

## 2. Building a stable workforce that is nurtured and valued

Quality early childhood education and care depends upon the calibre and strength of our workforce. A stable workforce is also essential for building responsive relationships with children and families.

CELA understands the challenges and concerns facing the ECEC workforce, both now and into the future. Our members must be able to attract and retain quality entrants, manage workload and levels of workforce stress, and provide professional development, pathways and recognition.

### ECEC sector students and trainees need better support

Member concerns conveyed via [CELA's](#) own research reinforce research findings from [ASQA](#) and the [Mitchell Institute](#) about the varying levels of understanding and preparedness of graduates. CELA will continue to work with training providers and universities to inform, build and develop consistent models of training to ensure early childhood educators are well equipped to enter and excel in their chosen profession.

### Skills shortage needs to be addressed

While the key to building the quality of ECEC in Australia is the attraction, retention and development of the workforce, currently the sector is facing a severe skills shortage. There are not enough graduates flowing through university early childhood education and care degrees to fill vacancies emerging in the next three years. Vacancies are occurring across every level of the sector, with growing reports of shortages at the essential Certificate III level.

### Attrition is high

There is clear evidence that attrition in the sector is high with comparatively poor conditions of

employment now motivating up to 30% of educators to change jobs within 12 months, and many leaving the sector altogether ([Thorpe et.al 2020](#)). Levels of upskilling are high, but many educators leave the ECEC sector due to higher wages available within the school education sector.

Evidence also shows negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our members, with increasing levels of anxiety, and increases to workload experienced by ECEC staff continuing to educate children when much of the country worked from home ([CELA, Front Project](#)).

### Better employee conditions are key

Looking ahead, we see benefit in services being provided with greater support to enable educator voice through participative decision making, building alignment with organisational goals and to enable, promote and reward professional learning.

Improving some conditions of employment within the sector will take time to address – we know those services with a supportive workforce culture experience lower rates of attrition.

### CELA is committed to strengthening our sector workforce via:

- ▶ Providing training and resources to help services attract, support, develop and retain skilled, quality early childhood educators.
- ▶ Working individually and with aligned peer networks to advocate for workforce development.
- ▶ Steering professionalisation of workforce through provision of career pathways, collaboration on a sector workforce strategy and achieving pay and conditions to attract and retain diverse, high-quality entrants.

## Stable workforce in brief

### Key facts

- ▶ Each year, a third of educators change jobs.
- ▶ Many educators leave the sector in the first five years.
- ▶ One in three services report unfilled vacancies.
- ▶ An extra 30,000 educators and 7,000 more ECTs will be needed within 3 years.
- ▶ Workforce shortages are more acute in regional and remote areas.
- ▶ Staffing waivers are increasing. Over 10% of long day-care services have a waiver, which is up 25% on 2019 ([ACECQA](#)).
- ▶ Workforce preparation is insufficient in many instances ([Jackson, 2020](#)).

### What are we seeking?

- ▶ Achieving ECEC remuneration equal to primary schools to stop drift from ECEC to schools.
- ▶ Support to retain workforce including professionalisation of workforce, access to professional learning, capacity to upskill.
- ▶ Targeted scholarships in areas of need.
- ▶ Research into best practice placements.
- ▶ Peer networks to build support.
- ▶ Support to ensure quality of RTO delivery such as industry accreditation of outcomes.
- ▶ Retention and attraction payments for selected services before they are in crisis

### Actions we are taking

- ▶ Workforce training in the form of identification and provision of professional learning to fill skill gaps.
- ▶ Regular representation at State Advisory Panels ensuring that a clear and consistent message is sustained in relation to workforce issues and how they impact the community and small providers.
- ▶ Regular representation with State and Federal Ministers ensuring that a clear and consistent message is sustained in relation to workforce issues and how they impact the community and small providers, in particular, pay, recruitment and retention.
- ▶ Developing innovative workforce models.
- ▶ Input to ACECQA Workforce Strategy, especially needs of community and small providers.
- ▶ Collaboration with like-minded Peaks, providing solutions to government for common workforce issues, such as pay, recruitment and retention.
- ▶ ASQA industry accreditation trial.
- ▶ Early Education Leaders Peer Network initiative.

- ▶ Shine a light on real life workforce issue in Amplify and Broadside.
- ▶ Support our members in meaningful ways through 1800 support line, essential operational resources and quality training opportunities.
- ▶ Engage in vital research such as the Exemplary EC Educators at Work research project with Macquarie University and Early Childhood Educator Wellbeing, Work Environment & Quality Interaction Project also with Macquarie University.

**What would  
progress look  
like?**

- ▶ Successful peer networks.
- ▶ Input to ensure the ACECQA workforce strategy responds to needs of small and community providers
- ▶ Development of innovative workforce development models including training to meet skill gaps
- ▶ Action taken on the strategies put forward to Minister Tudge to address immediate workforce shortages