



Jobs and Skills Australia ECEC Capacity Study

Submission

JANUARY 2024

A Joint Submission by:



Community Child Care Association



Community Early Learning Australia

About Us



Community Child Care Association

From a small beginning, Community Child Care (CCC) has grown significantly, and is now the peak body in Victoria for community-owned education and care, supporting long day care, outside school hours care (OSHC), kindergarten, family day care and occasional care educators, teachers, leaders, coordinators and directors. CCC's vision and purpose are underpinned by the belief that all children deserve the best possible start in life, regardless of their circumstances. Our vision is for excellent early childhood and outside school hours education and care for all and our purpose is to lead, support and advocate for accessible high-quality opportunities for children and families.

As a trusted sector leader, CCC provides leadership and advocacy, works with governments toward improvement in the sector and supports services with membership, quality professional development and consultancies. CCC equips and supports early childhood and outside school hours care services, educators and their communities with the skills and confidence to deliver high quality inclusive education and care services.

CCC's advocacy helps to enable and strengthen the development and retention of Victoria's community-owned education and care sector.

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Community Early Learning Australia

Community Early Learning Australia™ (CELA) is the voice for Australia's early education and care sector. As a peak body, our vision is for all of Australia's children to have access to quality early education, regardless of economic circumstance or where they live.

CELA supports over 1,800 members employing more than 27,000 educators and teachers nationally. Our members include community-managed not-for-profit, government, and privately owned small providers, delivering preschool, long day care, outside school hours care, and family day care services.

Our Mission is to:

- Deliver effective and expert support for our members, enabling them to deliver quality early education and care for all Australia's children.
- Influence policy makers and government by amplifying the voices of community based and small providers.
- Promote the value and importance of community-based early education.

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Executive summary

CCC and CELA welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Jobs and Skills Australia Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study. It has been widely recognised that addressing workforce issues is the key priority to enabling the sector to meet the growing and changing needs of children and families. It is also crucial to supporting the objective of the federal government to deliver a truly universal education and care sector which all children can benefit from regardless of where they live or what their families earn.

CCC and CELA represent community and small providers operating across the education and care sector, including long day care, outside school hours care and preschools/ kindergartens. Our submission is informed by extensive membership consultation as well as direct sector experience including as providers of training and professional development.

As well documented across multiple reports and reviews including the Productivity Commission, ACCC and ACECQA 2019 National Workforce Report, there have been persistent and increasingly pressing issues with attraction and retention of early childhood educators and teachers. The reality is now that providers across the sector are unable to operate and offer their full number of places to the children and families who need it.

While we recognise that workforce shortages are currently widespread across many industries and professions in Australia, ensuring families have access to the high-quality affordable education and care they need to support their own workforce participation choices and their children's growth and learning, is critical to addressing these broader challenges.

The recent Productivity Commission Draft Report on the early childhood education and care sector modelled that if all barriers to accessing services were removed as many as 118,000 full time workers could be added to Australia's labour supply¹.

Fixing the workforce crisis starts by delivering good, secure jobs in education and care. Structural working arrangements including career paths, flexible roster and leave arrangements, time for planning and programming and access to professional development are also crucial to supporting attraction and retention. While improving the quality of the job, these measures also underpin modern quality practices, leading to better outcomes for children.

Educators and teachers remaining in the sector are facing increased workload and burn out resulting from significant turn over, accelerating during and immediately after the COVID pandemic. Low wages and poor conditions compared to other government funded sectors are recognised as the driving factor and must be urgently addressed to stabilise this loss of qualified workers and send a signal that early childhood is a profession of choice for students and graduates.

The multi-employer bargaining process currently underway for the long day care sector is a significant opportunity to bring employers, employees and government funders together to collaboratively address this issue. Successful examples of such approaches including in kindergartens in Victoria, show that multi-employer bargaining in government funded sectors can provide a mechanism for long term, sustainable improvement to wages and conditions.

¹ Productivity Commission, November 2023. "A path to universal early education and care: Draft report". Pg 77 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>

While there are a number of levers and interventions that can be made across governments, employers and training providers, the most significant impact will come from addressing the chronic low wages of educators and teachers across the sector.

Response to consultation paper

Current State

- Lack of experienced workers is exacerbating workforce shortages, driving workload, burn out and labour costs. Almost a quarter of staff have less than 12 months experience in their current service.
- Low wages and poor conditions are the driving factor for workforce shortages and services ability to address these are limited by the cost impact on fees for families.
- Services are reporting increased shortages of Diploma qualified staff. Enrolment in Diploma qualifications are dropping and factors such as lack of financial recognition for the higher qualification may be contributing to this.
- Multi-employer bargaining under the supported bargaining stream provides an opportunity for the sector and government to address low wages and poor conditions in the sector without impacting fees for families.

The extent of the current demand for education and care workers across the country is well documented. The 2019 ACECQA workforce study predicted that the sector would need to grow by around 39,000 educators including an additional 9000 early childhood teachers by 2023.

Reported vacancy rates have been steadily increasing across this time and nationally around 12% of services currently operate with a staff related waiver because of the inability to recruit necessary qualified staff².

The vast majority of this growth in workforce demand is driven by the centre-based day care sector (long day care/ LDC) which has seen its workforce increase by 34% since 2013³.

The majority (86%) of staff with a qualification hold a Certificate III or Diploma⁴. The National Quality Standards require that 50% of all staff working in regulated services must hold a diploma qualification or higher.

² Productivity Commission, November 2023. "A path to universal early education and care: Draft report". Pg 16 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>

³ Social Research Centre, 2021. "2021 ECEC National Workforce Census" Pg, 6 <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>

⁴ Social Research Centre, 2021. "2021 ECEC National Workforce Census" Pg, 14 <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/2021-early-childhood-education-and-care-national-workforce-census-report>

While there has been a focus on teacher shortages and dropping university completion rates, CCC and CELA member services are reporting shortages across all qualification levels, with Diploma qualified educators now being identified as the hardest to recruit. Data on VET and universities enrolments show that while there has been an uptick at Certificate III and Degree level since 2018, enrolment in Diploma qualifications have fallen over the same period⁵.

This has been exacerbated by an exodus of experienced educators from the sector, especially resulting from the recent COVID pandemic. Higher workloads including increased perception of risk, and the rising cost of living have meant for many educators and teachers, education and care has simply ceased to be a viable and sustainable career.

The lack of experienced workers is contributing to workforce issues. The 2021 ECEC National Workforce Census highlighted the average tenure of paid contact educators was only 3.6 years and 23% of all educators working in LDC in Australia have been in their current workplace for less than a year.

Example: Centre Director – Victorian metropolitan long day care service

“When recruiting educators, we have had to lower our expectations as the candidates that are presenting themselves just do not have the experience we use to expect. This impacts the induction process we need to implement for new educators with the first 6 months of their employment taking on a more instructional/teaching element to assist them to build a work tool kit that enables them to complete the requirements of their role. Previously after an initial few days of induction, a new team member would step into their role and undertake their responsibilities immediately.

The lack of experienced educators has also led to inexperienced leadership as educators who do not have the skills and are not ready for leadership have been forced into roles as there is no one else to fill them. Due to this, they don't know how to manage a team, delegate tasks, build educator agency, or provide the basic well-being support needed. This has led to staff leaving the service and at times the sector as they don't feel supported or connected to the workplace due to poor leadership.”

⁵ Productivity Commission, November 2023. “A path to universal early education and care: Draft report”. Pg 22 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>

Despite this urgent and high demand for qualified workers, education and care workers remain Award reliant and are paid well below the national average⁶. There is clear market failure regarding the market rates for education and care workers which requires intervention to resolve. Wages in the sector are held back by significant structural issues, including historical gender undervaluation, limited access to enterprise bargaining and funding arrangements and the perception that working in education and care settings has low social status.

The reliance of the education and care sector on CCS funding has acted as a direct suppression to wages. As a demand-side subsidy, any increased costs resulting from improved wages are passed onto parents as increased fees. While the CCS does absorb a proportion of these increases (up to the fee cap), this impact on affordability directly acts as a disincentive to services to increase wages⁷. This nexus is also directly responsible for exacerbating workforce shortages in rural and remote areas, as well as low socio-economic communities, where capacity to pay higher fees to fund higher wages that will attract workers is significantly limited.

Resolving this without further increasing fees to families, requires targeted government funding to deliver nationally consistent professional wages and conditions. The multi-employer bargaining process currently underway for the long day care sector is a mechanism to do just this.

Currently involving 64 employers across small, medium and large employers, the objective of the process is to set up a model which can be expanded to the rest of the long day care sector and replicated for the outside school hours care and State funded preschool/ kindergarten sectors. CCC and CELA have taken a leadership role in this opportunity, acting as bargaining representatives on behalf of small and community providers as part of our ongoing advocacy for a professionally recognised and valued education and care workforce.

Unlike industrial Awards, workplace agreements provide a mechanism to not just improve wages, but also the underpinning conditions, including career paths, professional development, rostering and leave arrangements and specialist allowances. With over 7000 employers in the education and care sector, multi-employer bargaining under the supported bargaining scheme is an efficient method for the sector and government to deliver consistent minimum standards which have been demonstrated to improve staff attraction and retention. In particular it provides a mechanism to deliver wages and conditions that reflect comparable entitlements in government funded sectors such as primary and secondary teaching.

OSHC specific issues

The OSHC workforce is unique in the education and care sector and requires special attention to ensure school age children also benefit from high quality service delivery. Unfortunately, there remains misalignment in the sector between the perceived role of OSHC educators and what is actually expected of the role under the National

⁶ The Economic Benefits of High Quality Early Childhood Education, Grundoff, M, The Australia Institute, March https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Economic_Aspects_of_E&C_in_Australia_FINAL.pdf pg:24 and <https://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/workforcedata/wfglance.html>

⁷ Low-paid 'women's work': why early childhood educators are walking out, 2018 <https://issr.uq.edu.au/article/2018/04/low-paid-%E2%80%98women%E2%80%99s-work%E2%80%99-why-early-childhood-educators-are-walking-out>, University of Queensland

Quality Framework. There is low work value attributed to OSHC work with high levels of casual and part time roles cited as the main reason for this.

In recent times, the OSHC sector have had to place caps on occupancy due to workforce shortages. In some cases, parents have been asked to collect their children directly from school as the OSHC have not had sufficient staff to meet minimum ratio requirements and to provide suitable and safe care environments after school.

The vast majority of the OSHC educator workforce are employed on a casual basis, work short shifts and are required to work a before and after school split shift each day. This type of casual work arrangement is often not suitable (or desirable) for qualified educators seeking permanent employment with regular hours. Even when offered permanent employment, many OSHC educators prefer the casual arrangement due to the significantly higher (25% casual loading) rate of pay in contrast to the benefits of personal or annual leave. The casual loading is needed to compensate for the reduced hours of work available in OSHC. The best outcomes for children would be delivered if recreation and leisure pedagogues were employed full time and permanently in schools to plan programs and support children. With these pedagogues embedded in schools, particularly to support all children through transition to prep as well as before school, during recess and lunch, after school and during holidays periods, a continuity of care, leisure and learning would be provided for school age children. This shift would also allow for the creation of more attractive positions within schools, support career progression opportunities and help raise the profile of outside school hours care.

There are still no nationally consistent child to educator ratios or qualification requirements for OSHC services. This impacts on the quality of OSHC services being delivered in different states. While many educators currently working in the OSHC sector are studying towards a tertiary qualification, without a requirement for tertiary qualifications in OSHC they are forced to leave to pursue higher paying permanent roles. It is also not good enough that for many OSHC educators the only qualification they have access to is an early childhood qualification. This is not appropriate as OSHC is a very different setting with children in both early and middle childhood in their care. Attention is required to develop qualification pathways specific to OSHC, including higher education degrees that reflect the complexity and importance of OSHC provision.

Future Workforce

- Demand for centre-based care places continues to grow, while OSHC continues to be impacted by post COVID workforce changes.
- State and territory policies including expanding free or low-cost preschool / kindergarten is increasing demand for educators and teachers.
- The introduction of measures to implement 'universal' education and care by the Federal Government will also contribute to further growth.
- Meeting the complex needs of children with disabilities in education and care will require further skills development of the existing workforce as well as greater need for specialised allied health qualifications with a focus on early child development, to support inclusion objectives.

Demand for early childhood educators and teachers is expected to continue to grow as a result of many factors. The ACCC September interim report found that despite a decline in the population of children aged 0-12 the number of children accessing education and care has increased⁸. Government policy to increase affordability for families as well as the need for families to meet rising costs through paid work may contribute to this. In addition, we believe there has been a significant shift in parents' and families' understanding of the developmental benefits of children attending high quality education and care programs.

While demand for centre-based care has continued to increase, changes to work practices including work from home arrangements have had an impact on numbers of children attending Outside School Hours programs. The ACCC found that demand for Outside School Hours Care programs had not returned to pre-covid levels, especially in higher income areas where work from home arrangements were more likely to be present⁹. It is unclear whether this will be a short term or long-term trend in the OSHC sector.

The largest driver of increased demand for educators and teachers in the education and care sector is state and territory policy initiatives including extending hours of subsidised or free kindergarten / preschool to three- and four-year-olds and the objective of universal education and care currently being explored through the Productivity Commission Inquiry.

CCC and CELA support the draft recommendation of the Productivity Commission to deliver a universal entitlement of 3 days or 30 hours per week for every child. Currently access to subsidised education and care is based on the workplace participation of families and as many as 120,000 children are missing out on education and care due to this activity test. If the Productivity Commission recommendation was adopted by the federal government, it would significantly increase demand for the qualified workforce needed to deliver this level of provision.

Universal access also requires the sector to be equipped with educators and teachers skilled to respond to children with diverse needs. Around 5% of all children access education and care have a disability¹⁰ and educators and teachers are increasingly needing to develop skills and qualifications to best support these children. While allied health professionals are the most appropriate providers of specialist support, educators and teachers will need to be empowered with skills and understanding of health, behavioural and developmental needs of children with disabilities to support their outcomes. Recommendations from the recent review into the NDIS will further impact demand for more specialised skills within the education and care sector.

Moves to support flexible provision of education and care for children and families should also be considered carefully when identifying the future workforce. While there is general recognition that there may be a need to provide extended or wrap around care in standalone preschools/ kindergartens to better reflect the working hours of parents, describing this as 'outside preschool hours care' can have unintended impacts on quality and the workforce.

Compared to long day care services provided to children aged 0-6 years, there are currently no nationally consistent minimum qualifications required for staff providing Outside School Hours programs for school aged children. Characterizing extended

⁸ ACCC, 2023. "ACCC Childcare Inquiry – June interim report". pg: 52: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023/june-2023-interim-report#:~:text=June%202023%20interim%20report5.of%20the%20Child%20Care%20Subsidy>.

⁹ ACCC, 2023. "ACCC Childcare Inquiry – September interim report", Pg 117: <https://www.accc.gov.au/inquiries-and-consultations/childcare-inquiry-2023/september-2023-interim-report>

¹⁰ Productivity Commission, November 2023. "A path to universal early education and care: Draft report". Pg 8 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>

care in preschools/ kindergartens as 'outside preschool hours care' may have the effect of lowering quality requirements that would otherwise apply to children of this age.

The needs of younger children, as well as the focus on play-based learning means that these programs are better captured in the long day care model. Supporting preschool/ kindergarten services to offer extended hours long day care programs, will ensure quality standards are maintained for children and the contribution of play based learning for children prior to school age is recognised.

Better coordination between federal, state and territory governments is needed to establish future models of provision that better reflect that care and education occur from birth, while meeting the needs of working families.

Pathways and qualifications

- Ensuring there are proper career paths and financial rewards for higher qualifications is needed to incentivise educators and teachers to up-skill.
- Peer networks have proven to be effective in supporting emerging leaders in the sector and improving retention of experienced staff.
- Stabilising the workforce through improved wages and conditions, improves the experience of students and trainees on placement and supports higher qualification completion rates.
- Existing funded sector agreements have been shown to increase workforce attraction and retention and reduce reliance on staffing waivers.

As noted above, there is a growing shortage of experienced educators especially at the Diploma level, due to dropping enrolments and changes to eligibility requirements for the qualification.

While CCC and CELA support the changes to the requirements for the Diploma qualification, the impacts have been exacerbated as a result of limited financial incentives to encourage staff and students to take on the higher level role and responsibility.

Under the *Children's Services Award 2010* the difference in wages between an educator with a certificate III qualification and those with diplomas is just \$1.54 per hour. Furthermore, incremental progression to higher wage levels is not available unless the educator is appointed to limited specialist roles. When over 50% of staff employed must hold a Diploma qualification or above, this lack of recognition is significantly affecting services capacity to recruit the qualified staff they need.

Completion rates for teachers and VET students has been impacted by the workforce shortages in the sector, particularly the loss of experienced staff. Experienced staff and leadership in services is needed to support trainees and students to have the best experience during placements. As mentioned above 23% of staff have less than 1 years' experience in the service. This has created a situation where "trainees are teaching trainees" and potential graduates are not having positive first engagements with the sector.

Supports such as the CELA Peer Network have had proven success in supporting and developing emerging leaders in the early education sector by increasing retention of these crucial staff as well as improving professional skills such as program, staffing and training management.

Stabilising the workforce by addressing low wages and conditions will also increase student and trainee access to experienced mentoring and support.

Victoria provides a direct example of how direct investment in wages and conditions has supported the successful implementation of significant reforms including expanding kindergarten access. The Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) is a multi-employer agreement negotiated with employers and unions representing services offering funded kindergarten programs. The State government contributes to this process by providing additional funding to services to support the implementation of strategic policy measures including wages and conditions which contribute to workforce attraction.

Over 383 employers (mostly standalone kindergartens) in Victoria are covered by the VECTEA or its mirror multi-employer agreements¹¹. Kindergartens and long day care services providing a funded kindergarten program in Victoria are eligible to receive additional funding to support the costs of employing a qualified teacher to deliver the program under the "Early Childhood Teacher Supplement"¹². To be eligible to receive the supplementary funding a service must employ teachers under the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement 2020 (VECTEA) a funded multi-employer agreement, or an enterprise agreement which has been assessed as having equivalent salary and employment conditions as the VECTEA.

As a result of this cooperative approach, wages and conditions for early childhood teachers have reached parity levels with those of teachers in Victorian schools, while maintaining affordability for families. The impact of this investment can be seen in the significantly lower incidence of education and care services operating with a staff related waiver in Victoria. Only 2.1% of Victorian services are operating with a waiver compared to a sector wide average of 10%¹³.

While state level investment in the kindergarten workforce is clearly effective, a coordinated approach across state and federal governments is needed to avoid creating internal competition between parts of the sector. For example, higher wages and better conditions in standalone kindergartens has the potential to drive qualified educators and teachers out of the long day care sector. There is a need to create good jobs across the sector to ensure it is seen as a profession of choice to potential new staff. For this reason, CCC and CELA are supporting the draft recommendations from the Productivity Commission inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector that the Australian, state and territory government should sign a new National Partnership Agreement with implementation supported through a new Early Childhood Commission.

¹¹ Fair Work Commission – Decision [2021] FWCA 3620 Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement 2020

¹² Victorian Department of Education, Kindergarten Funding Guide <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/funding/J641-Kindergarten-Funding-Guide-v6.pdf> , Pg: 75

¹³ ACECQA, 1 October 2023. "NQF Snapshot – Waivers" *W1: Proportion of services with a waiver by jurisdiction and waiver category* <https://snapshots.acecqa.gov.au/Snapshot/waivers.html>

Participation and engagement

- Unique and culturally appropriate training, placement and assessment models are needed to better support pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators.
- Addressing issues with job structure including minimising the impact of split shifts and casual work in Outside School Hours care will support retention as well as increase the status and perception of the work.
- While professional development is generally offered across the sector, access to it and the quality of provision is varied.
- Industrial agreements in the school system and other sectors provide examples of further specialised incentives for target groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and teachers and staff working in regional and remote areas.

CCC and CELA recognise the importance of growing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and teachers across the education and care sector. This contributes to significantly improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, while also providing invaluable cultural learning for non-indigenous children.

We support the Productivity Commission draft recommendations to improve pathways and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain early childhood qualifications including by:

- Using different approaches, including culturally appropriate interviews and observations to establish eligibility for course credit from experience and prior learning.
- Using culturally appropriate assessment models.
- Providing tailored small group and one: one support and mentoring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.¹⁴

Job structure and conditions do have an instrumental impact on the patterns of work experienced by staff in the education and care sector. As mentioned above, the current reliance on short and split shifts effects the perception of the sustainability of jobs in the outside school hours care sector. This has contributed to higher levels of casual engagement and a reliance on casual loadings to compensate for shorter shifts. As a result, the workforce in the Outside School Hours sector tends towards staff who are completing other forms of study or part time work and who see outside school hours as a 'transitional' job.

Professional development is generally offered across the education and care sector, however there is great variability in the quantum which staff can access, and whether the time is paid for by the employer or occurs outside of work hours. This variability across the sector is significantly impacted by the reliance on CCS funding and the ability of families to pay higher fees to cover costs. This is also impacted by the diversity of teacher registration schemes across states and territories. For this reason,

¹⁴ Productivity Commission, November 2023. "A path to universal early childhood education – Draft report", Pg 68 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>

CCC and CELA have consistently supported recommendations to standardise teacher registration for early childhood teachers to increase quality and allow for greater workforce mobility between states and territories.

Moving away from a sector that is Award reliant, to one where terms and conditions are more flexibly set through industrial instruments (including funded multi-employer bargaining agreements) can also improve participation and engagement by including incentives and recognition for specific target groups (e.g. educators and teachers in regional and remote services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and teachers). Equivalent industrial instruments that exist in public school settings contain specific cultural recognition clauses including extended family and kinship recognition, cultural and ceremonial leave, and training arrangements. These agreements also include additional allowances and loadings to recognise increase challenges with recruiting in regional and remote areas, such as remote salary loadings and subsidised accommodation.

The multi-employer bargaining process currently underway is aiming to address several of these participation matters including establishing a minimum entitlement to paid professional development for all staff as well as recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and teachers.

Other insights

- There is a role of government in addressing low pay and conditions in the education and care sector.
- Supporting the education and care workforce in turn supports workforce supply for other industries by allowing parents and guardians to make choices about work.
- Multi-employer bargaining provides a real opportunity to address the structural issues that impact attraction and retention across the education and care sector.

Stabilising the current education and care workforce and making it a profession of choice that is attractive to prospective employees starts with addressing chronically low pay and poor working conditions.

As a result of current funding structures, this can only occur with direct intervention of governments. Without funding provided to cover the professional pay gap between the education and care sector and other comparable sectors such as aged care, disability care and schools, fee increases and inequitable quality outcomes for children will continue.

International examples including New Zealand, Ireland and Canada, as well as the state of Victoria, have all shown that government intervention to ensure supply of workforce while maintaining affordability for families is clearly justified. As recently as last year, the federal government provided direct funding for increased wages in the aged care sector.

While other interventions, including addressing affordability and accessibility of gaining qualifications, support for student completion and funding for professional development, will make a difference, the greatest impact can only come from

addressing the structural issues which continue to see this workforce undervalued and under paid for their critical work.

We commend the Federal Government for taking the first real steps towards this through the introduction of the Supported Bargaining Stream under the *Secure Jobs, Better Pay* legislation. We also recognise the significant and sustained investment from the Victorian State Government to improve wages and conditions for staff in funded kindergarten programs.

Extending the benefits of both measures will require substantial coordination, and for investment to be matched across the whole of the sector. However, we know the benefits from such an investment are substantial.

Investing in improving the wages and conditions for over 220,000 low paid (mostly) women will unlock the potential of the education and care sector and benefit not just children and families, but also other industries who will be able to access up to 118,000 additional full-time workers¹⁵. Tens of thousands of qualified educators would be attracted back to the sector now if they are paid professional wages and conditions. This would allow services to grow to meet the needs of their communities by opening up thousands more places currently unavailable due to workforce shortages. The end result of such reforms would be increased workforce participation, increased earnings for families, and most importantly improved outcomes for children.

¹⁵ Productivity Commission, November 2023. "A path to universal early childhood education – Draft report", Pg 77 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/childhood/draft>