



QUALIFICATION
REVIEW

Early Childhood Education & Care Functional Analysis



HumanAbility



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Address: Level 13/Suite 4, 80 Collins St (North Tower), Melbourne 3000

Phone: 1800 486 262

Website: www.humanability.com.au

Email: trainingproductadvice@humanability.com.au

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Introduction

Report purpose and audience

This Functional Analysis Report forms part of the current Training Product Review of *CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* and *CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care*.

A functional analysis is a comprehensive, holistic, systems-based research approach used to determine how existing national training products meet current and emerging sector needs. Broad and comprehensive stakeholder inputs underpin this approach against macro and micro environmental factors.

This report outlines:

- data collection activities undertaken
- data analysis methods
- data findings
- a discussion on agreed and contested issues
- next steps (in readiness for public consultation).

The intended audience of this report is sector stakeholders including (but not limited to):

- The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)
- ECEC sector representatives and stakeholders
- peak bodies, relevant government departments and associations
- registered training organisations (RTOs) and VET professionals
- HumanAbility staff, management and governance

Sector snapshot

Background

The early childhood sector is at a pivotal moment that presents significant opportunities to propel societal interest, investment and professional esteem. Research has demonstrated that high quality early childhood education has transformative impacts on children's life trajectories. Governments have committed to high quality, affordable and accessible early childhood education with increased Federal and State funding and initiatives.

In 1972, The Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) (Child Care Act) stipulated that quality could be achieved through the employment of staff qualified in early childhood education and/or health. In the 1990s, the Australian federal government increased access to early learning for children from lower income families through funding reforms and introduced the Australian National Childcare Accreditation system, linking ECEC funding to service quality. Subsequent initiatives to improve quality and access include the Universal Access National Partnership Agreement, Early Years Learning Framework, National Quality Framework, and the Child Care Subsidy. All of these have contributed to more Australian children having access to, and receiving, quality early education and care experiences.

Workforce challenges

More recently, however, the sector has faced workforce shortages, low pay, high staff turnover, and poor qualification progression and retention. According to HumanAbility's Workforce Plan 2025, labour shortages have led to an increasing reliance on trainee educators 'working towards' their qualifications, a rise in staff working overtime (not always paid), and providers using staffing 'waivers' based on educator-to-child ratios. The number of traineeships in the sector has more than doubled since 2020. *Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* traineeship enrolments increased by over 85% between 2018 and 2022. This is 7% more than all ECEC vocational enrolments over the same period resulting in an increased need for supervision in the workplace which is critical for delivering traineeships (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024).

Responses

The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession Report (Jobs & Skills Australia, 2024) recognised several opportunities to achieve the workforce growth needed in ECEC for the sector's long-term interests including:

- gender equality in a highly feminised workforce
- 'Closing the gap' by ensuring the sector is both culturally safe and responsive to the needs of First Nations staff, families and communities in all service types
- engagement of First Nations people at a strategic level to integrate knowledge, learning and care of Country into all settings
- recognition of the professional orientation of the EC workforce
- recognition and value of varied scopes of practice of educators and early childhood teachers, and the need for specialist skills and adaptability between service types

- identifying different services in the sector (preschool, kindergartens, centre-based day care (CBDC), family day care (FDC), in-home care (IHC), outside school hours care (OSHC) and services delivered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Further to the different services in the sector, the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) 2024 Version 1.0 has now been released. This is a new classification reflecting the Australian labour market resulting from a comprehensive review of Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation (ANZSCO) and the introduction of a tailored occupational statistical classification for Australia. These classifications include indicative AQF skill levels and short description of the role expectations and main tasks. The below early childhood occupations are included in OSCA:

- Early Childhood Educators
- Early Childhood Educators and Room Leaders
- Family Day Care Educator
- Family Day Care Coordinator
- Out of School Hours Care Educator
- Children's Education and Care Service Director
- Nanny

State and territory initiatives to support growth of the ECEC workforce s include (but are not limited to):

- Best start, Best Life Workforce Strategy: Continuing to value and grow the kindergarten workforce <https://www.vic.gov.au/support-victorian-early-childhood-workforce>
- The Queensland Early Childhood Workforce Strategy 2025-2028 <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/aboutUs/Documents/ec-workforce-strategy.pdf>
- South Australia's Early Childhood Workforce Strategy https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/922477/Early-Childhood-Workforce-Strategy.pdf
- The Early Years & School Age Sectors Workforce Strategy Tasmania

Child safety

Since July 2025, allegations of child sexual assault against children in long day care services have further compounded the early childhood workforce challenges and growth.

Responses

In August 2025, the Victorian Government commissioned and released the Rapid Child Safety Review. The review presents 22 recommendations to protect children's safety, rights and best interests whilst acknowledging significant national effort is required to drive a system of services that deliver safe and high-quality education and care.

Other states and territories have released, or are developing, their own workforce strategies and reforms for improving child safety. In Queensland, key initiatives include the establishment of the Queensland Early Years Institute, tasked with supporting and giving a voice to ECEC educators. This is the first of its kind in

Australia. Queensland is also investing in new programs that support inclusion and positive behaviour practices; and develop leadership and management knowledge and skills.

In Western Australia, a review of the current regulatory framework identified several opportunities to further strengthen protections for children in ECEC. This includes banning personal mobile phones, boosting compliance efforts with a \$1.1 million investment to increase the capacity of Western Australia's Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) and ensuring WA's legislation remains aligned with the rest of Australia and can adopt national reforms in a timely manner (Winton, 2025). The WA Office of Early Childhood has committed to:

- recognition that quality early childhood education depends on skilled educators
- workforce attraction and retention grants for ECEC and OSHC providers to attract, retain and support educators
- support to grow and develop the pool of early childhood teachers.

Other responses to improve the nation's child safety in ECEC services include the development of child safety guides and resources by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). These guides and resources assist providers and staff in creating child safe cultures and online spaces (NQF Child Safe Culture Guide, 2024; NQF Online Safety Guide, 2025).

Stakeholder feedback

ECEC stakeholders outlined several factors they believe are key contributors to the sector's challenges including (but not limited to):

- a lack of targeted and effective attraction strategies
- a dense entry level Certificate III qualification
- educators being unprepared for work conditions and requirements and 'burning out'
- too heavy a reliance on Working with Children Checks (WWCCs) to keep children safe
- a lack of ongoing professional development and on-the-job mentoring
- inconsistent training
- unclear career progression opportunities.

Some key stakeholder suggestions to improve the sector (within the scope of this project's objectives) include (but are not limited to):

- 'We need to 'return to basics' and take a child-centred approach that prioritises authentic, trusting and supportive relationships with children, families and educators. Educators need to learn to make finger puppets, sing, play and know how to engage with children.'
- 'Entry or taster training should not include compliance units. The focus should be on having fun with children and focus on what the role of an ECEC educator is about and involves. We lose too many too quickly when we start with compliance. They get overwhelmed with all the legal, ethical and compliance stuff and leave.'

- 'Without a solid understanding of child development first, everything else is irrelevant and won't make sense. How can they help with planning and recognising normal behaviours if they don't know the ages and stages of child development?'
- 'Child development together with positive role modelling is the key. Compliance and changing nappies can easily be learnt on the job over time, especially when compliance changes so often. Certificate III graduates cannot be expected to understand compliance. Even if we teach it, they won't understand it until it makes sense on the job and good role modelling is a big part of that learning.'
- 'The roles of early childhood educators need to be understood, valued, and supported by communities, governments, policy makers, and regulators as highly skilled professionals who play critical roles in shaping children's development.'

Recent entry requirement development

It is worth noting there recently existed an entry requirement issue where those with a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care that was older than the CHC30113 version did not meet the entry requirements for the *CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* which prevented career progression and reduced Diploma enrolments across the sector. This has now been addressed with the introduction of the *CHCSS00147 Entry to Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* which bridges the gap in satisfying these entry requirements for individuals who hold an Australian Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care or an Australian Diploma or Certificate III in Children's Services and cannot demonstrate 12 months of cumulative employment.

Value of the ECEC sector

Research continues to strongly support the benefits of early education. According to Australian Education Research Organisation (2022). When a child receives quality early childhood education, their learning and life trajectories are significantly improved. Wake et. al. adds 'the foundations of lifelong health are laid by school entry' and 'high-quality early learning environments offer protective benefits comparable to other major public health interventions' (2025, p.22).

Project objectives, scope, limitations

The primary objective of this project is to review existing ECEC training products to ensure educators have the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform job roles and fulfil work functions that meet current and emerging sector needs. This includes all units of competency (UoC) with a CHCECE prefix in *CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* and *CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* as well as the accompanying Companion Volume Implementation Guide (CVIG).

Once training products are fully endorsed, professional development workshops will be held with RTOs to support implementation. See Table 1 below for a list of all products under review in this project

The project involves broad and comprehensive collaboration and consultation across Australia with a range of ECEC stakeholders including government departments, peak bodies, employers, unions, RTOs, subject matter experts, academics and employees, and uses a range of data collection activities including desktop research, conversations, conferences, interviews, focus groups and workshops.

Whilst some stakeholder feedback falls outside the scope of this project, such as support for a new qualification, this data is integral to informing future potential projects and sector priorities. Also, outside the scope of this project are units of competency used in ECEC qualifications from training packages other than the CHC Community Services Training Package.

Table 1: Products for review in ECEC project

<i>CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care</i>
CORE (12)
<i>CHCECE030 Support inclusion and diversity</i>
<i>CHCECE031 Support children's health, safety and wellbeing</i>
<i>CHCECE032 Nurture babies and toddlers</i>
<i>CHCECE033 Develop positive and respectful relationships with children</i>
<i>CHCECE034 Use an approved learning framework to guide practice</i>
<i>CHCECE035 Support the holistic learning and development of children</i>
<i>CHCECE036 Provide experiences to support children's play and learning</i>
<i>CHCECE037 Support children to connect with the natural environment</i>
<i>CHCECE038 Observe children to inform practice</i>
<i>CHCECE054 Encourage understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures</i>
<i>CHCECE055 Meet legal and ethical obligations in children's education and care</i>

CHCECE056 *Work effectively in children's education and care*

Electives (2)

CHCECE039 *Comply with family day care administration requirements*

CHCECE040 *Attend to daily functions in home-based childcare*

CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care

Core (10)

CHCECE041 *Maintain a safe and healthy environment for children*

CHCECE042 *Foster holistic early childhood learning, development and wellbeing*

CHCECE043 *Nurture creativity in children*

CHCECE044 *Facilitate compliance in a children's education and care service*

CHCECE045 *Foster positive and respectful interactions and behaviour in children*

CHCECE046 *Implement strategies for the inclusion of all children*

CHCECE047 *Analyse information to inform children's learning*

CHCECE048 *Plan and implement children's education and care curriculum*

CHCECE049 *Embed environmental responsibility in service operations*

CHCECE050 *Work in partnership with children's families*

ELECTIVES (3 from 4 required)

CHCECE051 *Promote equity in access to the service*

CHCECE052 *Plan service and supports for children and families*

CHCECE053 *Respond to grievances and complaints about the service*

CHCECE057 *Use collaborative practices to uphold child protection principles*

Companion Volume Implementation Guide (CVIG)

Abstract

In the face of current ECEC sector challenges, community needs, and stakeholder feedback, the functional analysis process has determined the following next steps are appropriate in this qualification review:

- update skill and knowledge outcomes in both qualifications to include all foundational and technical requirements to enable educators to present, perform and interact in services and provide high quality early childhood education
- clearly and appropriately differentiate and logically progress skills and knowledge in terms of level of difficulty across qualifications without duplication and in alignment with sector benchmarks, job roles, work functions and tertiary preparedness
- integrate First Nations cultures, histories, knowledges and perspectives throughout training products
- ensure ECEC content aligns with and complements newly mandated ACCP child safety training
- note potential future pathway opportunities against HumanAbility's workplan priorities.

Further consultation will assist in determining:

- if, how and where leadership, management and coaching skills fit in terms of the ECEC suite of training products
- the specific skills and assessment requirements appropriate for newly graduated educators
- additional requirements of FDC, IHC and OSHC services
- the appropriate balance of relevant content across ECEC qualifications.

Data collection

Two main types of data were sourced to identify issues, challenges and opportunities: 1. Desktop research (secondary research) and 2. Conversations, conferences, interviews, focus groups and workshops (primary research).

Desktop research

Desktop research involved accessing documented sector information. This began in the workforce planning and pre-development stage and continued until this document was published. The specific activities in this category include:

Review of reports and documents, including government reports, publications, websites, resources, news articles, relevant data from other HumanAbility projects, regulatory frameworks and standards. These documents included (but are not limited to):

- Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2023). Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework Final Report
- New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care (2025)
- Jobs and Skills Australia. (2024). The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession
- Productivity Commission. (2024). A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report—Volume 1 (Inquiry Report No. 106)
- Education Services Australia. (2019). NQF Review 2019, Decision Regulation Impact Statement
- Qualification Design Group. (2024). Unlocking the potential of VET.
- National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy. (2021). Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022–2031
- Weatherill, J., & White, P. (2025). Rapid Child Safety Review, State of Victoria (Department of Premier and Cabinet)
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. (2024). Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Harmonisation Roadmap
- Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council, Belonging, Being & Becoming, The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia (V2.0) (2022)
- Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council, My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (V2.0) (2022)
- ACECQA, National Quality Standards (NQS)
- Queensland Government. (2025). The Queensland Early Childhood Workforce Strategy 2025—2028
- HumanAbility. (2024). HumanAbility's Workforce Plan 2024)
- documented suggestions and concerns relevant to ECEC collected during other HumanAbility projects.

A job advertisement analysis (June – July 2025) of 25 online job advertisements was conducted to map and compare the skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications sought by ECEC employers for a variety of job roles. Selections ensured all states and territories were represented and jobs were sourced from multiple platforms including Seek, Jora, Simply Hired and Indeed.

Conversations, conferences, interviews, focus groups and workshops

Connections were made with government organisations, peak bodies, employers, RTOs, subject matter experts, academics, research organisations and employees across the country.

Conversations

Conversations were held to share updates, progress initiatives and discuss ECEC issues, challenges and opportunities generally. These included (but not limited to):

- Department of Education and Workplace Relations (DEWR)
- TAFE SA Centre of Excellence
- University of Wollongong
- TAFE NSW Industry Collaboration Reference Group – Digital Health Forum
- National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy Reference Group (ACECQA)
- TAFE Directors Australia ECEC Network / Round Table
- TAFE Networking Group Community of Practice
- educators' personal reflections
- HumanAbility Industry Advisory Committee
- WA Care Sector Sub-working group ECEC workshop
- Victorian and TAS TAFE Support Network
- Central Queensland University
- Western Sydney University
- Centre for Policy Development
- Office for Early Childhood Development
- Chisholm, TAFE Victoria
- Wodonga TAFE
- Department of Education Child Safety Review group
- Independent Education Union
- United Workers Union
- Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB)
- Australian Education Union
- Victorian Skills Authority
- Early Childhood Teacher Education Network

- Early Childhood Policy Group Workforce Working Group
- Early Childhood Policy Group
- Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS)
- Early Learning & Care Council of Australia (ELACCA).

Conferences

At the time of writing this report, six ECEC conferences had been attended. These were opportunities to showcase the project and invite individuals and organisations to register for upcoming interviews, focus groups and workshops. These conferences included:

- Early Childhood Australia Conference, Perth
- SNAICC Conference, Brisbane
- Family Day Care Conference, Melbourne
- Little People Big Dreams Conference, Darwin
- VELG Conference, Gold Coast
- Second Early Childhood Biennial Workforce Forum, Sydney

Interviews, focus groups and workshops

Interview, focus group and workshop participants were invited from every Australian state and territory including metro, regional and rural locations, and from a variety of organisation types including public and denominational school-led, government, community/charity, not for profit and private; and from all ECEC services including preschool, kindergartens, centre-based day care (CBDC), family day care (FDC), in-home care (IHC), outside school hours care (OSHC) and services delivered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Most of these were held online, although some were in person.

Employer interviews

A total of 23 employer interviews captured a clear and nuanced picture of patterns, themes and concerns. One employer preferred to complete and return the emailed questionnaire. Whilst many interviews were one to one, several had additional participants in attendance, or providing their inputs by proxy. This resulted in many more individual inputs than interviews and as such, we estimate a total of 55 employer inputs. These additional inputs came from other employees or stakeholders, including educators, trainers, inclusion and behavioural specialists, educational leaders, managers, coordinators, etc. See Appendix A for employer-related interview questions.

Male employee interviews

Two male employee interviews, with a total of four attendees, focused specifically on male insights in the highly gendered ECEC workforce. See Appendix C for adapted employer/RTO questions.

Registered Training Organisation (RTO) focus groups

A total of seven one-to-two-hour RTO focus groups captured the main themes and areas of concern for RTOs. Most focus groups averaged 18 or more attendees, and one had eight participants with input from

several others. Commonly, members belonged to existing communities of practice or subcommittees. See Appendix B for RTO interview questions.

Employee workshops

A total of five employee workshops, with a total of 100 participants, captured patterns, themes and additional areas of interest. The workshops included two interactive whiteboard activities to extract data relative to:

- job role tasks in 'a day in the life' of an educator
- skills and knowledge required during the 'career journey' through pre-employment, graduate Certificate III and Diploma level stages.

Data analysis

We carefully considered all the data in terms of the project's objectives and scope. Relevant data was then manually analysed to identify themes, patterns and disparities. The key benefits of this approach include:

- ability to be flexible as new themes emerged
- rich understandings of the data including meaningful nuances
- clarity of the contextual differences and needs that supported stakeholder inputs.

Findings

This section outlines the relevant data findings from each data collection activity.

Desktop research

Reports and documents

A close examination of documentation related to the ECEC sector revealed important considerations for this qualification review. These are outlined below.

Child safety and protection

The Rapid Child Safety Review (Victoria) (Weatherill & White, 2025) makes several recommendations to improve child safety relating to:

- improving recruitment and induction processes,
- understanding what reportable conduct is
- the 'four eyes on the child' principle
- a ban on personal devices
- physical buildings and lines of sight
- signs of grooming and abuse
- access to service quality information
- speaking up
- safeguarding professional support programs.

ACECQA and the NQF

ACECQA's Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2023, was the result of targeted stakeholder consultation with child safety organisations and regulatory authorities with a focus on reducing harm, including abuse and neglect in approved early childhood and care services. The report noted these other emerging concerns:

- increase in reported incidents and allegations related to inappropriate discipline and interactions by educators
- absence of a consistent and coherent national framework to manage risks of 'persons of interest'
- difficulty in understanding and navigating different thresholds of obligations and reporting requirements
- lack in understanding of respective responsibilities to create and maintain a child safe culture and environment
- some providers do not understand the importance of undertaking thorough and comprehensive due diligence when hiring or engaging staff.

ACECQA's 16 recommendations are grouped into two categories:

- additional safeguards under the NQF
- inter-related child protection mechanisms.

Additional NQF safeguards include:

- strengthening child safe governance, leadership and culture
- embedding prevention and early intervention
- building and sustaining child safe capabilities

The development of additional NQF safeguards to help ECEC providers and staff understand their responsibilities in creating and maintaining safe child cultures which comply with laws, regulations and frameworks includes the NQF Culture Guide (2024) and Online Safety Guide (2025). Templates are also available to support self and risk assessments and responding to incidents (including complaints and disclosures). Content in the Culture Guide includes building a child safe culture, leadership, policies and continuous improvement, child's voice and cultural safety, protective behaviours and child safe pedagogical practices, recruitment, induction and probation, professional development, complaints and disclosures and families and the local community. Content in the Online Safety Guide (2025) includes building a child safe culture in the digital environment, using digital technologies safely, safe online practices within education and care services, embedding online safety, using electronic devices safety, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and online safety.

In accordance with Education Ministers recent changes, ACECQA provisions include:

- policies and procedures for the safe use of digital technologies and online environments
- notification timeframes for physical and sexual abuse
- prohibiting the use of vaping substances and devices
- refinements to NQS Quality Areas 2 (Children's health and safety) and 7 (Governance and Leadership).

Changes to the Education and Care Services National Regulations commenced on 1 September 2025, and refinements to the NQS commence on 1 January 2026.

Other resources

Other child safety resources include (but are not limited to):

- a series of online learning modules produced in conjunction with Early Childhood Australia (ECA) for early childhood educators (2025)
- National Office of Child Safety (NOCS) website resources
- National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021-2030)
- Safe sleep practice guidance on ACECQA website.

Safety and prevention from the start

Professor Daryl Higgins, Director of the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Institute of Child Protection Studies says child safety needs to be embedded into educator curriculum from the start rather than just asking for a blue card (2025). He warns that many child abusers are first timers so no history will be

detectable in screening and that children also engage in harmful behaviours that are not being identified. Professor Higgins suggests it is necessary to consider the power of a whole situation and new approaches to child safety include prevention education, parent focused interventions, sexual socialisation, perpetrator interventions, standards, situational crime prevention and contextual prevention. Contextual prevention focuses on factors external to an individual (situations and environments). Nappy time is one context where risks need to be assessed, and matching prevention strategies implemented. It is useful too, Professor Higgins suggests, recognising the factors that contribute to child sexual abuse: motivation (of a potential offender), vulnerability (of a potential victim) and opportunity. He advocates for a paradigm shift away from 'bad people' as it ignores the power of the whole situation. A simple-to-use Contextual Prevention toolkit based on the article: Context matters: Conceptualising and operationalising the contextual prevention of child sexual abuse (Rayment-McHugh et al. 2024) is available [here](#).

Mandatory training

The Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) is leading the development of the National Child Safety Training, which will be mandatory for all staff and volunteers in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector starting in 2026. The training will be nationally consistent, evidence informed and will need to be completed prior to an educator working with children.

Job advertisement analysis

Qualification levels

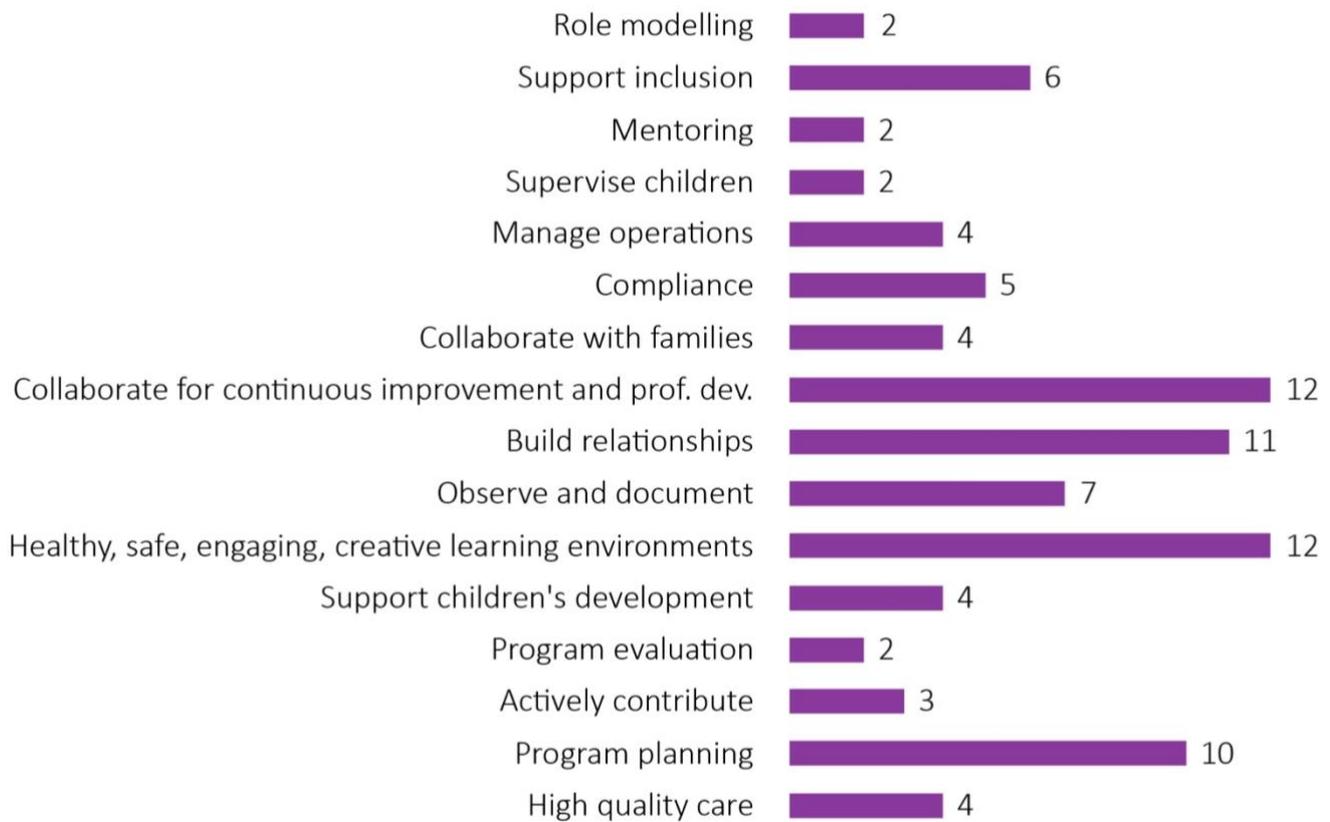
Many job advertisements analysed (14/25) specified candidates to have or be working towards a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care as a minimum requirement. Eight required a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care. One remote leadership role required a bachelor's degree. While Certificate III was most listed as the minimum requirement, many advertisements described duties and responsibilities that appeared more consistent with the skills and knowledge typically associated with Diploma-qualified educators.

Skills and knowledge

The most common skills sought by employers in job advertisements are represented in Image 2, and include:

- collaborate for continuous improvement and professional development (12/25)
- develop and maintain healthy, safe, engaging and creative learning environments (12/25)
- build respectful and supportive relationships with children, families and staff (11/25)
- program planning (10/25).

Image 2: Most common skills based on job advertisements



Skills sought between two and seven times in job ads include:

- role modelling
- mentoring
- supervision
- managing operations
- compliance
- collaborating with families
- observing and documenting
- supporting children's development
- program evaluation
- actively contributing
- providing high quality care.

Finally, many skills were sought by an employer only once across all job advertisements.

1. coordinate and oversee group activities

2. structure indoor and outdoor environments and activities with a balance of active and passive learning areas
3. implement and maintain clear expectations for children when establishing limits of appropriate behaviours
4. support a culture of reflective practice
5. actively contribute to the implementation and adoption of curriculum and documentation
6. skilled in art/music/STEM/dance/technology
7. utilise functional assessments and developmental screeners to identify appropriate support options (Early Years Specialist Educator (/ Allied Health Professional), bachelor or higher sought in inner regional NSW location)
8. build knowledge, skills and confidence in families, carers and professionals to support children in acquiring new skills (capacity building / leadership) (Early Years Specialist Educator (/ Allied Health Professional), Bachelor or higher sought in inner regional NSW location)
9. implement strengths-based support strategies in line with program guidelines (Early Years Specialist Educator (/ Allied Health Professional), Bachelor or higher sought in inner regional NSW location)
10. accurately document conversations, developmental information, goals and outcomes in the NDIA business system following the NDIS Performance Management Framework and assist families in applying for and implementing funded NDIS plans where applicable (Early Years Specialist Educator (/ Allied Health Professional), Bachelor or higher sought in inner regional NSW location)
11. contribute to resource planning
12. deliver ECE parent and child support programs to assist children to get ready for school (remote ECEC educator, with 'appropriate' qualification)
13. provide pedagogical leadership, advice and support to all staff, parents, community members (remote ECEC educator, with 'appropriate' qualification)
14. build and nurture partnerships with a range of internal and approved external stakeholders to improve ECE programs (remote ECEC educator, with 'appropriate' qualification)
15. assist with achieving safeguarding objectives across the organisation (remote ECEC educator, with 'appropriate' qualification).

One advertisement required candidates to be skilled in art/music/STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)/dance/technology.

Leadership-type skills are also sought, including resource planning; delivering school-ready programs; pedagogical leadership; partnerships with stakeholders to improve early childhood programs; assisting with safeguarding objectives; and contributing to curriculum and documentation. Except for resource planning, these are required for an early childhood educator with an 'appropriate qualification' in a remote Northern Territory location by a local council employer.

Experience

The data revealed 11 out of 25 employers wanted their new recruits to have previous experience. Most of these (10) didn't state how much; four required a minimum of one year and two employers wanted two to three years of experience.

Review of current training products

To identify the skills and knowledge required for effective practice in early childhood education, established sector benchmarks, including the Qualification Development Quality Principles (QDQP), the National Quality Standard (NQS), and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) were referenced. These benchmarks articulate expectations for educator capability, professional practice, and service quality across different contexts. These frameworks were used to interpret evidence from the job advertisement analysis to define skills, knowledge, and professional behaviours independent of existing training product structures. Once these requirements were established, they were mapped against the current training package to assess alignment and identify potential gaps. The outcomes include:

- based on QDQP principles 1, 2 and 3, there appears to be a lack of differentiation and progression in content and difficulty between the Certificate III and Diploma ECEC qualifications
- the NQS has a stronger and more explicit focus on individual child needs and rights than existing units of competency. Both the NQS and EYLF explicitly mention continuity of learning and transitions, but these concepts do not feature in existing units of competency
- the EYLF highlights children's strong sense of identity, but this is not explicitly mentioned or embedded in current content
- the EYLF values educators' abilities to 'critically reflect' to develop and improve children's learning and wellbeing but this is not sufficiently integrated in current content.

Conversations, conferences, interviews, focus groups and workshops

Conversations

Regular and ongoing conversations with ECEC stakeholder groups and bodies focused on current relevant issues, concerns, challenges, new program developments and initiatives. These insights provided further areas for consideration in this project including:

- child safety content including grooming, identifying and preventing maltreatment, reportable offences and the confidence to speak up
- compliance training to be done prior to work or professional placement in services
- guidance for RTOs on sequencing of training to ensure relevant child safety knowledge prior to placement and to support course progression, particularly for students who may find content confronting
- assessment conditions that support services to take student placements, particularly in relation to care routines and the use of digital devices for assessment
- embedding of literacy skills at the appropriate level to align with job role requirements

- potential future feeder courses or pre-employment pathways will need to be carefully considered, with a range of polarised views being presented
- taster courses could support students to make well informed decisions before commencing an ECEC qualification
- child development was seen as underpinning all other learning, including in relation to child safety and professional reflection
- leadership and mentoring are critical to combating staff shortages, retention and burnout
- qualification content needs to actively support men in early childhood to help counter the increased risk of discrimination already being experienced
- educators need to know how to support children's safe and respectful use of digital technologies
- Companion Volume Implementation Guides need to be more useable and include supports for RTOs and the sector relative to placement and assessment expectations and advice around delivery and sequencing
- training products could be structured to better facilitate student progression from Certificate III and Diploma into tertiary programs
- equipping graduates with foundational skills including writing, critical thinking, referencing and concepts of academic integrity, paraphrasing, writing balanced arguments using multiple sources and opinions, giving presentations, and basic literacy, numeracy and curriculum knowledge would better prepare students for tertiary studies and increase university's confidence in vocational graduates.

Interviews, focus groups and workshops

Employer interviews

Employer interviews provided a range of insights into the skills and knowledge educators need to perform ECEC job roles and meet sector needs and how qualifications might best be developed and/or designed. These are outlined below.

- basic child development knowledge and how children learn – most agree, this is fundamental to informing everything else including planning, play, observations, etc.
- compliance and paperwork
- how to have fun, be less self-conscious, play, engage and direct children's learning in alignment with learning frameworks
- how to implement adequate transitions between activities to suit child development
- how to interact, communicate and build relationships with diverse families
- how to have difficult conversations with families, manage emotions and balance discussions with positives
- plan and build environments that allow child-led learning to happen around children's interests
- how and what to observe in children for extending learning and designing programs

- how to recognise and support child behaviours, building a toolkit of strategies and learning styles including trauma, neurodiversity, etc.
- how to unpack children's behaviour, getting to the why, understanding developmental appropriateness and building strong relationships
- stages of the assessment cycle
- foundation /work readiness skills including: taking initiative, arriving on time, being self-aware, dressing appropriately, engaging in appropriate personal conduct, ability to be open to learning and listening, confidence to ask questions, ability to manage interpersonal differences, personalities and different work styles, ability to work in a team, passion for working with children, a willingness and ability to reflect and be flexible, understanding of appropriate personal and professional boundaries, ability to remain calm in a high-pressure environment
- induction or pre-employment knowledge including different services (such as IHC and FDC), job roles, learning models and theoretical approaches
- some self-awareness of own culture, biases and pedagogical identity
- knowledge of safety, supervision, leadership, regulations and laws including mandatory reporting obligations
- values, legal and ethical responsibilities including protecting and keeping children safe
- knowledge of own legal rights and workplace entitlements
- knowledge of the day-to-day activities and responsibilities of an early childhood educator
- applying learning to practice
- how to apply policies and procedures
- literacy skills to read policies, procedures, medication labels; and to write reports, compile portfolios and enter digital information about children's development
- the concept of intentional engagement
- how to teach play skills particularly in a post-covid context
- how play development trajectories might look different for neurodiverse children or those with other needs such as speech and language issues
- knowledge of play theory, play stages, how to set up play, how to extend play, the educator's role in play, and scaffolding play skills
- understanding and applying learning trajectories
- recognising what a 'child safe' organization looks like including the respective laws, reporting requirements, monitoring others and being reflective
- inclusion awareness to respond appropriately to behaviours
- appreciating cultural nuances and realising everything needs to be understood within local and community contexts
- how to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders perspectives in practice.

Integrating First Nations perspectives

Several employers expressed their concerns about how poorly First Nations perspectives are captured in training products. One recognised the Certificate III unit *CHCECE054 Encourage understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples cultures* is an add-on that promotes tokenism rather than inclusive practices that celebrate First Nations people. 'It's important to understand who your elders are in your communities that you can speak to. Understanding yourself and your position in your own culture is important before you start recognising someone else's. It's not just Indigenous cultures, it's all cultures. People need to understand Indigenous integration is not about being tokenistic. It's about understanding the 'why'. Probably the best way to transfer that through training and development is through literature. So, educators need to have more reading materials and other tools. Also, understanding seasons and the connectiveness around our local land and its Aboriginal name is a great start.'

Another stated, 'First Nations cultures, histories, knowledges and perspectives need to be taught both explicitly in stand-alone units of competency and woven throughout the qualifications, taking a strengths-based approach. Local protocols around researching and sharing knowledges and engaging with First Nations communities and services, should be explored and respected by trainers, learners and practicing educators. All First Nations content and assessment should be reviewed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts to ensure the integrity of the material. There was also a call for all content and assessment to be place-based to enable contextualization for a wide range of learners, trainers, locations and environments (including indoors or outdoors), recognising that access to resources, technologies and early childhood education services may be limited in parts of the country.'

Training product content gaps

In addition to missing skills and knowledge, employers suggested additional content as outlined here:

- More content is needed relative to working with children in the birth to two-year age range. These areas are covered in the Certificate III but then not mentioned again in the Diploma.
- Existing STEM, nature pedagogy and creative arts content is inadequate. Some suggested a basic knowledge was needed supported by coaching and others suggested this content needs to be embedded.
- Coaching and leadership to ensure ongoing professional development and learning.
- Risk awareness and management contents is needed for all educators.

Coaching and leadership

Many employers recognise on-the-job coaching and leadership are critical to educator skill development. One stated, 'Certificate IIIs are expected to hit the ground running' without sufficient experience, coaching, leadership and/or opportunities to reflect and learn, resulting in skill gaps.' At least two larger employers provide 'wrap around' supports to their workforce using coordinators. One explained the role of their coordinators is to fill last minute ad hoc shifts; facilitate end-to-end onboarding through a series of modules and competencies; and provide support where and when required. One of these employers expressed, 'having more experienced educators who can step in and model managing behaviours is vital to educator learning. They need to be able to build resilience and understand that often behaviours are not challenging, they are just part of child development and difficulties with communication.' Another said,

'If you're working with four toddlers or four little ones under two, your day is busy changing nappies, feeding them, managing the routine, making sure they're safe and happy and well cared for and have good quality interactions through the day. That's tough. It's not about being everywhere and doing everything, it is about being accessible to them...That's where the coaching comes in. You need someone who is experienced enough to say, 'you can do it this way'.

A key concern among many employers, however, is who should do the coaching. They recognise that high quality and willing educators are necessary for coaching to be effective and yield high quality outcomes. Many agreed that coaching skills could be provided either as additional skillsets or Diploma elective units.

Certificate III content

Some employers feel strongly that the Certificate III is more like a Certificate IV in terms of difficulty, content and workload and admit to struggling to fitting everything in. Some have even suggested degree qualifications have lesser workloads. Others recognise that as the Certificate III leads into a Bachelor of Education it must include everything that it does. Still others, think the Certificate III is great just the way it is. Interestingly, at least two of these comments came from services who provide wrap-around educator supports including coaching and team teaching both of whom enjoy long tenure from educators and have above ratio staffing.

Some employers insist, 'There are things to pull out of the Certificate III and things to put in to differentiate it from the Diploma.' For example, the Certificate III could be shortened, so it focuses on less of the higher order learning. Like planning – it should be mentioned but not to the extent that they need to do it independently. They are expected to make observations and contribute to plans, but they generally do that as part of a group.

Knowledge and skills

According to most employers, educators need to know about how children learn through play, the different ways to understand children, what a developing child looks like and more importantly, an understanding of their own biases so they can engage with diversity and support all children's learning. One stated, 'they need to know how to observe, what they are seeing and how to scaffold that learning. They need resourcefulness, how to sing songs without an iPad and make resources. You can't be what you can't see, we can't teach creativity and resourcefulness in children if we don't model it.'

There's a lot of workplace health and safety attached to the Certificate III necessarily, but they do a workplace health and safety unit and then a lot of that gets repeated in *CHCECE031 Support children's health, safety and wellbeing*. There's a lot of things associated with dishing out medications, managing risk and all things that need to be understood by a Certificate III. One employer stated, 'they need to know those rules, how it works and be able to demonstrate that. But how many times do you have to demonstrate you can wash your hands? I think it's four or five times in different settings. Yes, you've got to wash your hands because it manages germs and breaks the germ cycle, but we're not nurses so we don't have to understand the big details of bacteria. They just need to know that you wash your hands to get the bacteria off and to break the chain of infection, so bacteria is not spread to others.' Others argued however, that some skills, like washing hands, do need to be demonstrated in different contexts to consolidate learning and meet workplace requirements.

Another employer stated, 'While Certificate III's are under supervision, they need to provide education and care for children which means they need to have reasonable oral and language skills. They need to be able to talk to children, understand children, understand their own biases so they don't exclude children. They need to be able to recognise that their way isn't the only way and there are other ways that things happen i.e. you can't care for someone unless you have empathy and understanding for who they are and recognise how care takes place. So, there's some core things to focus on. You also need to understand that children learn by listening, talking, exploring, thinking and making their thinking visible because they can't yet write. How much of that you must know is one thing. How much of that needs to be assessed is another thing altogether and to what standard.'

Focus

One employer submitted focus needs to be on building care moments and rituals rather than wiping bottoms. It's the engagement with the child and being able to do that appropriately and in a caring way that's important. Focusing on some of these things in workplace health and safety units is not right.

Diploma content

The points below are employer insights specific to the Diploma.

Basic skills

One employer stated, 'Graduates should arrive with at least a basic knowledge of regulations, safety, laws and frameworks. They don't have planning, programming, documentation and room leadership skills. They also need an adequate understanding of summative assessment and leadership as a concept and a practice even if they are not in a leadership role. Diplomas are expected to have more leadership and management skills including managing a room, putting routines in place, having difficult conversations with families, organizing the day and managing programming but many are not confident performing these tasks. Also, they should be able to extend children by understanding observation, the child's needs, what is working and what else could be done to further develop a child.'

Leadership skills

Other employers recognised that leadership content in the Diploma is the same focus whether the educator wants to be a lead educator or a centre director and yet the leadership skills and tasks required are very different. One stated, 'We've got centre directors who supervise 36 staff. The qualification they have is the same as someone who's going to be a lead educator who may or may not supervise an assistant and who works under the supervision of an early childhood teacher.' Another added, 'I believe there should be additional leadership sitting over the top of the Diploma which is at the AQF level 7 or 8. Leadership and potentially the reintroduction of a research unit at this level could help facilitate transitions into degree programs.'

Sequence

Several employers suggested that units of competency need to be carefully sequenced so that entry level Diploma students are not being expected to undertake tasks at 'too high' levels.

Differentiation

Most employers agreed that where the Certificate III should be a practical qualification with some theory; the Diploma should be a skilful qualification that extends on theoretical understandings and provide a basis for professional reflection. They agree too that the qualifications need to be more clearly differentiated with skill levels progressing from the Certificate III to the Diploma. One suggested, 'The Certificate III could be embedded as a prerequisite into the Diploma (built in, not bolted on) with a Certificate III exit point. Certificate III units are clearly at an AQF level three to four, and the Diploma needs to sit at an AQF level five.'

Different streams

Employers agree there should be different streams for different services. According to an FDC and an IHC employer, 'Our environments are very different to those of LDC, but the training products assume all services are like LDC services.'

Advanced diploma

Several employers mentioned a former Advanced Degree which was focused on leadership and management. They acknowledged uncertainty around whether it should be a stand-alone course and that many providers are providing elevated learning experiences that capture leadership and management now because people are moving into roles more quickly than they would have previously.

Certificate II / Skillset pathway

There were many diverse opinions about potentially introducing a Certificate II qualification or skillset as a pathway into existing ECEC qualifications. Some of these comments are listed below:

- 'I'd like to have a Certificate II. Lots of students struggle academically but are great with children. They could be supervised and be part of ratio. These educators could help with a lot of routine tasks.'
- 'A Certificate II could be a prerequisite for the Certificate III. It could prepare people well for the Certificate III, ensuring they are fully cognizant about what they're getting into.'
- 'Maybe they could do a taster or a skillset that could be funded that allows them to get eight units which is gives them senior certificate credit points. Then when they leave school and turn 18, they can go into the funded Certificate III, having done some of it already. They would be useful to employ and could more quickly complete the Certificate III qualification, and they've got a job that changes their life.' (According to these employers, schools are pushing kids away from the Certificate III in ECEC because of the 160 hours of placement which they can't get done before they finish school.)
- 'Support units could be pulled from the Foundational Skills Training Package to help people with basic skills.'
- 'If the Certificate III had a scaffolded delivery by using prerequisites before moving on this would create a pathway and would be better than going lower. We are already very low and the goal, I am sure is to try and lift it.'
- There are existing Certificate II qualifications, but unit choice is limited. 'Some play units would at least be good – teach them about making glue, dough, getting them to do puzzles, etc.'

- 'The VETis ECEC Certificate II units are approved by the National Education Authority but they are bad units. Anyone who is interested walks away quickly. It's super dull. If you are going to do a Certificate II, you must make it interesting. So, include play units, social and physical development units rather than cognitively hard ones. Maybe also look at behaviour intervention.'
- (A Victorian employer / RTO received permission from VCAR last year to run the Certificate II in Early Childhood Education pathway program as a VETis program. They are the only RTO delivering this Certificate II.) In their opinion, 'It is great for VETis. There's no job outcome, but it gives a good ECEC grounding. We ran two pilots and there were quite a range of ages from 17 through to about 60. Had those people gone straight into the Certificate III, they would have dropped out within a few weeks. Of the eight that went through the pilot, six of them enrolled in the Certificate III. One of them has since withdrawn because it's not for them but the rest all continued. You get three credit transfers into the Certificate III. If high school students like it, they can go into either the full or partial Certificate III in year 11 and 12 VETis programs. I'd like to advocate for it becoming a pre-apprenticeship program given what's going on in the ECEC area. It would allow for suitable and quality enrolments into the qualification. It's delivered using virtual reality (VR) which we've filmed in our own EC centres and using robo-babies.'
- 'If there was a Certificate II that had some units that fit into the Certificate III that they could do in years 11 and 12 with us in line with their WWCC, they could then go into a Certificate III traineeship. The lack of a Certificate II in the sector is a clear gap and is resulting in young people not having basic skills and leaving the sector when they realise what's involved i.e. it would help with retention in the sector as students would be better prepared all the way through.'
- 'We are passionate about building the sector with students that are fully prepared and so they can be strong custodians within ECEC. I would envision they do their WWCC in year 11, do Certificate II in ECEC (separate to the Community Services Certificate II that's happening). What can be done in our experience in the Certificate II in Community Services with a childcare focus, is completely different to the rest of the other three focus areas so, we should be able to stand on our own two feet in this space. We think the Certificate III is at an AQF level three and should be kept there but not all our students (16–18-year-olds) have equity in this space hence the Certificate II for these students.'
- 'It would be an awesome minimum qualification for those 'in-home' situations but it isn't talked about so, we're kind of missed off the radar. A Certificate II should just contain that basic common child development knowledge because let's face it, that's what educators seem to be lacking. Especially for those who don't have families and haven't brought up their own children and have no child knowledge at all.'

RTO focus groups

RTO focus groups provided additional insights into the skills and knowledge educators need to perform ECEC job roles and meet sector needs and how qualifications might best be developed and/or designed. These are outlined below.

Certificate III

RTOs made the following comments when asked about the Certificate III:

- 'The language needs to be simplified for a Certificate III level, but this is not possible because of the regulations.'
- 'It is too hard for school leavers they are not prepared, feel overwhelmed and disappointment and leave.'
- 'Certificate III is as it should be – rigorous, heavy.'
- 'Certificate III is at a higher academic level than most Certificate IIIs in other sectors.'
- Some asked if there should be a Certificate IV to ease the burden on Certificate III level educators.
- 'The Certificate III is too challenging for multiple cohorts and is causing poor completions.'
- 'There is concern that the expectations of a Certificate III worker in this sector are unrealistic and it takes years to learn all those skills.'
- 'I'm hearing time and time again, 'They've got the latest Certificate III, but they don't know about child development'. I know when the EYLF came in, we threw the baby out with the bathwater and child development slipped down the drain and it is now back on the agenda, but we don't have time to dig too deeply into offering that information.'
- 'Some of the content, especially in the Certificate III is way beyond what they can understand. A good example is the recent issues around child protection, child safety and child safety standards. Let's not make this harder for them. They can't do what they've got now. We need to focus more on the practical components around safety, relationships, etc.'
- 'We have one of the hardest Certificate III qualifications anyone can undertake. We're good in our space on focusing on implementing adjustments for children, but we've got so many youths identifying with these needs also and all they've got to go into is a full CIII. So, bring back the paint pot people who can wash the paint pots and enjoy working with children without having to do 17 units of one of the hardest certificates.'
- 'Everyone in the service doesn't have to know everything. This whole notion of early childhood educators doing everything with their Certificate III is not fair. If you're paid as a teacher and they're paid as a Certificate III, you are responsible, not them.'
- 'I do still advocate for a more practical Certificate III because that was something that worked very well in the past and is very much missed.'

Assessment requirements

RTOs raised concerns with current assessment requirements, particularly in relation to personal care tasks. Some of these comments are below:

- 'Most centres are saying, from a child safety perspective, you can't do this and that such as assist a child with toileting. So how do we meet the training requirements when services are saying, 'no'. Yes, we can simulate but the requirements state you need to simulate with a real child.'
- Some services are unwilling to have students speak with families

- 'We are breaching children's rights to privacy and confidentiality and the Code of Ethics when observing nappy changes. So, on the one hand we are teaching the Code of Ethics but on the other, the training package is requiring children's rights are not protected for assessment and qualification purposes and without the safety of an authentic educator relationship. I'm very uncomfortable walking into a centre and observing nappy changes.'
- 'Assessment requirements in *CHCPRT025 Identify and report children and young people at risk* are now saying tasks need to be demonstrated in a service which is completely inappropriate and quite terrifying in today's landscape. So, something needs to be actioned there. Direct observation, privacy and dignity of the child – we're sending assessors in to observe students who have no relationship with these children whatsoever, they're strangers walking into services. So, it would be lovely to start building those relationships with the children and services. Does it need to be assessed by an assessor? Nappy changes weren't part of the qualification or assessments back when I did my Certificate III, but it was a lot more hands-on than the current one.'
- 'Changing nappies on real babies came from the sector in response to the last training package not having it which is why it was put into this one. I don't believe we need direct observation. The biggest issue now is that they're not letting children change nappies or give them food. A lot of services are stopping our students from doing a lot of things which is impacting on us being able to assess our students. We have no leeway around that except to use dolls which is not the same. We need to be clear about what it is the sector want educators to be able to do. They expect graduated students to be able to do everything but that is not actually what the training package is about. It's about, 'you're on your Ls with us and then you kind of got your Ps and then you're going to a centre and then you'll get your full license.'
- 'I've gone out to assess, and the centres don't have babies, or we don't have that student in that room today or they're on float. So, there's no access. And, rescheduling that visit is hard to do. So, meeting the needs of the service and the student when we're trying to view things where the service is saying 'that's irrelevant to us' is very challenging.'

Placements

Several RTOs shared their observations of students on placements:

- Students lack basic workplace skills. One suggested formally assessing on things like punctuality, initiative, professional communication, appropriate workplace conduct, ability to build relationships, ability to coach others, and appropriate dress. 'Because ECEC is such high risk with all the current attention, we are committed to making sure students are fully prepared to enter that space, but it is challenging making sure all relevant training has occurred before that work placement as we don't want to burn any bridges with the sector.'
- 'Placement is tricky in the school system because it interrupts the rest of the timetable. It puts a huge toll on the workplaces given their limited availability in small communities and is a cost burden with under-18 students who need to be supervised. The small centres that need them the most struggle to provide this support.'
- 'Services are increasingly refusing to take students.'

- 'Placements of one day a week (versus block placements) adversely impact students' ability to build relationships with children'
- 'Mandatory placement hours should be 160 hours for babies and an additional 160 for two- to 12-year-olds'
- 'What about a probation approach where students only become qualified after time in the workplace, post the delivery of course content?'
- 'Diploma placements should include observable leadership tasks, such as coaching, planning, and coordinating. Consider aligning placement tasks with career progression, such as preparing for roles like educational leader or director.'

Child safety

RTOs shared some interesting insights from their perspective relative to child safety, as outlined below:

- 'We need our own child protection unit not *CHCPRT025 Identify and report children and young people at risk*.'
- 'Child safety training needs to also include educator safety.'
- 'We must be very sensitive when delivering the child protection unit to young people who have been and/or are being abused and have trauma. Consideration should be given as to whether someone is ready to do that unit, but services will want them to have it before placement.'
- 'If you take on a trainee or an SBAT, you, as the employer, are responsible for the supervision of that trainee. When they start on day one, they do not have to know everything and in fact, they know nothing. Expecting them to have child protection before they even set foot through the door is unacceptable. If employers think that getting a student to do the child protection unit and then be informed about child protection, is crazy. They still won't understand it and know what they need to do. A lot of them would be too anxious to say, 'oh, I think there's a problem with this child or I've noticed this'. They don't yet have that confidence. They shouldn't be responsible for child protection in a service. It's not their job. If we pander to that, we are creating the situation ourselves. We need to say, 'hang on, that's not acceptable. They are not responsible, you are, you're the person in charge'. RTOs have a duty of care to their students and that is our priority.'
- 'Child abusers look for weak systems, a lack of supervision and under regulation as opportunistic environments. We don't have enough control over attracting the right people to advocate for the best outcomes of children. We need to get students reflecting on their own motivations because they could be in the wrong course and maybe there's something else more suitable for them.'
- 'Motivations for people coming into the sector include those from idyllic childhoods that want to replicate their experiences and those who had terrible childhoods and want to rescue people from that. Both impact child educational outcomes.'

Leadership and coaching

RTO thoughts around leadership and coaching included:

- 'Leadership in the Diploma needs to focus on room level leadership not Director level. This could be a skillset later.'

- 'The sector wants and needs coaches, but the resources don't exist to support it.'
- 'We need additional leadership and management pathways alongside the Diploma. Maybe a separate Certificate in Leadership and Service Management, or an Advanced Diploma or skillset linked to the Community Services Diploma?'

Qualification delivery

RTOs provided the following insights in terms of how qualifications are delivered and how this impacts skill and knowledge development:

- 'The 'actively working towards' is grey in relation to the expectation of completion of units. This encourages services and some RTOs to push for faster completions, rather than slowing down and focusing on learning content.'
- 'Rolling enrolments can result in students starting with advanced units, rather than foundational ones.'
- 'There is TAFE and then there's everyone else. It's almost like we are teaching a completely different qualification, and it shouldn't be like that. Students should be getting the same regardless of where they're going. This is hurting the sector because they're getting students who are doing a qualification in three months as opposed to 12 months or two years. They're part time, the rigour and opportunities are not there. It's really unbalanced. I understand the sector want educators but at what cost? I don't know if the training package is going to be the answer, but it can help.'

Units and qualifications

RTOs made the following suggestions in terms of improving units of competency and qualifications:

Units of competency

- 'We need to decide what key skills and knowledge we want different graduates to have and focus on that. There is content that is misplaced such as child development in a legal and ethical unit. There needs to be a limit on what is expected at the Certificate III level.'
- 'Back to basics is the big message and the sector is crying out for it. The sector just wants someone who knows how to make playdoh, play with puppets, sing songs and create engagement. We need children, students and educators to be safe and families to be supported. What does that look like in the training package? It's one word: relationships.'
- 'Understanding child development is more important than being able to change a nappy. The latter skills can easily be picked up compared to building relationships and managing behaviours.'
- '*CHCECE030 Support inclusion and diversity* unit includes relationships and behaviours. I suggest these two topics are separated out into different units.'
- 'An induction unit would be helpful to give new recruits the skills and knowledge they need to get started in the sector.'
- 'Critical reflection and reflection are core parts of the EYLF, but we don't have our own unit on that.'
- 'We need a unit on 'play' or 'child development''
- 'Administering medication is often performed but is not appropriate under legislation. I would suggest removing it altogether'

- 'Meal prep unit presents challenges and may not align well the early childhood context as typically children bring meals from home rather than having them prepared onsite.'
- 'The unit on behaviour and guidance strategies has limited opportunities to coach students in effective real-world interactions and risks making parts feel tick-box in nature.'
- 'Some unit requirements are misaligned e.g. Diploma level tasks in Certificate III or tasks typically performed by coordinators assessed at a practitioner level.'
- 'Need more on oral communication skills including how to talk to parents, peers, managers, children – all different styles and how to pivot between them.'
- 'Ability to manage own self and appropriately self-advocate is critical i.e. working within own role and setting effective professional boundaries.'
- 'There needs to be consistency in language when talking about the planning cycle – different units are using different terms in this regard.'
- 'Training products should reflect safe and ethical use of digital tools to prepare students for modern workplaces as many services use Apps for communication and documentation.'
- 'Take out the unnecessary repetition across the units e.g. hand washing, safety audits, incident reports, reflection tasks. This is leading to student fatigue and disengagement.'
- 'A greater focus on inclusion is needed. This needs to go beyond diversity and include more content on inclusion, including supporting children with additional needs and behaviour management.'
- 'We can't do the work of teaching creativity and confidence in two sessions on running a music and movement session and one session on storytelling and one session on reading a book. When I taught music and movement, I would have a semester long unit that enabled me to look at different age groups, different abilities, using music, using musical instruments. We need to bring the units back, not just the mention as an element or performance criteria'.
- 'I think the problem is that we've kind of steered away from focusing on the development. We've gone into so much nappy changing and bottle preparation. We've gone the opposite way. I'd love to see us go back to more development, more understanding of the child because that's where the interactions and initiatives stem from. We don't need to deep dive as much as we do. The development unit that we had that had an overall picture of development and then aligned it well with what does that mean for us and what do we do with children.'

Qualifications

- 'We need a Certificate III core qualification with additional skillsets or streams for specific roles like FDC, IHC, OSHC, etc. instead of the current *CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* that has been developed from a LDC perspective. Maybe a bank of electives for each? In the child protection qualifications in the Certificate IV, there are two streams. There is an out of home residential and a family support stream. They are very clear subsectors.'
- 'There is too much content in the Certificate III and Diploma creating unnecessary overload and misalignment with job roles.'
- 'Focus more on foundational educator competencies in Certificate III, reduce duplication, make the workload realistic and develop clear pathways.'

- 'In Diploma: focus on lead educators and educational leaders with an emphasis on planning, documentation and leadership.'
- 'Behaviour management is too advanced early in the Certificate III. Either separate or defer behaviour management to Diploma level.'
- 'There needs to be a better balance between safety, compliance and competence across the qualifications.'
- 'Qualifications need to reflect actual roles in the sector, from assistant educator to director.'

Bring back the joy

A strong theme amongst RTOs related to bringing back the joy for students by improving their learning experiences. Some suggestions in this regard include:

- 'Activities like music and movement, dramatizing stories, using puppets are not taught, so it's not modelled and this has removed all the fun and creativity. It was a way of engaging them. And you could bounce from those activities to how does this influence development. Where is the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings and all of that? So, you start with the fun and then you work down and it's just nowhere. And our young children are really missing out on their immersion in the arts.'
- 'We had opportunities in the classroom to explore and learn music and play with materials and see what they could do. We had fun. I'd love to bring back that approach where educators know what to do for babies and toddlers in terms of music, arts, creatively and play. Back then we were expected to create the resources. We had to bring a box of things into our placement and use them. Let's bring back some of that expectation so that students, right from the beginning, get the opportunity to have fun and create.'
- 'There is a risk of focusing on quality management, child protection/safety at expense of not focusing on persistent factors responsible for developing productive and healthy young humans. Balance around responsibility for children in the early learning environment and getting that right with rights of the child, holistic development and educational focus. Joy comes from having more time to do what we would consider curriculum e.g. what it is that children are learning.'
- 'So, I'm all about the practical side, bring back singing in services because they are pressing the YouTube button and then saying, 'I've got children with big behaviours. No, it's not children with big behaviours, it's about you learning how to interact, engage and build positive relationships with children.'

Certificate II / skillset

As for introducing a Certificate II or skillset into the ECEC suite of qualifications, the following responses were received from RTOs:

- 'We strongly recommend a Certificate II in ECEC to provide students the opportunity to get their foot in the door, get the foundational skills and start working with children. If there was a Certificate II that had some units that fit into the Certificate III that they could do in years 11 and 12 with us in line with their WWCC and they could then go into a traineeship in the Certificate III area. The lack of a Certificate II in the sector is a clear gap and is resulting in young people not having basic skills and leaving the sector when they realise what's involved i.e. it would help with retention in the sector as students would be

better prepared all the way through. We are passionate about building the sector with students that are fully prepared and so they can be strong custodians within ECEC. I would envision they do their WWCC in year 11, do Certificate 11 in ECEC (separate to the Community Services Certificate II that's happening). What can be done in our experience in the Certificate II with the childcare focus Certificate II in Community Services is completely different to the rest of the other three focus areas so, we should be able to stand on our own two feet in this space.'

- 'Staff with lower-level qualifications or no qualifications could under supervision, could undertake tasks like setting up, cleaning, and helping children wash hands. My concern, however, is that there are no workforce options for people who may not be able to meet the demands of a Certificate III.'
- 'A Certificate II is more appropriate for high school students'
- 'Trying out the sector at a Certificate II level would enable people to confirm if this was the right career for them before going on to further study.'
- 'TAFE SA Centre of Excellence has a taster course which is an introduction into the sector and can help students make informed career decisions. This course includes skillsets for targeted learning in areas like inclusion, behaviour support, and child protection.'

Advanced Diploma

As for introducing an additional Advanced Diploma to the ECEC suite of qualifications, RTOs made the following comments:

- 'It was deleted because no one was enrolling because it's not mandated. We fought to keep it, but it was deleted due to low enrolments. That's the problem when we bring on a qualification that's not mandated is that people won't necessarily do it. It would be a good thing for authorised supervisors if it was mandated. The world has changed since the Advanced Diploma was deleted. That was pre-educational leader role and pre-COVID and I think our sector is crippled by the lack of people who have experience and expertise in coaching and leadership and it's screaming out for some training that provides that. This is why we have an overinflated Certificate III, why we have Certificate IIIs running rooms and people with two years of experience managing services and why we are in the state we are in. So, bring back the Advanced Diploma.'
- 'The unit: *CHCECE044 Facilitate compliance in a children's education and care service* in the Diploma involves doing a quiz and a self-assessment. We have some concern about element 5 – 'coordinate the service for an assessment and ratings visit'. Our thoughts are that sits more with a coordinator of a service more so than a Diploma educator working in a room in a service i.e. the language is around 'coordinating a service'. Is this really the Diploma educator's role or the service coordinator's role? This is the problem not having the Advanced Diploma – the Diploma does the service manager role now and that is the issue. We often will walk out and see students that have graduated with a Diploma one year later running a whole service and it's scary. Or students who are still studying running services.'

Employee workshops

Employees shared details of what educators do on the job every day, and what the learning journey looks like at various stages of their career. These insights can inform recommendations for unit design and

qualification structure by confirming what we already heard, as well as highlighting additional areas for implementation and consideration. Key insights include:

- educators understanding the 'why' of what they were doing, rather than just going through the motions such as observing meaningfully and setting up play spaces
- knowing how to play, sing and make toys
- engaging in reflective practice
- understanding grooming behaviours
- knowing how to protect children
- the ability to receive feedback.

Many of these considerations are embedded into units of competency and are considered in terms of differentiated markers in the learning journey i.e. understanding the 'why' will look different for an early Certificate III graduate compared to a Diploma qualified educator in an educational leadership role.

Discussion

This section discusses areas of agreement and contention amongst stakeholders and outlines other gaps and opportunities which emerged from the research.

Areas of agreement

Qualification differentiation

There appears to be a lack of clear differentiation between the current *CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* and *CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care*. Skill levels are not progressed appropriately. In some cases, skills and knowledge are duplicated across qualifications or omitted altogether. This lessens the validity of different qualification levels; reduces opportunities to develop skills and knowledge; puts unnecessary pressure on Certificate IIIs to perform everything a Diploma does; suggests a lack of alignment with the AQF; sets new Certificate III educators up to fail and leave; reduces the value of career progression for those wanting to develop their skills and knowledge; and ultimately lessens the capacity and development of the ECEC workforce.

CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care Both employers and RTOs agree there needs to be a core Certificate III ECEC qualification and then streams which account for different work functions across services. Potentially, this could be achieved using electives. They argue that the current qualifications are based around LDC structures, risks and needs and are therefore not fit for purpose for services such as FDC and IHC.

This is an interesting finding which directly informs qualification design. Further consultation might be helpful in getting more clarity around what is missing, what else is needed and/or whether training products need to be written in way that they effectively capture service differences or whether new units are needed.

Skill and knowledge gaps

We have heard that current training products lack opportunities for educators to develop the skills and knowledge they need to work in complex and diverse environments. Whilst some of the below content areas exist, some exceed sector expectations and others fail to provide adequate depth. As such, stakeholders agree the following content areas require further consideration and development:

- building meaningful relationships with families, children and other educators
- understanding and applying child development fundamentals and theories
- creating diverse and safe workplaces and learning environments
- meaningfully observing children
- self-awareness and ability to self-reflect
- understanding play, play types, play theory, stages, and how to scaffold play, setting up play spaces that enable child-led learning to be facilitated and extended

- ability to participate in, plan and facilitate experiences to extend children's learning through visual arts, music, dance, drama, nature pedagogy, STEM, language and literature, workplace and digital literacy skills to prepare graduates for the workplace
- leadership, management and coaching skills.

Areas of contention

CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care There are a range of perspectives around whether the Certificate III is too difficult and dense. Many stakeholders suggested this qualification is pitched more at an AQF level four than three; the language and literacy levels required to complete it exceed the capabilities of many students; there are too many assessments and unnecessary duplications of tasks; and it assumes new graduates need to know everything about everything on day one.

Others strongly support the current Certificate III saying it is exactly where it needs to be to meet the sector's needs.

Considering the lack of differentiation and difficulty progression in current qualifications, this area of contention makes sense given the context. Perhaps once the training products are clearly differentiated and logically progress from what a newly graduated Certificate III needs to be able to do to perform in the workplace compared to that of a more developed Diploma qualified educator, this point will become clearer.

CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care work functions

Based on findings from the job advertisement analysis and employer feedback, employers provided divergent views about what Certificate III graduates should be able to do in the workplace. One example of this, is program planning. It appeared as one of the top four skills sought by employers yet, several employer interviewees revealed this is indeed a group task, stating that whilst Certificate IIIs are involved in the program planning process, they are not (or should not) be responsible for writing them as should be overseen by a more senior educator in the workplace.

This is a useful finding in informing the next steps in this project as it again speaks to a need for clarity and appropriate progression of difficulty levels across qualifications. In addition, it also suggests an area requiring further and more specific consultation regarding what is and what should be expected of newly graduated Certificate IIIs in the workplace.

Certificate II / skillset

Many believed a new ECEC Certificate II or skillset would help to develop the necessary foundation skills, complete some fundamental units and better prepare new candidates for commencing the Certificate III and working in the sector. The idea is that the right people will stay and the wrong ones won't waste their and the sector's time in starting only to stop shortly thereafter. This assumes however, that retention issues depend largely on candidates not having the right basic skills or being of the right mindset in the first place. This may be the case with some, but not others.

Some suggested the Certificate II is the missing piece in high schools, or in some remote community based unregulated services. The Certificate II could attract those who may not have the language and literacy skills needed for the Certificate III, but have the skills to interact with children and perform tasks like putting things away, setting up spaces, cleaning, cooking, etc. While others took the view that an additional qualification or skillset prior to the Certificate III would further 'dumb down' the sector, increase workloads and succeed in attracting even fewer candidates, which could be catastrophic.

Whilst the introduction of additional qualifications is outside the scope of this project, this data is useful in a) identifying potential pathway opportunities into the sector and, b) the potential impacts of not having a Certificate II or skillset on existing qualifications. This pathway data will therefore be considered against existing and future priorities within HumanAbility's workforce development.

Advanced Diploma: leadership and coaching skills

Stakeholders mentioned the former Advanced Diploma in ECEC which was deleted due to low enrolments. Many are suggesting the omission of this qualification is pushing roles and responsibilities of leadership and coaching onto Diploma and even Certificate III educators despite some functions belonging to director and coordinator roles. Reinstating this qualification could ease the pressure on other roles and free the existing qualifications up to focus on the foundational and practical skills and knowledge required to perform in their job roles. Others suggest Certificate III and Diploma qualifications both need leadership skills and knowledge to meet sector demand and work functions. Still others believe leadership, and coaching skills are best suited to a skillset at a higher AQF level.

Whilst the introduction of additional qualifications is outside the scope of this project, this data is useful in a) identifying potential higher education pathway opportunities and, b) the potential impacts of not having an Advanced Diploma on existing qualifications. This data will therefore be considered against existing and future priorities within HumanAbility's workforce development.

Again, once the qualifications are differentiated and levels of difficulty are progressed, the specific skills and knowledge required within each qualification may become clearer.

Other gaps and opportunities

Training product quality

A review of current training product against the sector's benchmarks (QDQP, NQS, EYLF) revealed opportunities where training products could be better aligned. This is a critical finding within this research which directly informs how existing training products can be improved to ensure educators are well-equipped to perform job roles that meet work functions and provide quality early education.

Child safety

A current, emerging and critical theme in the ECEC sector is child safety. The findings have revealed keeping children safe is multi-faceted and requires a holistic approach which includes prevention education, parent focused interventions, sexual socialisation, perpetrator interventions, standards, situational crime prevention and contextual prevention. More specifically, it is also important to recognise

child-to-child interactions and educator safety as foundations of child safe cultures. According to one employer, risk awareness by all educators, should also be an integral feature in child safety.

At the time of writing this report, HumanAbility and the ACCP are engaged in regular meetings to review and map training content, determine how the newly mandated child safety training will be provided to educators and, if any, gaps exist in terms of the findings of this report. This information will inform the development of training products to ensure they complement the ACCP's content without unnecessary duplication.

Assessment requirements

Recent child safety incidents have highlighted the importance of ensuring training package assessment requirements can be fulfilled whilst protecting child rights (including consent and privacy); enabling educators to develop the skills and knowledge they need to perform work functions and provide high quality childcare; and protect services from unnecessary liability and reputational risk. This will be informed through further consultation to determine what skills newly graduated educators require to perform work functions and in particular personal care tasks involving, toileting, dressing, nappy changing, feeding, etc. Consideration will then be given to determine what needs to be assessed and how and what should be learnt on the job (post-graduation).

Unit development

In addition to levels of difficulty in units needing to be clearly differentiated at appropriate levels, the data also involved several comments about specific units in terms of:

- separating content areas
- increasing placement hours
- using consistent language and terms
- removing irrelevant content (medication and meals)
- including digital skills
- removing unnecessary duplicate assessment tasks
- balancing relevant content.

Each of these areas will be considered during the unit and qualification design phase of this project. Some areas will require further consultation with stakeholders.

Higher education pathways

Building tertiary-ready foundational skills into training packages was suggested to better prepare vocational graduates for higher education and improve the confidence of universities in accepting these students into their programs. Key skills include writing, critical thinking, referencing and concepts of academic integrity, paraphrasing, writing balanced arguments using multiple sources and opinions, giving presentations, and basic literacy, numeracy and curriculum knowledge.

Opportunities to embed these skills into the *CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* and *CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* will be closely considered. Whilst

some could be embedded into units of competency, others are likely beyond task and assessment requirements of these levels.

Integrating First Nations perspectives

Employer feedback has revealed that training products do not effectively integrate First Nations people's cultures, histories, knowledges and perspectives. This qualification review is an excellent opportunity to reconsider where and how these components might best be captured within training products, so they are integral to early childhood service practices and not simply 'add-ons'.

Different streams

Employers requesting the introduction of different streams to accommodate differences between services and roles aligns well with the recent occupation categories in the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) 2024. The opportunity in this qualification review is to ensure qualifications, units of competency, potential streams, training package rules, and companion volumes align with these occupation classifications.

Conclusion / next steps

This Functional Analysis Report provided an outline of the scope and purpose of the Early Childhood Education and Care qualifications review, the sector's current climate and issues, how data was collected, categorised and analysed, and subsequent findings and discussions.

Given this project's primary objectives are to ensure educators have the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform job roles, achieve work functions and meet sector and community needs, some clear next steps have emerged throughout this functional analysis process. They are outlined below:

- align qualifications more closely with QDQP, NQS, OSCA and EYLF sector benchmarks
- clearly differentiate skill and knowledge outcomes and difficulty progressions across qualifications rather than treating units of competency as stand-alone skillsets, duplicated or missed altogether
- consider embedding tertiary-ready skills into units of competency where appropriate
- integrate First Nations cultures, histories, knowledges and perspectives into training products
- add skills and knowledge to training products which adequately prepare educators for all parts of their job roles including how they present, perform and interact with other educators, children and families
- further consider the position of leadership, management and coaching skills within qualifications once they have been differentiated including the progression of skills and knowledge relative to appropriate difficulty levelsnote potential pathway opportunities identified in this report (into the sector and into higher education) against current and future ECEC sector priorities
- map ACCP content to the functional analysis findings in this report to determine gaps and how training products should be developed to ensure content is complementary and not duplication
- consult further with stakeholders to determine:
 - skills needed by graduate educators (Both Certificate III and Diploma) relative to work functions including program planning, personal care tasks, digital skills; what needs to be assessed; in what contexts; and with what requirements
 - where leadership, management and coaching skills should be positioned for ECEC qualifications
 - FDC, IHC and OSHC services to determine their specific needs and how they might best be accommodated in the training products including irrelevant and missing content areas
 - engage with First Nations communities and services to ensure all content and assessments are reviewed by relevant experts (Indigenous and non-Indigenous).

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Appendix A – Employer interview questions

Can you tell us a bit about your role and your organisation? For example, staff numbers, locations, service types, etc.

Is your organisation an RTO? If so, what do you deliver and to whom?

How familiar are you with the ECEC training packages for the Certificate III and Diploma?

What are the different roles/position titles you employ in your organisation?

How might you describe the role tasks of an educator recently graduated from a Certificate III?

How might you describe the role tasks of an educator recently graduated from a Diploma?

What are your main recruitment challenges, if any?

Do you employ for any non-ratio reliant roles above and beyond minimum service educator requirements? (e.g. educator assistants?)

Who is your typical candidate/applicant? i.e. gender, age, background, notable trends (e.g. increased interest from people with childcare qualifications or experience, school leavers?)

Would you like to attract different or a broader range of candidates? If so, who and why?

What are the motivating factors for new recruits into the ECEC workforce? Have you experienced barriers to supporting these motivations and increasing retention?

Do you employ trainees, or do you require all new recruits have experience? If you require experience, how much?

What skills, knowledge and/or attributes do new educators need before working in the ECEC sector? When and how could these be attained?

Are you aware of any skills or knowledge gaps in current ECEC qualifications?

Do you provide your employees with any training? If so, what types?

Are you aware of reasons some students struggle to complete their ECEC qualifications? If so, do you have any suggestions to improve this?

Are Certificate III educators motivated to undertake further study such as the Diploma? What are the benefits, motivators and de-motivators of doing so? (e.g. increased pay, responsibility, etc.)

Do you employ trainees and if so why/why not? Are there any barriers you have identified to using traineeships? Can you see benefit in having an ECEC traineeship qualification?

Are there any areas in the training products where individuals / groups are excluded and/or their access is more difficult? (i.e. internet or equipment requirements, remote and regional location challenges, language and cultural barriers, discriminatory factors including disability, age, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.).

What does a typical day look like in the life of a Certificate III qualified educator?

What does a typical day look like in the life of a Diploma qualified educator?

Are there challenges educators face?

What are the key skills that differentiate a Certificate III from a Diploma qualified educator?

Would you be willing to share any job descriptions with us to assist us in collecting data relevant to the needs of industry?

What are the most important skills for success in each of your job roles?

What are the most important qualities and attributes for each job role?

What are the essential knowledge areas for each job role?

Can you tell me about the language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy technology skill requirements for each of your job roles?

What level of preparedness do educators have in terms of providing inclusive and supportive learning experiences for children's varying needs and backgrounds? (including complex behaviours, neurodiversity, disability, cultural engagement, responsiveness and safety)

What level of preparedness do educators have in terms of promoting and ensuring child safety?

What level of preparedness do educators have to use evidence-based learning frameworks to apply pedagogies and practices to suit ages and stages of children's development?

What level of preparedness do educators have for engaging children with curriculum content such as STEM, creative and visual arts, music, drama, language and literacy education?

In terms of engaging children with curriculum content such as STEM, creative and visual arts, music, drama, language and literacy; what skills do Certificate III educators need?

In terms of engaging children with curriculum content such as STEM, creative and visual arts, music, drama, language and literacy; what skills do Diploma educators need?

What level of preparedness do educators have in terms of understanding how infants and children learn and develop; and how to teach them?

What level of preparedness do educators have in terms of implementing the curriculum planning and assessment cycle?

Could targeted upskilling/ micro credentials be formally recognised as professional development and be tied to wage classification structures?

Could targeted upskilling /micro credentials in areas not covered by broader VET programs lead to greater levels of worker engagement and satisfaction?

Are there new technologies or tools you are using or considering for your services? (e.g. digital attendance tracking, online activity planning)

What political, technological, or socio-economic changes are currently affecting the ECEC sector? (e.g. funding, legislation, labour shortages)

Are there any issues, areas of concern or challenges with work placements for Certificate III students? (e.g. length, accessibility, assessment difficulties)

Are there any emerging issues or in-demand skills in the sector that could be supported by short form courses /micro credentials?

Are there any issues, areas of concern or challenges with work placements for Diploma students?

Finally, a blue-sky question: Imagine you could design the perfect training package and set of training products for the ECEC sector. What would it/they look like? What would it/they involve / include? What would it/they achieve?

Appendix B – RTO focus group questions

What, if any, challenges do you experience with implementing and assessing current training products? (specific to *CHC50125 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care* & *CHC30125 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education*)

Are you aware of anything missing in any of the training products? (i.e. technical skills, knowledge, foundation skills at qualification or unit of competency levels)

Is there anything else you would add to the training products?

What, if any, common barriers exist for students commencing or during their studies for either of these qualifications?

Are there adequate opportunities to make reasonable adjustments within the training products? (i.e. to suit different abilities and learning needs)

What, if any, completion or student retention issues have you experienced?

What parts of the training do students enjoy and engage well with?

Is there anything you might suggest in terms of attracting and retaining student completions?

Are there duplications across any of the training products? If so, are they necessary or unnecessary?

Are there any areas in the training products where individuals / groups are excluded and/or their access is more difficult? (i.e. internet or equipment requirements, remote and regional location challenges, language and cultural barriers, discriminatory factors including disability, age, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.).

Do you think different Certificate III options would be useful for those wanting to work within community-based services?

Are there any issues, areas of concern or challenges with work placements for Certificate III students? (e.g. length, accessibility, assessment difficulties)

Are there any issues, areas of concern or challenges with work placements for Diploma students?

What do you believe the work placement requirements for the Certificate III should look like and why?

Could targeted upskilling /micro credentials in areas not covered by broader VET programs lead to greater levels of worker engagement and satisfaction?

Could targeted upskilling /micro credentials in areas not covered by broader VET programs lead to greater levels of worker engagement and satisfaction?

Are there any emerging issues or in-demand skills in the sector that could be supported by short form courses /micro credentials?

What opportunities do you see for the development of pre-employment pathways, a Certificate II, skillsets or micro-credentials?

What do you see as being the most crucial legislation and policy updates that will need to be considered during the review of these qualifications?

Finally, a blue-sky question: Imagine you could design the perfect training package and set of training products for the ECEC sector. What would they look like? What would they involve / include? What would they achieve?

Appendix C – Male employee interview questions

Are there training tasks that men feel especially challenged by?

Are there workplace tasks that men feel especially challenged by? Have you provided males with extra training or support to help men feel comfortable performing these tasks.

What cultural barriers are there for men to undertake certain workplace tasks? How might they be overcome? Culture may refer to gender, age, Indigenous identity, ethnicity, faith group, sexuality, education level, etc.

Do you think training packages exclude men, directly or indirectly? If so, how?

Do you think workplaces exclude men, directly or indirectly? If so, how?

Imagine the ECEC sector was gender neutral. Ideally, what would the workplace and training packages look like?

Are there unrealised opportunities for men in the sector?

Tell me about the isolation experienced by men in the sector.

What creates a sense of community for men in the sector?

What do men need to thrive in the sector?

How do you think young men are feeling about working in ECEC given recent abuse charges against men in the sector? Consider men currently in the sector and boys/men thinking of working in the sector.

Would the sector be more highly valued if there were more men in it?

Only 3% of the ECEC workforce are men. What is the long-term impact of not having more men in the sector?

How do we attract more men to the sector?

What could be done at the recruitment phase to employ the right people?

What could be done in the workplace to retain the right people?

Thinking about recent allegations of abuse by male ECEC workers, what do you think can be done at the training level to prevent this from occurring?

What do you think can be done at the recruitment level to prevent this from occurring?

What is the role of HE qualifications in the ECEC sector?

Would you like to see VET qualifications structured so that they provide a pathway to HE qualifications?

What do you think of including a 'fitness to practice' component in Certificate III and Diploma programs? For example, where the RTO assures the fitness to practice of learners commencing placement.

Note regarding all interview questions: A bank of interview questions was provided to each interviewee prior to each interview to guide the conversation and ensure the best use of time. Interviewees were invited to speak to all or some of them or, if they preferred, to discuss other areas that had not yet been identified. This flexible approach catered to a range of individual preferences, styles and expertise and successfully resulted in a comprehensive data set representing a wide range of perspectives.



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