



ELACCA response to *Independent Review of Education in Tasmania*

October 2024



The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) welcomes the opportunity to submit our response to the Tasmanian Government's *Independent Education Review*.

About ELACCA

The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) was established to promote the value of quality early learning and care as an integral part of Australia's education system.

Our 18 CEO members include some of the largest early learning providers in the country, representing both not-for-profit and for-profit services.

ELACCA members operate 2,017 long day care services, 320 preschool/kindergarten services and 88 OSHC services, covering every state and territory. They offer one-quarter of all the long day care places in Australia. Together, our members serve over 232,000 children and their families, and employ approximately 60,000 staff.

As well as promoting the value of quality early learning and the need for greater public investment, ELACCA advocates for the right of all children to access quality early learning and care, particularly children facing disadvantage. We do this by drawing on the knowledge and practical experience of our members and representing their views to decision makers in government, the media and the public.

ELACCA response to consultation draft *Independent Education Review*

ELACCA commends the Tasmanian Government on its independent review of the Tasmanian school system, with terms of reference that includes kindergarten through to Year 12, focused on high-quality teaching, and evidence-based pedagogy to improve educational outcomes and behaviour. We note that early learning and care is out of scope for this review, beyond kindergarten. We encourage the Tasmanian Government to develop policies and programs that will support the entire early learning system, for children aged birth to 8 years.

ELACCA supports a child-first approach in the adoption of any new policy or reforms for early learning and care, and the creation of a holistic early childhood development system, to ensure Tasmanian children get the best possible start in life.

Theme 2 - Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education

Importantly, the Review recognises that: *early childhood is a critical foundation for learning. Young children who are engaged in play-based learning before they start school stand a much better chance of being able to learn when they go to school – there is plenty of evidence to show its impact on future learning outcomes.* (p5)

The following responds to the guiding questions:

- *What can be done to better support students who are struggling or at risk of falling behind to get back on track?*
- *How can we ensure all Tasmanian learners get the most out of their education and reach their full potential?*

ELACCA advocates for access to two years of funded, high-quality kindergarten/preschool programs for all Tasmanian children in the years before school. The central aim of preschool is to scaffold children's growth and development for an additional two years before formal schooling, to help set them up for success in learning and in life.

The Australian Early Development Census provides evidence that many children are starting formal schooling lagging up to 2 years behind their peers, with that gap most likely to grow rather than diminish with time. Data from the last Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) found that Tasmanian children (52.7%) were below the national average (54.8%) for children identified as on track across AEDC domains, including Tasmanian children at nearly 5 percentage points below the national average on school-based language and cognitive skills¹.

We acknowledge the current Kindergarten Development Check undertaken twice a year for children enrolled in kindergarten in Tasmania. Supporting early intervention, particularly important for children from families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, is an important role undertaken by early childhood educators in kindergartens and long day care settings. Developmental delays and vulnerabilities in the early years can be identified and supported through early intervention within a quality preschool program. To further support inclusion and build capacity within the kindergarten workforce, the Tasmanian Government could also consider an initiative similar to the Victorian Government's School Readiness Funding², which promotes access to allied health and inclusion.

High-quality kindergarten/preschool supports the development of positive learning dispositions to support transition to school, and ultimately to school completion. Both of these aims result in economic benefits and productivity gains for Tasmania. Investing in high-quality early education in the years before school – above and beyond the current offering - is a strategic, high-impact, high-return investment for the Tasmania Government to ensure children start school with the best opportunity to achieve their potential.

Recommendations

Fund two years of high-quality kindergarten/preschool programs in the years before school.

Support innovative approaches to inclusion support, including building the capacity of the early learning and care workforce, building system navigation support across service systems and trialling support such as the Victorian Government's School Readiness Funding program.

Supporting connection to culture and community for children, young people and families

ELACCA supports an approach to early education that supports and promotes connection to community and culture, that is both inclusive, and celebrates and respects diversity. ELACCA supports building the capacity of early learning and care services to be culturally safe.

All children benefit from cultural diversity and acceptance. A significant proportion of our early learning and care workforce come from non-English speaking backgrounds, and can offer unique cultural perspectives and opportunities. This capability should be recognised and supported by the Tasmanian Government.

Recommendations

Build the cultural capability of the entire ECEC workforce to ensure programs and early childhood centres and environments are culturally safe.

Liaise with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, including SNAICC, and peak organisations for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities to inform and assure cultural safe environment, and identify opportunity to learn and celebrate culture and community.

¹ Data accessed (October 2024) from the Australian Early Development Census <https://www.aedc.gov.au/early-childhood/findings-from-the-aedc>

² Victorian Department of Education (accessed February 2024) <https://www.vic.gov.au/school-readiness-funding>

Theme 3 – Outcomes at the conclusion of formal years of schooling

The delivery of preschool programs, by a degree qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework, is critical to uplift Tasmanian children’s developmental trajectories as well as improve school completions, workforce engagement and overall health while also reducing engagement with the judicial system.

With 90 percent of a child’s brain development occurring prior to commencement of formal schooling, combined with the critical period of executive function development between 3 and 5 years of age, investment in early childhood education is essential to enable Tasmanian children to thrive, and fulfill their potential into adulthood.

Theme 4 - Support for our teaching workforce

The following is in response to the guiding questions:

- *How can we get more great teachers and school leaders and help them do their jobs well?*
- *How can we keep the existing workforce feeling energised and supported so they stay?*

Targeted, ongoing investment – that attracts and retains early childhood teachers and educators, builds and maintains workforce capacity and capability – is vital to uplift children’s outcomes.

The recent Jobs and Skills Australia, *The future of the Early Childhood Education and Care* report³ and Productivity Commission’s report *A path to universal early childhood education and care*⁴ highlight the importance of building and retaining a quality workforce to support high-quality learning and development in the early years, and investing in ongoing professional learning and development for all staff.

Further, the Australian Children’s Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is overseeing a ten-year national strategy for a sustainable, high-quality workforce of teachers and educators. *Shaping our Future*⁵ has a series of actions structured around attraction and retention, leadership and capability, wellbeing, qualifications and career pathways, data and evidence and professional recognition.

ELACCA stands for quality early education and care, supported by a quality, qualified and appropriately valued workforce. We urge that government to consider mechanisms to support the attraction and retention of our workforce, and build the esteem of the profession, and capacity for career progression.

The following should be considered in Tasmania to build and maintain a skilled workforce, for the delivery of high-quality kindergarten programs, ideally through a state-based workforce strategy:

- a statewide recruitment campaign like ELACCA’s Big Roles in Little Lives⁶
- initiatives to build the pipeline of future workforce, including vocational education and training and tertiary education
- scholarships, mentoring, paid practicums and other wrap-around assistance to support upskilling of the current workforce.

Further, ELACCA advocates for Governments to support the early learning sector to partner with universities and training providers to co-design qualifications to better prepare students for the profession.

For example, *From the Ground Up* is an innovative six-month leadership program for educators in ELACCA member organisations which won the 2023 Australian Council of Deans of Education Excellence and

³ Australian Government Jobs and Skills Australia (2024), *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession* <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/studies/early-childhood-education-and-care-study#studyreport>

⁴ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care* <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childhood/report>

⁵ Education Services Australia (2021), *Shaping our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children’s education and care workforce 2022–2031* <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf>

⁶ ELACCA website (accessed October 2024) <https://elacca.org.au/big-roles-in-little-lives/>

Impact award. Co-designed by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and ELACCA, the program builds and strengthens leadership skills for early-career educators and emerging and experienced leaders. There have been over 200 educators graduating across all jurisdictions in Australia, including strong representation from regional and remote areas. *From the Ground Up* is facilitated by QUT academics in collaboration with ELACCA, participants work in pairs to build their skills and knowledge that can be put into practice straight away. Along with leadership skills, the program builds confidence and creates connections and support networks for educators.

The Case Study below looks at another program co-designed by ELACCA, Initial Teacher Education Boost.

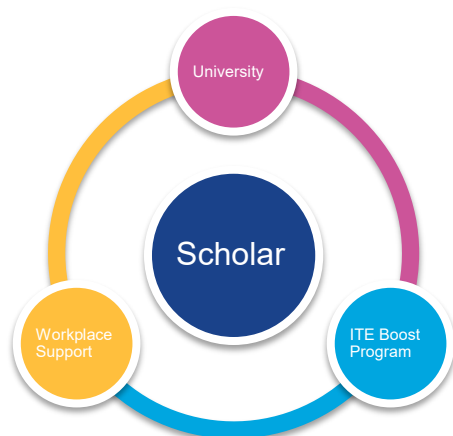
Case Study: Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Boost program

The Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Boost program was developed in response to the increasing unmet demand for early childhood teachers in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings across Australia.

In 2023, a new accelerated degree commenced – the Bachelor of Education (The Early Years) – co-designed by the University of Wollongong and ELACCA, to boost the number of early childhood teachers, by removing barriers to study for those who are already working in the sector, looking to upskill. This degree co-design was supported with funding from the New South Wales Department of Education with scholarships now available for participants.

ELACCA is working with other universities to develop, co design and deliver bespoke intensive programs to upskill diploma qualified educators to achieve a teaching degree qualification. ELACCA's involvement in the co design of these courses ensures that the quality of the coursework is not compromised.

To successfully increase the number of early childhood teachers in the ECEC sector, it is necessary to build support infrastructure to 'wraparound' educators whilst they undertake study. The ITE Boost program works on the principle of a triadic collaboration between the university, the scholar's workplace, and ELACCA.



University courses in the ITE Boost program have been co-designed with ELACCA to focus on reducing barriers and obstacles to completion of the degree, meaning that the university experience is uniquely designed and individualised to a cohort of learners who already have a diploma qualification and sector experience. This includes consideration of professional placements, assessment styles and how the learning content is delivered. Our relationship with the university continues for the duration of the program allowing ELACCA to provide ongoing input into the course design.

Workplaces with scholars in the program need to offer extensive support strategically tailored to their studying educators to ensure that they can complete the course. Workplace support contributes significantly to a scholar's successful completion of the teaching degree. This support should be tailored to individual scholars needs and may include study leave and/or financial contributions.

ELACCA delivers centralised support through the ITE Boost program, connecting early to inform and work with educators and their workplace from initial queries through to the attainment of an early childhood teaching qualification drawing on contemporary research on retention and reduced attrition of early childhood professionals engaged in tertiary studies.

Recommendation

That the Tasmanian Government develop and fund a state-specific workforce strategy that aligns with *Shaping our Future*, and includes the following action to build and retain a quality early learning and care workforce:

- A targeted recruitment campaign, such as ELACCA's *Big Roles in Little Lives* campaign to attract, reattract and retain a robust early learning and care workforce
- Increased opportunities for educator upskilling to become teachers and supports innovative delivery of teaching qualifications.
- Fund targeted mentoring for new early childhood teachers, with release time and remuneration for teachers provided the mentoring.
- Provide a service location subsidy to all teachers in regional and remote areas, and other unserved/underserved locations.

Thank you for considering our submission.

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