



Government of Western Australia
Department of Training
and Workforce Development



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WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN

Regional Early Childhood Education and Care

May 2023



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The State Training Board, in collaboration with Community Skills WA (CSWA) explored issues affecting the early childhood education and care sector in regional Western Australia, and how the training sector may be able to assist.

To inform this program of work, the State Training Board and CSWA held industry consultation sessions with key stakeholders in the sector.

CSWA subsequently prepared the *Regional Early Childhood Education and Care report* which was endorsed by the State Training Board.

The report provides nine recommended strategies under the following seven key themes:

Key theme 1: Tightening regional labour markets

Key theme 2: Importance of local workforce initiatives and Aboriginal workforce development needs

Key theme 3: Targeted promotion of early childhood education career pathways

Key theme 4: Untapped labour markets

Key theme 5: Barriers of the training and regulatory environment

Key theme 6: Housing affordability

Key theme 7: Overseas workforce

The State Government recognises the importance of the early childhood education and care sector and the fundamental role that it plays in supporting workforce participation, particularly for women.

The State Government has already embarked upon addressing many of the recommended strategies in the report. Two key strategies include the establishment of a Job Ready pilot program specifically for the early childhood education and care sector through the Department of Training and Workforce Development and implementation of the State Government's election commitment to attract, retain and support early childhood education and care workers in regional Western Australia through the provision of grant funding by the Department of Communities.

The State Government will continue to focus its efforts on initiatives and programs to further support the sector and increase the pipeline of skilled workers to meet industry's needs.

Some of the recommended strategies also provide an opportunity for CSWA to take a lead role in advocating on behalf of the sector, working in collaboration with both State and Commonwealth Government agencies.

WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN

Regional Early Childhood Education and Care

KEY THEME 1: TIGHTENING REGIONAL LABOUR MARKETS

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

There are significant skill shortages for many roles within the Health Care and Social Assistance sector including early childhood education and care (ECEC). Attracting, developing and retaining a high quality workforce in the ECEC sector continues to be a significant challenge, with this challenge magnified in regional and remote areas. Consultations by CSWA confirmed that stakeholders were keen to explore how the Job Ready Program could be expanded into ECEC.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Progress the development of a Job Ready Program into ECEC.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

The State Government established the ECEC Job Ready pilot program in October 2022. This program provides the students with a pathway to the ECEC traineeship, employment or further learning. This program contains a skill set from the Certificate III in ECEC and a work placement.

In addition, State and Territory governments will work with the Commonwealth government to identify priority areas where government can collaborate to support better outcomes across the ECEC system with a particular focus on workforce shortages.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

Existing measure

KEY THEME 2: IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL WORKFORCE INITIATIVES AND ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

Increased workforce development, particularly in regional and remote WA is needed to address the significant disadvantage and bridge the gap for the Aboriginal population. Opportunities to strengthen programs in Aboriginal communities that support the local workforce to obtain skills and qualifications for a career pathway in early learning should be further explored and developed.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Strengthen current programs in Aboriginal communities that support the local workforce to obtain skills and qualifications for a career pathway in early learning.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

This recommendation aligns with the State Government's establishment of an ECEC Job Ready pilot program. The program is a unique collaboration between the State Government, North Regional TAFE, Community Skills WA, Broome Local Jobs and local industry. It's being offered on a full-time and part-time basis to cater to identified job seeker cohorts, with wrap-around support services also provided by Nyamba Buru Yawuru to assist in providing a tangible pathway for local Aboriginal participants into the ECEC sector.

There are also a range of other programs available that support the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in training and/or employment, including:

- » Aboriginal School Based Training Program that supports Aboriginal students in years 10, 11 and 12 to develop skills needed for further study or employment;
- » Western Australian Group Training Program that provides funding to participating GTOs who employ apprentices and trainees in priority groups (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) and support them through to completion and/or securing employment; and
- » Jobs and Skills Centres that provide specialised services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

Existing programs support this strategy.

KEY THEME 3: TARGETED PROMOTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CAREER PATHWAYS

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

Mapping current initiatives to inform the Year 9 Career Taster Program (CTP) may assist in the development of targeted materials for regional school students and identification of local champions. It will also assist in promoting career pathways in ECEC.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Map current initiatives to inform the Year 9 CTP.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

Five ECEC related CTP experiences have been made available to school students through the CTP across a number of regional and metropolitan locations. Experiences range from hands on activities at ECEC centres to information and taster activities at TAFE college campuses.

The Department of Training and Workforce Development will continue to pursue opportunities to include further ECEC experiences in the CTP.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

Existing measures

KEY THEME 3: TARGETED PROMOTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CAREER PATHWAYS (CONTINUED)

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

Promotion of career pathways and employment opportunities in the ECEC sector is a way to attract people to the sector and ensure there is a pipeline of labour for the future.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Target the promotion of employment opportunities and career pathways.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

There are a range of initiatives in place that promote training and career/employment pathways in the ECEC sector, including:

- » Low fee existing worker traineeships being made available for key ECEC qualifications from 1 October 2021 to assist in addressing the urgent need of the ECEC sector to upskill their workforce. These traineeships have been promoted through:
 - » dedicated website content and resources, and a promotional campaign on the Department of Training and Workforce Development's social media channels; and
 - » direct engagement with relevant industry associations and employers.
- » A State-wide promotional campaign to raise awareness of publicly funded *Lower fees, local skills* (LFLS) training opportunities and the employment pathways available. The Certificate III and Diploma in ECEC qualifications have been subsidised at the LFLS fee rate since 2021 and became fee-free in 2023, making training more affordable;
- » The Certificate III in ECEC being included on the Department of Training and Workforce Development's Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivered to Secondary School Students Funded List; and
- » Promotion of the ECEC Job Ready program on the Department of Training and Workforce Development's Skilling Solutions webpage on jobsandskills.wa.gov.au

Further action, timelines and responsibility

Existing measures

KEY THEME 4: UNTAPPED LABOUR MARKETS

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

Opportunities to capture skills obtained by individuals in other areas is needed, as there is a potential untapped labour market of skilled employees who have the necessary skills and abilities for a career in ECEC but whose skills are not formally recognised. An RPL process that does not compromise outcomes but can recognise existing knowledge and experience and enable gap training could assist in engaging a broader potential labour pool for the sector.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Clarify recognition of prior learning (RPL) models for the existing workforce and for those wishing to re-engage with the sector.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

RTOs are already providing RPL assessment services in accordance with the *RTO Standards 2015*. This service may be subsidised if the RTO is contracted by the Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

The Department of Training and Workforce Development to develop, in consultation with CSWA, appropriate information and resources to clarify existing RPL services and promote these through a communications strategy.

Timeline: 6 months

The Department of Training and Workforce Development to explore the possibility of expanding the existing Skills Recognition Apprenticeship Program (SRAP) to include selected qualifications in ECEC. The SRAP provides an accelerated pathway to qualification completion for those individuals who have existing skills, experience and knowledge from working in the industry or prior learning.

Timeline: 12 months

KEY THEME 4: UNTAPPED LABOUR MARKETS (CONTINUED)

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

A potential pool of applicants, such as retirees, could be tapped into to fill the current labour market need or provide the much needed mentoring support for new graduates. Mentoring and volunteering opportunities within the local employment pool should be further investigated.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Investigate mentoring and volunteering opportunities within the local employment pool.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

Industry may lead the work in exploring local mentoring and volunteering opportunities for the ECEC sector.

In addition, the 10 Regional Co-ordinating Committees (RCCs) established throughout Western Australia as an outcome of the Regional Skills Summits held in 2021 are working with key stakeholders in each region to identify and develop practical actions to address local training and workforce development issues. The 10 RCCs will be expanded to 12 in 2023 to include Esperance and Gascoyne regions.

Some common themes of RCC regional action plans include:

- » Attracting and retaining workers with the right skills in the region, particularly in those industries where there is a demand for skilled workers;
- » Supporting young peoples' participation in training and employment;
- » Providing high quality, flexible and responsive education and training to meet the needs of the local community, including under-represented groups; and
- » Supplementing the workforce with skilled migrants to fill employment vacancies unable to be filled by the local workforce.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

CSWA to work with industry stakeholders to explore mentoring or volunteering opportunities for the ECEC sector.

Timeline: 6 – 12 months

KEY THEME 5: BARRIERS OF THE TRAINING AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

The introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012 in the ECEC sector regulated the minimum qualification requirements for workers. The NQF was introduced to encourage an optimal quality of ECEC. Regional and remote ECEC providers face specific challenges in meeting these requirements, with around 10 per cent of ECEC services in outer regional and remote areas in Australia having waivers in place for staffing arrangements under the NQF.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Further investigate minimum qualification requirements with Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to identify other possible occupations for inclusion.

State Government response

Recommendation supported in principle – The Department of Communities will continue to work with ACECQA and other jurisdictions to ensure that qualification requirements under the NQF remain fit for purpose and nationally supported. Industry is also encouraged to raise the issue with ACECQA directly.

The requirements for qualified staff in both educator and early childhood teacher roles are important to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children in care. Requirements are nationally agreed to ensure a consistent framework and quality across Australia. The State Government has several initiatives in place aimed at supporting the ECEC workforce including:

- » Ongoing work to implement the National Workforce Strategy in line with other jurisdictions including actions to review staffing and qualification requirements;
- » Providing support for attraction and retention measures targeted to regional ECEC; and
- » Working with out of school hours care peak bodies and providers to broaden allowable qualifications for educators in this sector whilst maintaining safety and quality requirements.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

CSWA to raise the minimum qualification requirement issue directly with ACECQA.

Department of Communities to continue to work with ACECQA and other jurisdictions to ensure that qualification requirements under the NQF remain fit for purpose and nationally supported. The Department of Communities to also consult with the ECEC sector, where appropriate, on these matters.

KEY THEME 6: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

The shortage of affordable housing is an issue consistently raised by stakeholders as a workforce barrier, impacting on the recruitment of employees and the provision of other services in regional areas. A whole-of-government approach may be useful to increase the accessibility and affordability of regional areas, and attract intrastate and interstate workers. Incentives or subsidies, such as travel and relocation allowances, funding for remote training, housing, tailored professional development and income incentives should be explored.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Explore the implementation of incentives to assist with the attraction and retention of a high quality ECEC workforce into regional areas.

State Government response

Recommendation supported.

The State Government's election commitment provides \$1 million to local governments in regional areas to fund retention and attraction workforce packages for ECEC workers by providing access to a range of activities. In 2022 under this program, the Department of Communities provided 14 local governments with \$330,340 to support the provision of ECEC in the regions. Funded projects included:

- » support for accommodation and relocation subsidies for educators;
- » professional development for existing staff; and
- » contributing to course costs for new trainees.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

Existing measure

KEY THEME 7: OVERSEAS WORKFORCE

CSWA observations and recommended strategy

Skilled migrants play an important role in meeting industry's need for experienced workers. Possible strategies that may assist in improving the availability of skilled migrants for the ECEC sector include:

1. stipulating ECEC settings for pre-primary teachers to the priority migration skilled occupations list;
2. decreasing requirements for qualifications for sponsorship i.e. recognition of 2 years of work in a previous role in the sector not just in the nominated role;
3. removal of working hour caps for students on student visas in the Early Learning Sector, which would immediately increase labour availability for some workers, noting that the hospitality sector has this in place currently; and
4. prioritising visa processing for Childcare/Early Learning Sector including Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) applications and any visa transfers and reduced fees.

CSWA recommended strategy:

Explore the implementation of strategies that aim to optimise the availability of skilled migrants for the ECEC sector and improve the utilisation of skills, qualifications and experience.

State Government response

Recommendation supported in principle –

Proposed strategies are relating to the Commonwealth Government migration settings. Industry is encouraged to discuss the recommended strategies directly with the Commonwealth Government Department of Home Affairs. There are a number of Designated Area Migration Agreements already in place in various parts of regional Western Australia. These agreements provide various occupations, including ECEC occupations, with concessions to the usual requirements that migrants/employers would otherwise need to adhere to.

The approaches and strategies currently being undertaken by the State Government in pursuing skilled migrants include:

- » Expansion of the State Nominated Migration Program (SNMP) and re-opening of the program to offshore applicants, with the State Government securing an interim allocation of 8,140 SNMP places from the Commonwealth Government;
- » The inclusion of over 300 occupations on the Graduate Occupation List to help attract international students to WA;
- » Implementation of a regional TAFE international student bursary program, available from January 2023, to assist international students with costs and attract them to live, work and study in regional WA, which will assist in relieving regional skill shortages. Two ECEC qualifications are included in the scope of this program, to be offered by Central Regional TAFE, South Regional TAFE and North Regional TAFE;
- » Establishment of a new Skilled Migrant Employment Register to connect skilled migrants with WA jobs. The free register can be accessed through the Migration WA Portal and has been designed to support skilled migrants to settle in WA, including in regional areas, while giving employers visibility of new talent; and
- » Opening of the WA borders and promotion of WA, through the 'Build a life in WA' and 'Western Australia – it's like no other' marketing campaigns, which are aimed at attracting interstate skilled workers to WA.

Further action, timelines and responsibility

CSWA to discuss the recommended strategies directly with the Commonwealth Government Department of Home Affairs.