development needs to differ across provider types and service contexts.

For non-aligned small to medium-sized providers, a LAMP can be accessed through ACECQA, while outside school hours care services can access the program through the Queensland Children's Activities Network.

Key funding and design features include:

- A blended delivery model combining face-to-face learning, virtual components and coursework, with communities of practice to support networking, reflection and collaboration.
- Broad eligibility parameters, with delivery organisations prioritising participants based on factors such as leadership interest, experience, employment status, ability to commit, employer support and backfill capacity.
- A practical, research-informed curriculum focused on leading teams, developing educators, promoting workplace culture and improving service quality.
- No direct cost to participants, although approved providers or employers may still need to meet backfill costs where staff are released to participate.

Initial impacts and emerging issues

LAMP is in its first year of delivery with monitoring arrangements such as pre- and post-program surveys in place rather than mature outcome evidence. Early implementation evidence therefore points more clearly to design strengths and emerging risks than to final impact

We heard that participant choice was an important engagement feature because it enabled educators to select a stream aligned with their perceived career stage and needs. At the same

time, this flexibility created some risk that participants might select an option that was less well suited to their actual stage of development, suggesting a need for guided choice rather than unrestricted self-selection.

Lessons learned

Early lessons from one provider's implementation of the LAMP point to several factors that appear important for success:

- Extensive consultation with early childhood leaders helped to ensure the program responded to sector and provider needs rather than relying on a generic leadership model.
- Incorporating adult learning principles supported self-directed learning and participant motivation.
- Including face-to-face sessions helped to establish a cohort experience that sustained engagement when delivery shifted online.
- Delivering the program over an extended period, rather than as a one-off workshop, created more opportunity for reflection and practice change.

The main challenge we heard was supporting participation, particularly for specific service types that had limited capacity to release staff. This was particularly challenging for smaller settings where consistent release time can be challenging to achieve. Service delivery models such as smaller settings may have trouble recruiting and retaining participants throughout the program even when the program itself is free.

Transferable design options and principles

Several design features appear potentially relevant to the Measures:

- Offer structured choice, so participants can access professional learning aligned to career stage while still receiving enough guidance to select the right pathway
- Facilitate blended delivery and communities of practice to support access, peer learning and sustained behaviour change beyond one-off professional development courses
- Highlight that leadership development is a distinct career path opportunity, a workforce sustainability strategy, and not only a quality improvement strategy, given the role of capable leaders in retaining and supporting staff
- Consider how release time or backfill constraints will affect uptake, particularly for smaller or tightly staffed services and across a period where there are considerable other mandatory professional learning requirements relating to child safety reforms.

- There is potential for the program to support critical performance and career conversations based on shared language and leadership concepts that promote ongoing professional growth in the early childhood sector.

Tasmanian Workforce Development Scholarship Program (TWDSP), Tasmania

This case study examines the Tasmanian Workforce Development Scholarship Program (TWDSP), drawing on a stakeholder interview and publicly available information from Early Childhood Australia and the Tasmanian Government. The program forms part of a broader Tasmanian Early Years and School Age Care (EYSAC) Workforce Initiative, aligned to the EYSAC Workforce Strategy, and is delivered by Early Childhood Australia, on behalf of the ECA Tasmania Branch with Tasmanian Government funding.

Rationale

The program was established in response to workforce shortages and pipeline pressures in Tasmania's education and care sector. Public program material describes it as a strategic initiative designed both to support current educators to upskill and to create supported pathways for new entrants to join and remain in the sector.

The program has an explicit focus on long-term workforce participation in locations that are hardest to staff. In addition to supporting qualification attainment, the program includes relocation assistance for educators moving to remote or hard-to-staff areas such as King Island, Flinders Island and Tasmania's West Coast, reflecting the state's geography and service distribution challenges.

Key design choices

The Workforce Development Scholarship Program is delivered by Early Childhood Australia, on behalf of the ECA Tasmania Branch, and is funded by the Tasmanian Government through the Department of State Growth. Public materials indicate the program has capacity to support up to 200 people across Tasmania to undertake qualifications from Certificate III to Bachelor's and Master's level.

Key design features include:

- Financial support for study-related expenses, paired with completion and retention incentives
- Tailored support plans that combine academic, wellbeing and professional support rather than relying on course funding alone

- Mentoring, coaching, literacy and numeracy support, study skills development, networking and communities of practice
- Relocation assistance for participants moving to designated hard-to-staff locations
- No cost to participants to access the program

Initial impacts and emerging issues

There is early evidence of strong interest, with early estimates of indicating applications could reach total capacity of scholarships available, and strong engagement in related networking and leadership activity. However, these early results required substantial relational and outreach effort from ECA. Building trust, recruiting participants and generating applications took significant time and limited resources.

Early implementation constraints included the time required to recruit suitable staff for delivery and the need to triage support particularly across geographically dispersed cohorts, highlighting variation in support needs based on location. This suggests that relational, high-touch support models may achieve strong engagement, but they are not low-cost or low-administration to run.

Lessons learned

There are several important lessons from this case study:

- Flexible funding settings appear to support more responsive and tailored delivery, including the ability to vary payment milestones and wraparound supports in response to participant needs.
- Co-design and ongoing sector engagement is important, with program refinements informed by workforce data and direct feedback from services and educators.
- Peak bodies and trusted local organisations can play an important delivery role because they bring existing relationships and sector credibility.
- Relational programs require sufficient administrative and specialist staffing, including coaching, mentoring, outreach and sector expertise.

The program does face some challenges:

- Application processes that appear simple on paper can still be difficult for services with limited capacity
- Small and remote providers may require intensive proactive outreach
- Pre-existing hesitation toward government-funded programs can limit uptake unless delivery partners invest in strong relationship-building.

Transferable design options and principles

The Tasmanian program suggests several principles that may be useful for future workforce support:

- Support workforce development across the full pipeline, including advanced qualifications where these meet sector need.
- Pair funding with holistic supports such as mentoring, academic help, wellbeing support and networking.
- Recognise that effective workforce programs are often highly relational and require delivery models, staffing and timelines that reflect this.
- Use accessible language and fit-for-purpose application processes, particularly for smaller services with limited administrative capacity.
- Align individual programs with a broader workforce strategy rather than relying on isolated, one-off interventions.

Qualification Pathways Program (QPP), Queensland

This case study examines Queensland's Qualification Pathways Program (QPP), drawing on interview evidence from the Queensland Government Department of Education and publicly available program information. The insights here describe the overall program settings.

Rationale

QPP was established to address shortages of qualified ECEC staff, particularly early childhood teachers. Public program material describes QPP as part of Queensland's wider early childhood workforce investment, including support for educators to complete approved qualifications and build a more skilled and supported workforce.

The program is intended to be more than a scholarship scheme. The core logic is that qualification completion in ECEC is often limited not only by tuition costs, but also by barriers such as mentoring needs, access to equipment, practicum costs, travel and accommodation, particularly for educators in rural and remote communities or those facing additional barriers to participation.

Key design choices

The Queensland Government funds multiple organisations to deliver QPP on its behalf, with delivery partners providing scholarship subsidies and wraparound support within a common program framework. The first round of the program was launched in 2024 involved government partnerships with nine organisations, and public materials indicate that the program was intended to benefit nearly 2,000 educators.

Key design features include:

- Support for approved early childhood qualifications across Certificate III, Diploma, Bachelor and Graduate Diploma levels
- A combination of financial assistance and wraparound support, rather than funding alone, including regular check-ins and mentoring
- Coverage of a broader set of study-related costs, including textbooks, IT equipment, travel, accommodation and practicum-related expenses
- Additional supplementary support for educators in rural and remote locations and for those with CALD, First Nations backgrounds and/or requiring intensive support
- Milestone or completion-focused incentives to encourage course completion
- No direct cost to participants for accessing scholarship support

Initial impacts and emerging issues

There are several early positive effects, although most are still emerging and based largely on stakeholder feedback rather than formal outcome evaluation. A formal evaluation of this program will be undertaken by the Queensland Government in late 2026. Reported early benefits include improved professional capability, stronger motivation to complete qualifications, and anticipated retention benefits associated with mentoring, coaching and financial assistance.

We heard some issues that impact delivery:

- There is an uneven awareness of the program, given differing capacities for services to promote the initiative, so it is difficult to maintain ongoing and consistent promotion of the program.
- QPP includes variable forms of wraparound and supplementary support depending on the provider delivering the program, which makes coordination and communication important so students know what supports are available to them.
- There is overlap with other supports such as RATEP.

Lessons learned

Design of QPP was informed by extensive consultation. We heard that workforce data, census data and substantial sector feedback, including feedback from educators, shaped program settings and key design decisions. This ensured that QPP would be tailored to fill existing gaps.

Lessons emerging from implementation include:

- Wraparound supports matter and should not be treated as secondary to scholarship funding, because mentoring, coaching and practical problem-solving appear central to course completion

- Remote access issues require specific attention, including travel, technology and local relationship-building
- Program settings may need to evolve over time, including eligibility settings, support roles and clarity of requirements

Transferable design options and principles

Several QPP features are potentially relevant to future workforce considerations

- Treat qualification completion as a supported pathway, not simply a tuition subsidy, by combining funding with mentoring, advising and practical assistance.
- Design for equity by building in supplementary support for people facing geographic, cultural or practical barriers to participation.
- Communicate clearly about program purpose, eligibility and available benefits, especially where there are multiple similar supports available.
- Anticipate administrative requirements early, including the staffing and systems required to design and deliver.

School Readiness Funding (SRF), Victoria

This case study examines Victoria's School Readiness Funding (SRF), drawing on publicly available Victorian Government program information and the government's 2022 Future Directions statement. Unlike the other case studies in this appendix, this case is based on desktop review rather than interview evidence, so the analysis relies more heavily on published program settings, evaluation findings and reform commitments.

Rationale

SRF was established to address educational disadvantage by building the capacity of educators, services and families to respond to children's learning and development needs before school entry. It is a permanent part of the Victorian kindergarten funding model and supports state-funded kindergarten programs for 3-year-old and 4-year-old children across Victoria, including in CBDC settings.

The program is designed around three priority outcome areas:

- Communication
- Wellbeing
- Access, inclusion and participation

Victorian Government materials describe these priority areas as evidence-informed and intended to direct resources toward the developmental domains where additional support can make the greatest difference for children experiencing educational disadvantage, while still allowing services to respond to local need.

Key design choices

SRF is a needs-based component of kindergarten funding. Kindergarten funding allocations are informed by parental occupation and education data, which are used as indicators of educational disadvantage. Public guidance states that funding is highly targeted and ranges from $2,000 for services with lower levels of need and / or smaller enrolments to more than $400,000 for services with higher levels of need and larger enrolments.

Key design features include:

- Permanent, ongoing funding embedded within the Victorian kindergarten funding model, rather than a time-limited grant program.
- A requirement that most funding be spent on a menu of externally validated, evidence-informed programs and supports aligned to the three SRF priority areas.
- For services with larger allocations, pre-purchased and contracted allied health support to deliver specialist capability building to educators, particularly for working with children with additional needs.
- Limited flexible funding for larger allocations, allowing services receiving over $10,000 to spend up to 25% of their funding on off-menu items that still align with SRF objectives.
- A move from annual planning to a two-year planning cycle from 2025, intended to improve predictability, reduce administrative burden and support longer-term implementation.
- Planning and administration support, including an allowance of up to 5% of funding for services receiving more than $5,000 and a $250 administration payment for services receiving $5,000 or less.

Initial impacts and emerging issues

The Victorian Government's published evaluation summary presents SRF as having had positive early effects on service capability and children's outcomes. The 2022 Future Directions statement reports that 95% of services consulted said SRF was impacting identified outcomes, 65% said these outcomes had been met and/or exceeded, and more than 80% of teachers reported

improving outcomes for children, including in social and emotional development, language development and service engagement.[88]

The same material reports several service-level capability gains. More than 75% of services providing kindergarten programs agreed that SRF had improved the capacity of services and staff to respond to the needs of children and families, and more than 68% agreed it had increased the uptake of evidence-informed programs and supports. Early childhood teachers also reported adjusting program planning to better reflect children's needs, strengthening their ability to identify vulnerabilities and feeling better equipped to respond to individual children.

At the same time, the published evaluation identified several design and implementation issues. These included:

- Pressure created by the previous one-year planning cycle
- Difficulty finding menu providers willing to travel to rural and regional area (with the exception of Allied health supports, which is centrally managed to avoid this)
- Variable perceptions of menu item quality
- Limited opportunities to provide feedback on menu items
- Only moderate agreement that SRF complemented other early childhood supports, such as Kindergarten Inclusion Support, the Preschool Field Officer program, and Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program.

Lessons learned

The published reform material suggests that one of SRF's strengths is that it has been actively refined in response to evaluation and sector feedback. Rather than treating initial design settings as fixed, the Victorian Government has used staged rollout, process evaluation and strategic evaluation to identify where the model was working well and where it required adjustment.

Several lessons are particularly relevant:

- Building education professional and service capability appears to be a meaningful pathway to improving children's outcomes, not only funding direct service delivery.
- Longer planning cycles can support more strategic use of funding, improve continuity and reduce administrative burden for services.

[88] Victoria State Government. September 2022. School Readiness Funding: Future Directions. https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/funding/SRF_ReformDirections_MinisterStitt_Statement_2022.pdf

- Menu-based models can help steer services toward evidence-informed supports, but they require active quality assurance, clear item descriptions and attention to the accessibility of those items in rural and regional areas (with the exception of Allied health supports).

Administrative supports matter, particularly for smaller services that may struggle to plan, analyse data and report against funding requirements.

Transferable design options and principles

SRF offers several design principles that may be useful for workforce supports:

- A needs-based allocation of funding can concentrate resources where educational or workforce disadvantage is greatest
- Combine local flexibility with a curated evidence-informed menu, so services have choice but are also supported to invest in high-quality supports
- Build review and iteration into program design from the outset, using formal evaluation and sector feedback to refine settings over time

Flying Start Workforce Grants, South Australia

This case study examines South Australia's Flying Start Workforce Grants, drawing on interview evidence from the Office for Early Childhood Development, South Australia and publicly available grant information.[89,90] The program sits within South Australia's broader Flying Start reforms linked to the rollout of 3-year-old preschool and wider efforts to strengthen the early childhood workforce.

Rationale

The Flying Start Workforce Grants were established in response to workforce shortages and pipeline pressures in regional, rural and other hard-to-staff communities in South Australia, and was informed by research on existing workforce initiatives operating in other jurisdictions and input through broad stakeholder engagement. The program was designed for places where more standard interventions may not generate sufficient change and where local conditions required responses tailored to community context.

[89] Government of South Australia. 2026. Flying Start Workforce Grants Round 3. https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1315958/Flying-Start-Workforce-Grants-Round-3-Guidelines.pdf

[90] Government of South Australia. 2026. Flying Start Workforce Grants Information For Grant Applicants. https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/1102911/FS-Workforce-Grants-fact-sheet.pdf

The grants are part of South Australia's Early Childhood Workforce Strategy to support attraction and retention ahead of the 3-year-old preschool rollout. The program therefore combines a clear system-level objective with a place-based logic: local organisations are funded to develop solutions that respond to evidenced local needs, rather than applying a single statewide intervention.

Key design choices

The program provides one-off, 12-month grants of up to $150,000 to early childhood services in regional, rural and hard-to-staff communities. Public grant information states that funded initiatives must respond to clearly evidenced local need and are expected to involve partnerships or collaboration across early childhood services within a community, and / or with local networks, training providers or councils.

Key design features include:

- Geographic targeting of regional, rural and hard-to-staff communities
- Support for locally designed initiatives rather than a single mandated intervention model
- Partnership-based applications intended to strengthen local coordination and shared ownership
- Priority areas including attraction, retention, cultural safety, wellbeing and mental health, and increasing and retaining the number of qualified educators, teachers and trainers in communities
- No direct cost to recipients, unless project costs exceed the approved grant amount

Initial impacts and emerging issues

This is a relatively targeted, short-term grant program, so available evidence is still weighted toward early activity and implementation rather than mature outcome data.

Grant rounds have stimulated new planning and partnership activity, with services developing retention packages, local pathway programs and training initiatives that either did not exist previously or had not been funded before. Early indications suggest that some services are using the funding for mentoring, induction, wellbeing initiatives and shared-role models intended to make employment more sustainable in remote areas.

The grants are helping regional workforce projects within a broader pipeline approach, in part because they sit alongside other Flying Start initiatives such as pathway and study support programs. This system-linkage is notable because it means the grant scheme may have value not only through local projects themselves, but also through how it connects those projects to a wider reform agenda.

Lessons learned

Several implementation lessons are already apparent, and changes have been made between the grant rounds:

- Reporting and contract management requirements need to be proportionate to grant funding amount and recipient capability, particularly where recipients have limited experience with grant administration
- Application forms benefit from iterative refinement to improve clarity, reduce unnecessary detail and support fair assessment and capture the information needed for funding agreements
- An open-round format can reduce time pressure and make it easier for applicants to develop thoughtful, locally grounded proposals
- Strong stakeholder engagement is important both in the design of the grant program and in shaping successive rounds
- Building internal grants management processes is itself a significant implementation task for a newer agency or program area
- The program's place-based strengths depend on administrative flexibility. If funding and reporting arrangements are too rigid, they can undermine the very local innovation and collaboration the program is intended to support.

Transferable design options and principles

- The Flying Start Workforce Grants point to several transferable principles for future workforce support:
- Use flexible funding to support locally tailored responses where workforce issues are highly place-specific
- Require proposals to be grounded in evidenced local need and encourage collaboration with local partners
- Iterate application and reporting processes over time to reduce avoidable administrative burden
- Draw on lessons from other jurisdictions when designing or refining new workforce initiatives
- Ensure program guidance is clear about eligibility and expectations so that smaller or less experienced applicants are not unintentionally excluded