



Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Secretariat
Department of Education, Skills and Employment
GPO Box 9880, Canberra, ACT 2601

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ACECQA submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment Quality Initial Teacher Education Review.

Early childhood education is an integral part of the Australian education system and sets the foundations for lifelong learning and development. Just as in the school sector, quality developmental and educational outcomes for children depend upon a highly skilled, well supported and professionally recognised workforce. However, the early childhood sector can often be overlooked in the context of broader education policy and reform.

Children's education and care

The children's education and care sector is large and diverse, with more than 7,000 education and care service providers approved to operate more than 16,000 services under the National Quality Framework (NQF). This includes more than 8,000 long day care services and more than 3,000 preschools/kindergartens. Around 1.5 million children attend education and care services across Australia, with individual children attending anywhere from a few irregular hours to more than 50 hours every week.

The NQF has been in place since 1 January 2012 and is the national system for regulating education and care services, setting standards for quality and safety that benefit all children attending services.

The NQF requires all long day care services and preschools/kindergartens to employ, engage or have access to an early childhood teacher (with the exact nature of the requirement dependent upon the number of children in attendance and the geographic location of the service).

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is an independent national authority established under the *Education and Care Services National Law* to guide the administration of the NQF. Our functions under the National Law include determining the qualifications required to be held by educators.

The objectives of the NQF include improving children's educational and developmental outcomes, and promoting continuous improvement in service quality.

Early childhood teachers

Over the last decade, the NQF has progressively improved the ratio of educators to children, as well as mandated qualification requirements. Most long day care services and preschools/kindergartens must employ at least one degree qualified early childhood teacher.

Over 25,000 early childhood teachers are registered by teacher regulatory authorities across four states – South Australia (Teachers Registration Board of South Australia), Western Australia (Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia), Victoria (Victorian Institute of Teaching) and New South Wales (NSW Education Standards Authority, with registration called ‘accreditation’ in NSW). Given that more than three quarters of children’s education and care services are located in these four states, most of Australia’s early childhood teachers are required to be registered, formally recognising their status as a key part of the broader teaching profession.

Part A: Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession

[Commencements](#) in early childhood initial teacher education programs have declined by a quarter over the six years from 2012 and 2018, while the [2020 employment projections](#) suggest that the sector will grow by around 8,000 additional early childhood teachers (a 17% increase) for the five years to November 2025. The combination of decreasing supply and increasing demand means that the children’s education and care sector continues to face significant and increasingly urgent workforce challenges.

The high proportion of single service providers (more than 80% of all providers under the NQF are approved to operate a single service) illustrates the different context of the children’s education and care sector when compared to the school sector, particularly given that the majority of these services may only employ a single early childhood teacher. The mentoring and support structures that are typically embedded and routine within schools are often not available or possible for single service providers.

The children’s education and care sector does however offer opportunities for high-performing early childhood teachers to take on multiple roles and responsibilities within a service, including pedagogical and administrative leadership roles. Early childhood teachers often work independently and can be responsible for curriculum planning across multiple age groups within a single service. The same leadership and management opportunities are less likely to be available to early career teachers within the school system. This level of autonomy and responsibility may well appeal to mid- and late-career professionals who have transferrable management and leadership skills.

Despite this, there is a predominant perception that early childhood teachers are less qualified than school teachers, with children’s education and care being viewed as an inferior teaching career. A [2019 study](#) examined the perceptions of students enrolled in combined early childhood and primary degree programs, in particular their career intentions and satisfaction. Over 70% of students indicated they intended to seek employment in schools and fewer than 5% intended to work in long day care settings. In addition, there was still a cohort of students who felt that early childhood education was ‘not real learning and education’.

Part B: Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

The majority of NQF approved early childhood teaching programs cover children aged birth to eight or birth to 12 years of age, qualifying graduates to teach in both early childhood and primary school settings. These courses are assessed and approved by both the relevant [state and territory teacher regulatory authority](#) in line with the [National Standards and Procedures](#) (the Standards), and [by ACECQA](#) to ensure there is appropriate early childhood content and experience. While there are many complementary aspects to the two sets of requirements, the Standards are largely silent on practice and pedagogy in non-school settings, such as long day care services and standalone preschools/kindergartens.

The recommendations from the [Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group](#) in late 2014 have led to several policy changes in initial teacher education. While these should not necessarily detrimentally impact a program's early childhood components, some higher education providers report increasing pressure to negotiate less early childhood content in order to satisfy the additional requirements and broader fiscal and resourcing constraints.

One notable requirement – that primary school teachers must graduate with a [subject specialisation](#) – means initial teacher education courses must include relatively high volumes of school age content and professional experience in birth to eight and birth to 12 courses. This can result in the early childhood content and experience being displaced or overshadowed, particularly as higher education providers and governments continue to invest in accelerated programs.


Other initiatives flowing from the 2014 recommendations, for example the [teaching performance assessment](#), have been developed with teachers in schools as the primary target. These initiatives may reinforce perceptions that early childhood teaching in a non-school setting is an inferior, second or third class option within the teaching profession, despite the internationally recognised specialised practice and pedagogical knowledge required to be an early childhood teacher.

Future opportunities

In December 2019, Education Ministers endorsed the development of a new [national workforce strategy](#) for the children's education and care sector, as a joint partnership between all governments and key sector stakeholders. ACECQA, on behalf of all governments, has been coordinating the co-design and development process, with the final strategy due to be considered by Education Ministers in the second half of this year.

Along with a range of other actions, the strategy is likely to highlight opportunities to consider contemporary and emerging skills and knowledge needed for early childhood teaching as part of initial teacher education programs, as well as innovative approaches to program design and delivery.

ACECQA continues to advocate for an inclusive, nationally consistent approach to teacher education and registration. While acknowledging the different roles and responsibilities, we remain committed to pursuing opportunities to streamline and align the respective accreditation and approval processes, recognise early childhood as a specialisation and ensure a sustainable supply of high-quality early childhood teachers.

If you would like to discuss our response in more detail, or would like further information about ACECQA, please feel free to contact me or Michael Petrie, General Manager of Workforce, Engagement and Research 

Yours sincerely

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Chief Executive Officer

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