



Australian Education Union Submission

to the

COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group – Education, Skills, Training and Early Childhood Development

on

A national quality framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

Angelo Gavrielatos
Federal President

Susan Hopgood
Federal Secretary

Australian Education Union
Ground Floor
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Telephone: 61 3 9693 1800
Facsimile: 61 3 9693 1805
E-mail aeu@aeu.federal.org.au

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
General Principles.....	3
Free and Public Early Childhood Education and Care	4
Age Cohort and Teaching Hours	5
Teacher Child Ratios.....	5
Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education and Care ..	6
Prioritising Children from Disadvantaged backgrounds.....	7
Children with Additional Needs	7
Workforce Issues	7
A National Quality Framework	10
A National Early Years Learning Framework.....	13
Supports and resources for the Early Years Learning Framework	14
Consultation with Stakeholders	14

Introduction

The Australian Education Union represents 175,000 teachers and educators in the primary, secondary, TAFE and early childhood sectors throughout Australia. As such, it is uniquely placed to represent the views of early childhood teachers and educators on the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

The AEU has long campaigned for recognition by governments at State/Territory and Commonwealth level of the critical importance of the early childhood years of education to children's educational and life chances and to their families and the community. The AEU has particularly campaigned for universal access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) delivered by degree qualified early childhood teachers for children in the years prior to school, and accordingly welcomes the new COAG and Federal Government initiatives to extend provision of ECE, in these terms, to all Australian children.

The AEU has also campaigned for systems and resources to support improved quality of early childhood education and care services, to tackle disadvantage and to support parental engagement with their child's education and development. In this context, the AEU welcomes the commitment of the Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the States and Territories, to pursue a reform agenda that has at its core a desire to achieve outcomes of this nature.

The values described in Chapter 11 of the discussion paper are consistent with the principles and policies of the AEU, as detailed in various parts of this submission.

The AEU wishes to engage constructively with the Federal, State and Territory Governments, COAG, the COAG Productivity Working Group and other concerned parties in the development and rollout of the various aspects and strategies associated with the reform agenda, in particular with the rollout of universal ECE provision for Australia's four-year-old children.

The AEU welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission, and believes the development of a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care should take into account the following matters.

General Principles

The AEU believes that a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care should reflect the need to provide all children, regardless of sex, language, culture, ethnicity, religion or disability, with quality Early Childhood Education and Care capable of maximising their long-term education and life potentials and capacities for lifelong learning. This requires a commitment to equity and excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care, to support ECEC teachers, early childhood professionals and learning centres, and to address the issues that impede just and fair educational outcomes for all.

The National Preschool Education Inquiry, 2004, found that international research clearly demonstrates that Early Childhood Education is a highly effective investment in maximising a child's potential for educational achievement throughout her or his life, and that this is especially so for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹

The Australian Education Union accordingly welcomes the Commonwealth and COAG recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care and views the commitment to placing ECE amongst its top priorities as a positive development.

In this context, the AEU supports the stated aim in the discussion paper of promoting social inclusion, including recognition and respect for diversity. However, the AEU believes that the achievement of true educational equity and opportunity for all requires going beyond the concept of an entitlement to "equality of access" mentioned in the discussion paper² or the provision of "choices" as these paradigms inevitably lead to inequity of outcomes. The promotion of equity and the provision of opportunity for **all** requires governments to intervene proactively to promote real equality, improve outcomes and overcome disadvantage. The AEU therefore believes the provision of universal access to ECE should be underpinned by equality of outcomes rather than the more limited concept of equality of opportunity.

Similarly, the discussion paper and the COAG Human Capital Agenda puts a great deal of emphasis on the 'human capital' aspects of Early Childhood Education and Care and its importance in economic development. While this aspect is important, the agenda should have a greater emphasis on the importance of early childhood education and care in developing an individual's intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic capabilities, and the skills and values required for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. The AEU believes it is vital to recognise the role ECEC plays as a vehicle for social good in achieving fairness, equity and social justice.

Free and Public Early Childhood Education and Care

The AEU believes ECEC must be provided through quality public provision, free, secular, universally accessible and inclusive of all, and treats all the same regardless of ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background or ability to pay. In particular, the AEU believes that the profit motive is incompatible with the ECEC's primary ethical obligations to deliver quality education and care for all children.

The AEU notes the Commonwealth's commitment to ensuring all four year olds will be eligible to receive 15 hours of Government-funded early learning programs per week for a minimum of 40 weeks per year, which is a significant step towards the AEU's policy goal of 20 hours per week. The requirement for all early childhood education and care

¹ Walker, K. 2004. *For All Our Children. National Preschool Education Inquiry Report*. Australian Education Union. <http://www.aefederal.org.au/Ec/ecfullreport.pdf>

² *A National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care*. COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group – Education, Skills, Training and Early Childhood Development, August 2008. p. 36.

services catering to four-year-olds to have sufficient degree-qualified early childhood teachers to meet this entitlement is a significant and commendable step.

However, the AEU is concerned that the present proposal, whilst referring to government-funded programs, does not include a clear and unequivocal commitment to the abolition of fees or the free public provision of ECEC. Access to, and affordability of, preschool education for families varies significantly across the states and territories, with considerable fees and user costs for ECEC remaining in some states. Evidence suggests that the capacity to pay limits access and opportunities for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. This ultimately undermines the goal of universal access to ECEC services.

Age Cohort

The AEU recognises the importance of a well qualified workforce in producing the best outcomes for all children and supports endeavours at both a State/Territory and Commonwealth level for the growth and development of the workforce. AEU policy outlines that early childhood education must be delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers for both three and four year olds, consistent with academic literature that indicates this maximises the benefits of ECE for individual long term educational development.³ This is highlighted by a 2001 OECD report, which states that trends ‘...in all countries is toward full coverage of the 3- to- 6 year old age group, aiming to give all children at least two years of free publicly-funded provision before beginning compulsory schooling...often within the education system’.⁴

The COAG discussion paper also describes the strong research base supporting the importance of child development in the first five years of schooling.⁵ Whilst the AEU welcomes the commitment to ECE delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher for four year olds as an important first step, we believe that the longer term aim should be the provision of universal access to publicly provided education for both three and four year olds. The AEU Early Childhood Policy (2007)⁶ (see attached) outlines that this provision could be introduced through a ten year strategy of cooperation between state and federal governments.

Teacher Child Ratios

There is considerable evidence showing the importance of group size and teacher-child ratios to the outcomes of ECEC. The AEU is pleased that the discussion paper recognises the importance of appropriate teacher-child ratios and group sizes.⁷ The AEU believes

³ See Hull, R. and Edsall, S. (2001) *No Small Matter*. (AEU Research Report). Chaps. 3 & 4.

⁴ OECD, 2001, *Starting Strong, Early Childhood Education and Care*.

⁵ *A National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care*. Op Cit. pp. 30 - 31

⁶ Australian Education Union *Early Childhood Policy 2007*, clause 3.5.

<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Policy/EarlyChild2007.pdf>

⁷ *A National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care*. Op Cit. p. 14.

that an appropriate ratio is one qualified teacher to every ten four-year-old children in early childhood education settings. Details of appropriate teacher child ratios and group sizes, taking into account a mix of fully qualified teachers and trained assistants is detailed in the AEU Early Childhood Policy (as attached). Funding agreements need to be established between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to ensure compliance with national standards on staff student ratios, group sizes and teacher caseloads.

Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC

The AEU welcomes and supports the Federal Government and COAG commitment to prioritise the expansion of ECEC programs into Indigenous communities. The data indicates that only about half of Indigenous children participate in ECEC, a figure considerably lower than that of the wider community.⁸ The provision of ECEC to Indigenous children is likely to lead to significant improvements in levels of Indigenous education as a whole, as well as other positive social benefits. The AEU believes that prioritising provision of ECEC for Indigenous children is a vital instrument of equity and social justice as well as a fundamental human right.

The MCEETYA Joint Ministers' Communiqué of 7 July 2006 agreed to examine the implementation of two years preschool education for Indigenous children.⁹ In this context the AEU regards Prime Minister Rudd's commitment in his Apology to the Stolen Generations to providing Indigenous four-year-olds in a remote Aboriginal communities with ECE within five years as a welcome first step in what should be a longer term goal of prioritising the provision of ECE for both three and four year old Indigenous children.

In prioritising ECEC for Indigenous children it is necessary to act proactively to dismantle barriers which discourage Indigenous participation in ECEC programs, including fees and other costs such as clothing and transport, location of ECEC services and any additional impediments.

The AEU strongly agrees with the contention expressed in the discussion paper concerning the importance of cultural recognition in the education of Indigenous children.¹⁰ The AEU believes that providers of ECEC for Indigenous children must recognise that a focus on identity is central to learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Accordingly, programs need to be culturally appropriate and inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies, including the appropriate recognition and utilisation of children's first languages. Strategies must be developed to increase the participation of Indigenous parents in education and care programs.

⁸ Kronemann, M. (2007) *Early Childhood Education 2007 Update*. p. 9.

⁹ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Twentieth Meeting, *Joint Minister's Communiqué*, 7 July 2006.

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/MC20_Joint_Communique.pdf

¹⁰ *A National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care*. Op Cit. p. 36.

The AEU believes that a comprehensive sequence of Indigenous studies must be offered to ECE teachers and early childhood education and care workers in both pre-service and in-service training. Research has determined that this is vital to the delivery of effective ECEC for Indigenous children.

In addition to this, proactive measures to encourage Indigenous people to enter the ECEC professions must be in place. Staffing policies that give priority to appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff should be implemented.

Prioritising Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

As recognised in the discussion paper,¹¹ there is a considerable body of academic evidence that ECEC produces long-term educational and social advantages for students from disadvantaged backgrounds even greater than it does for students from the community as a whole. The AEU accordingly believes that the expansion of ECEC programs to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds should be a priority in the roll out of universal provision.

The AEU also believes that in targeting students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds it is necessary to act proactively to dismantle barriers that discourage the participation of students and parents from such backgrounds in ECE programs. These include fees (in systems that do not yet provide for free access), clothing, transport, location of ECEC services and other impediments. Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should work together to ensure that programs address such issues. An ECEC Equity Program is a possible way to address such issues.

Children with Additional Needs

Students with additional needs must be recognised through the provision of adequate funding above other costs of ECEC to provide adequate support. These include access to specialised multidisciplinary services, professional support staff, trained integration aides and professional development for ECEC teachers and staff on issues related to children with additional needs as well as specialist teachers in appropriate ratios. Group sizes and staff/student ratios should be reduced for each child who meets the criteria for this assistance.

Workforce Issues

The AEU welcomes and supports the Federal Government and COAG commitment that ECEC should be delivered by properly qualified early childhood teachers with four years training at an appropriate tertiary institution. The AEU also recognises the important roles played by teaching assistants and qualified child care workers in integrated, co-located, wrap around and support services and believes that all workers in ECEC should

¹¹ Ibid.. p. 7.

be appropriately qualified for the roles and tasks that are performed in the various ECEC settings. Within this context, as the discussion paper points out, there are “significant demand, supply and retention issues for Early Childhood Education and Care professionals.”¹²

Improving salaries, conditions and the recognition of the status of ECE teachers, and all education workers within ECEC, is crucial to developing the effective workforce a quality ECEC system requires. Many areas of teaching are currently experiencing teacher shortages, and this is likely to impact through the ECEC sector as the expansion of universal provision for four-year-olds unrolls. The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments should work together to improve teaching conditions and remuneration in the interests of ensuring the provision of quality education in all sectors including ECEC.

All teachers and education workers in ECEC should have the right to appropriate recognition, remuneration, career paths and status and proper industrial representation through registered unions to ensure the protection of industrial rights. ECE teachers should accordingly have opportunities to full-time permanent reasonably paid positions with opportunities for career development and expansion. Proactive measures should be taken to avoid casualisation, limited term contracts or unwanted part-time employment.

The AEU is therefore concerned that 15 hours ECE teaching could lead to unwanted casualisation as it is less than a full-time teaching load. Measures must ensure that 15 hours provision does not lead to unwanted part-time employment, which would have a counter-productive impact on attraction and retention.

The expansion of ECEC services will require a considerable increase in the qualified ECEC workforce, fully qualified ECE teachers, assistants, and qualified child carers. The AEU supports provisions proposed by the Federal Government of extra university places for ECE educators, the support for HECS relief for ECE students, and the proposals to cover the TAFE fees of childcare trainees. These must however go hand in hand with improved terms and conditions of employment. Significant differences between the terms and conditions of degree-qualified teachers working in ECE and those working within the school education sector could potentially exacerbate attraction and retention problems.

It is likely that lack of parity in salaries and conditions between the ECE and primary sectors may encourage dual qualified (EC/Primary) teachers to elect to teach in the school sector, if the pay and conditions are more favourable, which in many cases they are. In addition, strategies to up-skill child-care workers with teacher qualifications may not have a favourable impact on the sector, for the same reasons stated above. Of particular importance, given the high incidence of for-profit providers in some states and territories, will be ensuring that the terms and conditions of ECE teachers in long day care services are no less than those of their colleagues in other service types.

¹² Ibid. P. 24.

Providing qualified teachers for ECE in remote areas will pose a particular challenge. The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments must work together to ensure that appropriate housing, relocation assistance, living and travel allowances and other requirements are provided to attract teachers to remote areas and support them while they are there. Structures should be put in place to ensure that work in remote areas is recognised in the career structures of ECE teaching, and that working in a remote area is not an impediment to career mobility. Consideration must also be given to the issue of under-employment (insufficient hours) resulting from small populations. Systems, which support options for cross-sectoral employment, for example EC/Primary, as well as across the pre-compulsory years, will provide greater opportunity. Similarly, attraction and retention of staff may also be impacted upon by hours of employment resulting from fluctuations in the birthrate and resultant ECE enrolments. These must be buffered against through system and workforce planning processes.

The AEU is concerned about the policies of State and Territory education departments which deny teachers and educators who come from remote communities the same rights to department supplied housing afforded teachers from outside these communities. This has a particular effect on Indigenous teachers, particularly those recruited in their home communities, and works against the policy of encouraging people from these communities to become teachers. In order to work effectively teachers need to be provided with appropriate housing.

In addressing the Quality Consultations forum in Melbourne on 8 August, The Hon Maxine McKew MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care said;

“Our long term goal should be to ensure that staff/child ratios are evidence-based, reflect internationally accepted best practice, and support a high quality early childhood education and care experience.

“There must also be alignment on qualifications. It goes without saying that enhanced professional qualifications are critical to the success of the new framework.

“I know there’s some concern in the sector about our emphasis on four-year trained teachers. However we believe four-year trained teachers are a prerequisite to achieving our policy goals. Not because they have a qualification per se, but because international studies have found that it is not the qualification itself that affects outcomes, but the staff member’s ability to create a better pedagogic environment that makes the difference. So we’re looking for people - indeed - we’re trying to encourage the training of educators, who will be leaders in learning and development.

“And for those without four-year qualifications but with a passion for children and their welfare, we will work with their employers, with training institutions

and with them, to ensure they have every opportunity to further their professional development and improve their skills if that is what they choose.”¹³

The AEU applauds the government’s goal and the articulated commitment to the place of four-year trained teachers within that reform. Nevertheless, in the haste to fill the shortage of qualified early childhood teachers, care must be taken not to undermine the integrity of the qualification and thus the government’s investment and commitment. To this end, the AEU believes that registration of early childhood teachers should be required in all States and Territories, as is the case with teachers in other levels of education.

The AEU also believes there should be articulated and accredited pathways for early childhood education workers to seek further relevant qualifications, including to teacher status. Further, the AEU believes that proper accreditation and registration procedures must be adopted for all early childhood education workers.

A National Quality Framework

Parents and children deserve to know that high standards are in place in all ECEC centres and that children in them are provided with the best possible Early Childhood Education and Care possible to maximise children’s learning potential and prepare them in the best way possible for their further education and lives. It is vital that State, Territory and Federal Governments work together to ensure that the highest possible standards are in place in all ECEC centres throughout Australia. A National Quality Framework is one mechanism that can help to ensure these standards are met, both that ECEC centres and teachers meet their responsibilities and that governments fulfil their system responsibilities to provide them with the resources to do so.

The AEU believes that a number of fundamental standards are essential to quality ECEC and should be recognised in the National Quality Framework. These include;

- appropriate child teacher ratios and group sizes, appropriately qualified and trained teachers and education workers, and enriching, well equipped, caring and secure environments in approved and accredited locations, all of which should be defined and enforced by regulation;
- Early Childhood Education should be coordinated and delivered by qualified early childhood teachers in developmentally appropriate, educationally sound, and culturally inclusive learning environments;
- all settings accredited to provide early childhood education must provide an appropriately trained teacher for each group of children accessing preschool education and meet other standards which will ensure quality;

¹³ McKew, Maxine. 2008. Quality Consultations Speech. Quality Consultations Citiclub Hotel, Queen Street, Melbourne, August 8.

- actively engaging parents in the expanding development of their children, in acknowledgement of their critical role, rights and needs in caring for and educating their children;
- a quality preschool education reflects a belief in the uniqueness of childhood by respecting children as they are now and who they are right now.

The AEU believes that quality Early Childhood Education and Care is strengthened by providing quality transitions, where possible by integrating into or co-locating with primary school. ECEC services should be co-located with primary schools or linked with school services to facilitate integration with the early years of schooling. Government primary schools should be regarded as the preferred locations for ECEC centres, although centres may also be situated in other areas that meet local demand provided the links with the early years of schooling are maintained.

Further, reasonable salaries, conditions and career paths for teachers and other education workers are necessary to quality provision in order to encourage talented people to enter and remain in the ECEC teaching and caring professions. The AEU welcomes the fact that all of these elements are mentioned in some way in the discussion paper and recognised by COAG and the Federal Government. Federal, State and Territory Governments must work together to ensure that ECEC centres are provided with the resources to achieve these standards.

Accountability for the quality of education and care which ECEC centres, teachers and education workers provide is essential. It is a concept supported by ECEC centres, teachers, education workers, and by the Australian Education Union. Parents, students and the public have a right to know that teachers and education workers are competent, professional, and engaged in high quality teaching and learning practices.

There is, however, a very great deal of difference between an accountability system based on supporting teachers, education workers and ECEC centres and recognising their professionalism and the use of mistrust, unreasonable sanctions and public blame and shame as accountability mechanisms. The AEU is accordingly deeply concerned that the proposed A – E rating system or any similar ranking mechanism will be counterproductive to the stated aims of improving standards, communicating relevant and accurate information to parents, and driving improvement. There is strong evidence base that such an approach leads to a lowering of standards, an unfair vilification of institutions and teachers serving disadvantaged communities and an increase in educational inequity. A recent OECD report described the effect ranking schools had on the quality of education in England,

“Many educationalists claim that these ranking lists have had an unfortunate influence on public perceptions. Certainly, the consequences for the individual school, as well as for the individual pupil, are often negative, and it is clear that the construction of the tables favours schools that are already advantaged. Less successful schools have to fight against the following vicious circle: bad reputation, worsening school atmosphere, decreasing identification of the pupils

with their school, decreasing number of pupils, reduction of resources, decreasing job satisfaction and motivation among staff, lack of applications of well-qualified teachers for this school, worse quality of lessons, decreasing pupil achievement, worse results in the league tables.”¹⁴

While the report refers to the effects of rankings on primary and secondary schools, there is little reason to believe the effects would be greatly different on ECEC centres if the proposed A – E system or any similar ranking mechanism is implemented in Australia. Nor is there evidence that such a system would improve informed parental choice when such choice is constrained by the availability and affordability of places. Of concern to the AEU that in these circumstances any guilt or anxiety parents may have about the placement of their child in a particular service will be compounded by their inability to respond to the rating allocated to that service.

Far from feeding continuous improvement as the discussion paper claims, an A – E ranking system or any similar ranking mechanism would be likely to create a hierarchy of advantaged and more disadvantaged ECEC centres, inevitably impacting worst on centres with the most disadvantaged cohorts, harming the very children and communities the program is most aimed at helping. The AEU accordingly strongly believes a National Quality Framework should not contain an A – E or any similar “blame and shame” ranking system.

The AEU believes support for collaborative and supportive structures need to be at the centre of a National Quality Framework. As stated earlier, ECEC centres facing challenges for a variety of reasons need to know they will be assisted by a culture of proactive support. This should include support for programs and resources to address disadvantage and special needs. The AEU believes a culture of improvement is a culture of teacher and education worker professionalism. Measures driving improvement must acknowledge and support the professional judgement of teachers and others. The AEU accordingly supports consultative approaches to decision making at the individual centre level, and believes support for such structures should form a part of a National Quality Framework

Commitments to standards and continuous improvement should include support for the professional development of teachers and other education workers. All teachers and early childhood education workers must be able to access this professional development in order to keep abreast of educational research, practice and technological change.

It is AEU’s belief that delivery of flexible and responsive children’s services must not lessen or eliminate standards that establish the pre-conditions of quality service provision. The AEU believes that service standards should be principally established on the basis of whether services are home based or centre-based but there will need to be the capacity within this structure to provide for some service type specific provisions, for example in-venue Family Day Care (FDC) and Out of School Hours Care (OSHC).

¹⁴ Pont, B, Nusche, D, Moorman, H. 2008. *Improving School Leadership*. OECD. Vol. II p. 115

The AEU believes this model of standards does not inhibit the development of multi-service types. Various centre-based programs (preschool, long day care, occasional care, OSHC) could be able to co-locate in any combination and could be joined by a FDC service (co-coordinating unit).

The AEU believes that, whilst preschool can be delivered across a range of settings, it should be the responsibility of the department responsible for education in each state and territory to monitor and report on preschool delivery for four year olds.

A National Early Years Learning Framework

The AEU supports the proposal for a National Early Years Learning Framework, which aligns with the AEU's policy of a national plan for Early Childhood Education. The AEU agrees that it should be developed in cooperation with all levels of government, and should provide a broad and adaptable framework around which curricula appropriate to the needs of different cohorts may be built.

The AEU agrees with the contention in the discussion paper that such a framework should be “an overarching document that describes the broad parameters”¹⁵ and should not be over-prescriptive. The framework should enable states and territories and individual centres to innovate, respond and adapt curriculum to their particular needs. In addition, it must facilitate professional decision-making by teachers about curriculum and programs, and allow for flexibility for ECEC centres catering to different cohorts to achieve educational standards in different ways. The AEU also agrees that ECE must be “accessible through a range of settings”¹⁶ to cater to the requirements of diverse children and communities throughout Australia, and for curricula to be delivered in manners and settings that are appropriate to these communities and cohorts.

Within this context ECE learning should be age appropriate, play based and recognise the differences in the ways children learn. Such learning should be holistic in approach, taking as its focus a developmentally appropriate methodology and contextually appropriate strategies. The AEU opposes curriculum based on formal assessment in early childhood.

Along with the above, the AEU believes that early childhood education curriculum should be child focused and thus incorporate:

- knowledge about how children learn;
- knowledge of the individual differences of children;
- the need to provide continuity of learning experiences across, between and within all settings of early childhood education.

¹⁵ *A National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care*. Op Cit. p. 27

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 34.

Further, the AEU believes that developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum should display the following characteristics:

- attention to how young children learn through teaching strategies which include observing, modelling, facilitating, supporting and challenging them as learners;
- progression from early to middle childhood;
- a view of learning as an integrated active and interactive process in which the learner constructs his or her own understanding;
- a valuing of the gender, experiences, language and cultures of all children;
- recognition that learning takes place in a context where social, cultural and gender related factors have an influence.

The AEU agrees with the five outcomes proposed for the framework in the discussion paper, namely that children develop physical wellbeing; that they become effective communicators; that they become creators, thinkers and problem solvers; that they develop an interdependent understanding of self; that they develop a positive sense of self and other and become active participants within society.¹⁷

ECE should be consistent with a national curriculum framework, but operate within curriculum frameworks established by State and Territory governments. A national policy framework for preschool education should take into account both the pedagogy of preschool education and the curriculum frameworks of the early primary years and provide for articulation between them.

Supports and resources for the Early Years Learning Framework

In line with the 1996 recommendation of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, the AEU believes the national Early Years Learning Framework could be supported by the establishment of a National Centre for Research in Early Childhood Development. Such an institution could establish a reliable data base on the provision of and participation in preschool education and other early childhood services, as well as providing important ongoing support for curriculum development and associated resource and support materials.

Consultation with Stakeholders

The rollout of universal provision of ECEC and the development of new structures and models of ECEC provision must be undertaken in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including the AEU. This will ensure the development of high quality ECEC provision which meets local community needs and relevant industrial conditions.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 38.