Children's education and care

HumanAbility

1. Sector profile

The children's education and care (CEC) sector provides education, care and development services to children from birth to end-of-school age. HumanAbility's remit covers the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce employed in services under and outside of the National Quality Framework (NQF), and education support roles serving children in their early years and school years.[1]

Within these sectors, subsectors and frameworks, there are important distinctions. For example: Long Day Care (LDC) services cater to children from infancy to before schooling years; preschools (also known as kindergartens) serve children in the year or two before full-time schooling, family day care (FDC) serves infants through to end of primary school, and Outside of School Hours Care (OSHC) serves children in primary school (and, following recent policy changes, preschool), and has a larger emphasis on leisure and recreation, as opposed to care and development.

The CEC occupations under HumanAbility's remit are:

- early childhood educators (including room leaders, and educators working in pre-school, FDC, OSHC, and nannies)
- children's education and care service directors (including OSHC coordinators and preschool directors)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers, Community Education Officers, Community Education Counsellors
- Inclusion support assistant
- early childhood teachers, and
- education professionals not elsewhere defined at skill level 1, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Teacher.[2]

The CEC sector plays a vital role in children's learning, care and development across a range of domains – cognitive, language, physical, emotional, cultural and social.

The CEC sector plays a vital role in children's learning, care and development across a range of domains – cognitive, language, physical, emotional, cultural[3] and social. High-quality services provide numerous developmental benefits for children, supporting lifelong learning, development and wellbeing.[4]

Available, accessible, quality CEC also promotes social equity and financial security for families and communities, by enabling parents and carers – and children themselves once older – to work, study, and volunteer. This in turn promotes gender equity and community cohesion, contributes to local, state, and national economies, and promotes higher productivity, innovation and community connectedness.[5]

1.1 Size and demographic profile

In November 2024, there were 920,400 individuals employed within School and Children's Education and Care sectors, including school teaching and leadership roles (which are beyond HumanAbility's remit).[6] This is projected to grow to 963,000 by 2034.[7] 81% are women, 34% work outside capital cities, and just 2% are First Nations.[8]

Profile of the children's education and care sector[9]

920,351 employed

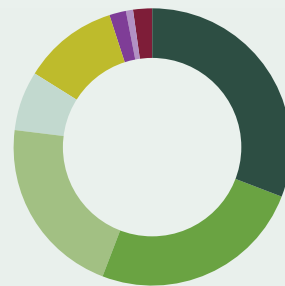**81%** are female

42% are part-time

2% identify as First Nations
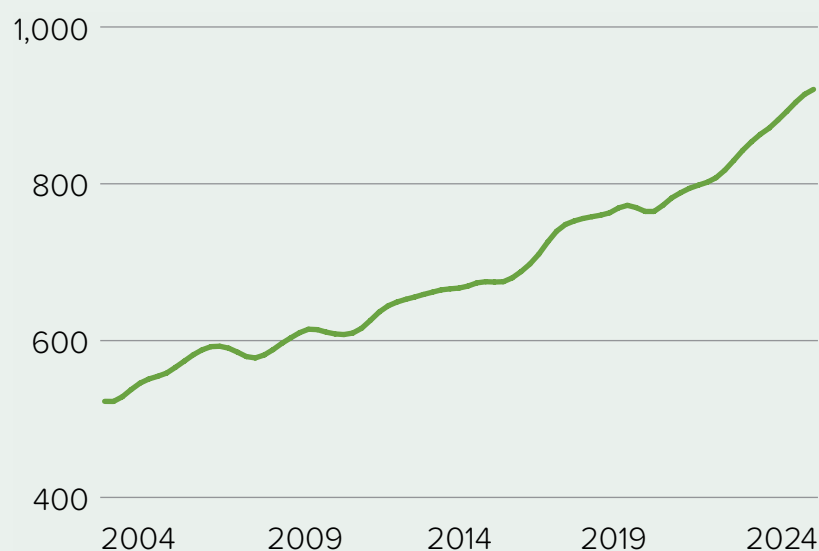
34% work outside the capital city

Employment by state

- New South Wales **31%**
- Victoria **25%**
- Queensland **21%**
- South Australia **7%**
- Western Australia **11%**
- Tasmania **2%**
- Northern Territory **1%**
- Australian Capital Territory **2%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Employment over time (thousands)

1,000

800

600

400

2004   2009   2014   2019   2024

Employment projection

2029 **918,600 employees**

2034 **963,000 employees**

Relative to all Australian occupations, staff holding roles in the ECEC workforce:

Are much more likely to be female (93.3% vs 48.6%)

Are more likely to hold a qualification at the level of Certificate III or above (78.7% vs 66.1%)

Earn less than similarly qualified occupations

Are slightly more likely to be born overseas and speak a language other than English at home (30.5% and 23.6% vs 28.5% and 21.4%)

Are more likely to have a long-term health condition (33% vs 28.6%)[10]

The median age of workers differs between service types and by gender. For example, occupations falling under the "education aide" grouping have a median age of 43[11] and educators in family day care (FDC) and preschools have a median age of 45–46, followed by educators in long day care (LDC) at 35 for women and 32 for men, while outside school hours care (OSHC) and vacation care workers have a median age of 23 for men and 25–26 for women.[12]

The proportion of First Nations people is much higher in ECEC occupations (3.8%) than the average for the broader education and training sector (2%), and the average for all occupations (1.7%); however, First Nations people remain over-represented in the lower-paid roles.[13] There is a pronounced geographic dimension to this cohort, with First Nations workers in ECEC settings comprising 2.4% of the workforce in major cities, 6.8% in regional Australia, and 25% in remote Australia.[14]

Occupations

The five largest occupation groups under HumanAbility's remit are Early Childhood Educators, "education aides" (multiple roles; see footnote),[15] Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs), and Children's Education and Care Centre Directors.

These key occupations work in LDC services,[16] FDC services, standalone preschools[17] (including preschool programs within LDC services), schools (especially education aides, OSHC and vacation care (VAC) workers), occasional care (also known as limited hours care) services, the In Home Care program, mobile services, and ECE or integrated services offered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). These last three services are overwhelmingly utilised by children and families in remote areas and with additional or complex needs.

Other core roles in the sector covered in this profile but not well captured by ANSZCO are pedagogical/educational leaders, room leaders, and FDC coordinators.[18] The replacement of ANZSCO with OSCA will provide greater granularity and accuracy for CEC occupations. This change has commenced but will fully come into effect with the 2026 census, with key data sets used for occupational planning still using ANZSCO.

Table 1: Key occupations in CEC and Education sectors[19]

Occupations (per ANZSCO)	Number employed Feb 2025	Female share	Median weekly earnings	Part-time share	Median age
4211 – Educator ("Child carer") including: • 42111 Child care worker • 42112 1 – family day care worker • 42113 Nanny • 42114 Out of school hours care worker	176,300	94%	$1146	55%	32, of which: 45–46 in FDC[20] 35 in LDC 23–26 in OSHC & VAC[21]
"Child Care Centre Manager" #1341	20,100	94%	$1412	24%	41
Early Childhood Teacher #2411	73,700	97%	$1660	50%	39
"Education Aide" #4221 including: • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker 422111 • Integration Aide 422112 • Preschool Aide 422115 • Teachers' Aide 422116	134,800	86%	$1098	69%	43
Primary School Teacher #2412	164,300	85%	$2000	35%	39
Secondary School Teacher #2414	146,400	62%	$2166	22%	42

Table 1 (above) shows that in occupations where the children are younger, the proportion of women is higher, and their earnings are lower. This links to two issues HumanAbility is working on: increasing gender diversity in the sector, and increasing the valuation of the care and support workforces, which remain heavily female dominated.

The 2024 ECEC National Workforce Census (NWC) has very similar estimates for key ECEC roles, despite differing methodologies. The NWC counted a total of 240,041 people working in services eligible to receive the Child Care Subsidy (an increase of 23,422 since the 2021 NWC) in May and April 2024, of which 217,420 were 'paid contact staff' directly providing care or education to children.[22]

Of the ECEC workforce, the NWC found the vast majority – almost 80% – worked at an LDC. Of the remaining workers, 30,486 worked in OSHC, 31,686 in vacation care, 9,688 in FDC, 743 in IHC and 28,009 in standalone preschools.[23]

Numerous education and training qualifications and pathways provide entry to these vital occupations. The most common of these are:

- Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC 30121)
- Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC0121)
- Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care
- Diploma of School Age Education and Care (CHC50221)
- Certificate III in School Based Education Support (CHC30221)
- Certificate IV in School Based Education Support (CHC40221)
- Bachelor and Master of Education (in Early Childhood or Early Childhood and Primary)

These courses and qualifications are offered by a mix of TAFE institutes, universities, dual-sector providers, community education providers including ACCOs, enterprise providers, and private training providers.

Additionally, Earn While You Learn (EWYL) models, such as traineeships, and Grow-Your-Own programs (including On Country programs for First Nations people, typically in regional and remote settings) provide different and often more flexible pathways (see case study on RATEP below).

Employers are also accessing microcredentials to meet specific technical or bespoke professional learning and development needs in areas as diverse as supporting children with developmental delays or disabilities, frontline management and educational leadership. HumanAbility is researching the potential for quality, shorter forms of training to meet the sectors' desire for more flexible training options to support the ongoing professional development and upskilling of existing workers (see sections 2 and 4).

Qualification types and levels

The qualification types and levels vary across occupations and across service settings, (see Figure 1, below) reflecting not only different services, age cohorts and contexts, but also regulations at state and federal levels to support quality.[24] Within ECEC, 81.3% of workers working directly with children had an ECEC-related qualification. Additionally, 27.9% of LDC educators were currently studying for a qualification, an increase from 23.7% in 2021.[25]

Figure 1: Qualification types and proportions across ECEC settings[26]
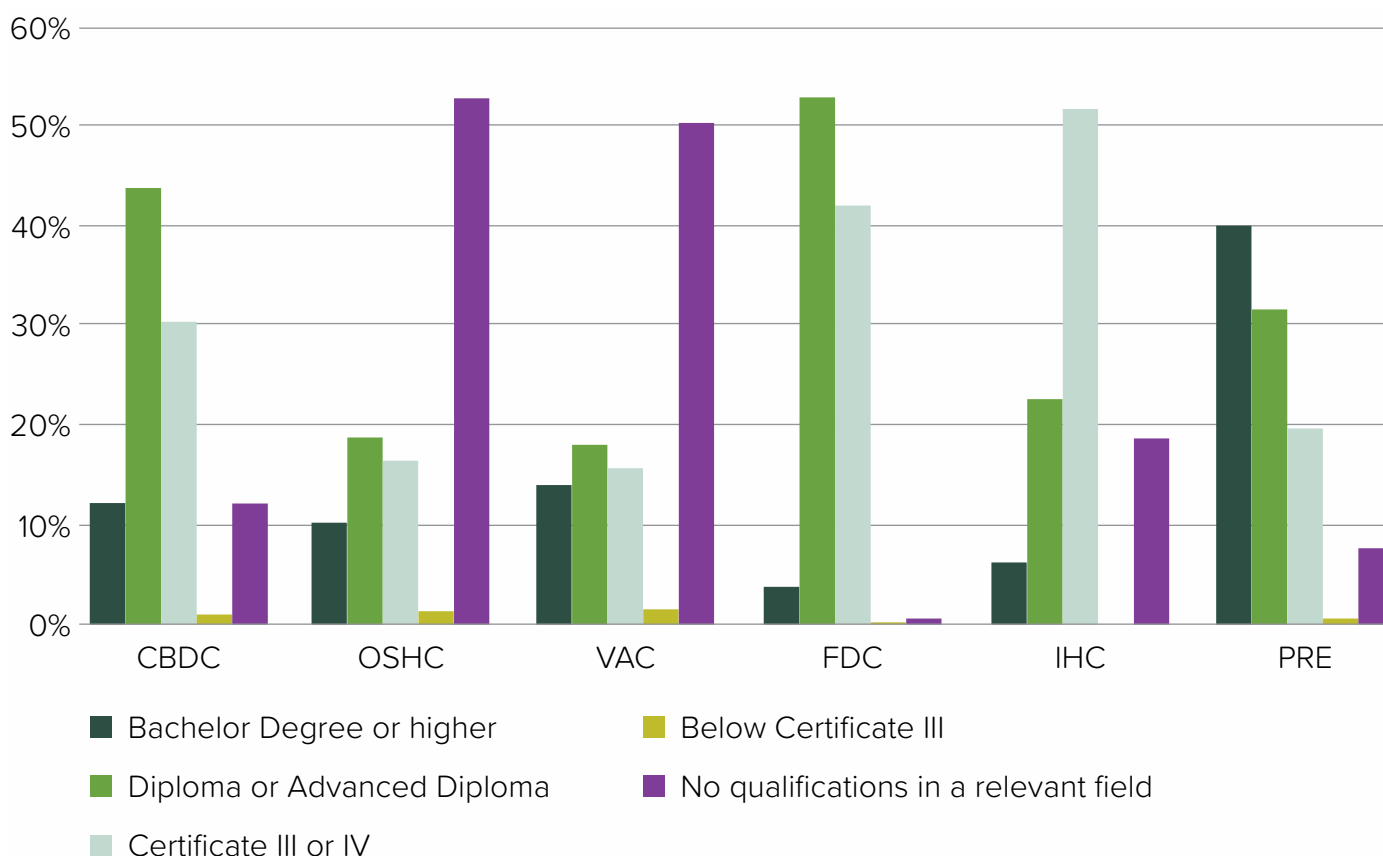
Over half of all OSHC and vacation care educators hold no qualifications in a relevant field,[27] reflecting (among other factors) the lack of nationally consistent qualifications for these subsectors. This is an area of current focus for HumanAbility (see sections 3 and 4). However, 24.1% of OSHC educators and 26.5% of vacation care workers are undertaking a qualification in ECEC or a related field. The vast majority of these are Bachelor-degree qualifications or higher.[28] This fact – that so many OSHC and vacation care educators are younger and undertaking tertiary education in non-ECEC fields – is directly correlated to their high turnover, both with their current employer and the sector.[29] Once these educators finish their degree (or other qualification), they seek or commence work in those other fields.

1.2 Forecast growth

All occupations under HumanAbility's CEC remit have grown in workforce size in the last 12 months and are expected to further increase in coming years. However, this growth does not meet current demand and falls far short of meeting future demand under all modelling scenarios, especially when workforce attrition and policy reforms are considered. This is explored further in section 3.

Employment projections from Victoria's University's forecasting model show varying levels of growth across the four key CEC occupations within HumanAbility's remit, as well as overall growth for all CEC sub-sectors between May 2024 to May 2034 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Employment projections May 2024 to May 2034 for core CEC occupations under HumanAbility Remit[30]

Occupations (per ANZSCO)	Projected employment May 2034	% change from 2024 to 2034
Educator ("Child carer") #4211: including Child care worker 42111; FDC worker 421112; Nanny 42113; OSHC worker 42114)	177,100	+ 2.3%
Child Care Centre Manager #1341	22,400	+ 13.2%
Early Childhood Teacher #2411	66,700	+ 8.6%
Education Aide #4221 including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker 422111; Integration Aide 422112; Preschool Aide 422115; Teachers' Aide 422116	142,452	+ 11.1%
All children's education and care subsector	963,000	+ 7.4%

All occupations under HumanAbility's CEC remit have grown in workforce size in the last 12 months... However, this growth does not meet current demand and falls far short of meeting future demand.

1.3 Enrolments and completions in qualifications

Far more people enrol in the qualifying courses than complete them. While some learners discontinue for good reasons – for example, switching to a course that better meets their needs and interests – high non-completion rates among other students raise possible questions around course content and delivery, including whether all students' needs are being met as effectively as possible. Further, very low rates of enrolment and especially of completion among learners identifying as First Nations and learners disclosing a disability (relative to the proportion of these cohorts in Australian population) highlight the need for these courses to be more physically and culturally inclusive and responsive to learner needs. These issues are discussed further in section 3 on challenges and opportunities, and section 4: roadmap.

Table 3: 2023 Enrolments and completions in CEC qualifications (NCVER, 2024)[31]

For qualifications marked with *, please note qualification has been superseded.

First Nations and disability enrolments are based on the numbers of learners that disclose this status. For each of these, between 2% and 12% of learners did not disclose their identity in the survey.

† There are no national qualification requirements for educators at OSHC services, however, state and territory-specific qualification requirements apply in the ACT, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

82,119

18,046

Indigenous: Enrolments **5.9%**; Completions **2.4%**   Disability: Enrolments **7.2%**; Completions **3.6%**

#### CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care*

5,190

921

Indigenous: Enrolments **4.6%**; Completions **2.9%**   Disability: Enrolments **5.1%**; Completions **5.2%**

CHC50121 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care

21,798

4,473

Indigenous: Enrolments **4.3%**; Completions **2.0%**   Disability: Enrolments **4.9%**; Completions **1.9%**

CHC50113 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care*

2,604

1,508
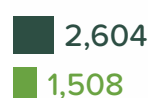
Indigenous: Enrolments **2.1%**; Completions **1.1%**   Disability: Enrolments **3.5%**; Completions **2.5%**

■ Enrolments   ■ Completions

CHC40113 Certificate IV in School Aged Education and Care[†]

284

95

Indigenous: Enrolments **3.6%**; Completions **6.0%**   Disability: Enrolments **7.9%**; Completions **6.5%**

CHC50213 Diploma of School Age Education and Care*

1420

209

Indigenous: Enrolments **4.3%**; Completions **11.5%**   Disability: Enrolments **7.0%**; Completions **2.8%**

CHC50221 Diploma of School Age Education and Care

73

16

Indigenous: Enrolments **2.1%**; Completions **1.1%**   Disability: Enrolments **3.5%**; Completions **2.5%**

CHC40213 Certificate IV in Education Support

588

216

Indigenous: Enrolments **3.4%**; Completions **1.4%**   Disability: Enrolments **3.8%**; Completions **1.0%**

CHC30213 Certificate III in Education Support

413

228

Indigenous: Enrolments **6.0%**; Completions **4.0%**   Disability: Enrolments **12.9%**; Completions **15.8%**

CHC40221 Certificate IV in School Based Education Support

18,118

4,045

Indigenous: Enrolments **3.5%**; Completions **1.4%**   Disability: Enrolments **6.4%**; Completions **4.5%**

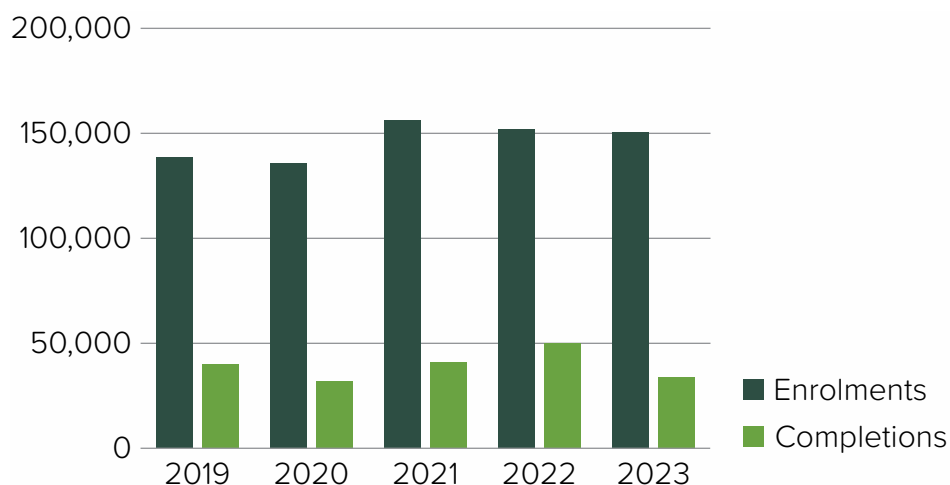CHC30221 Certificate III in School Based Education Support

17,886

4,123

Indigenous: Enrolments **7.0%**; Completions **4.1%**   Disability: Enrolments **8.4%**; Completions **6.8%**
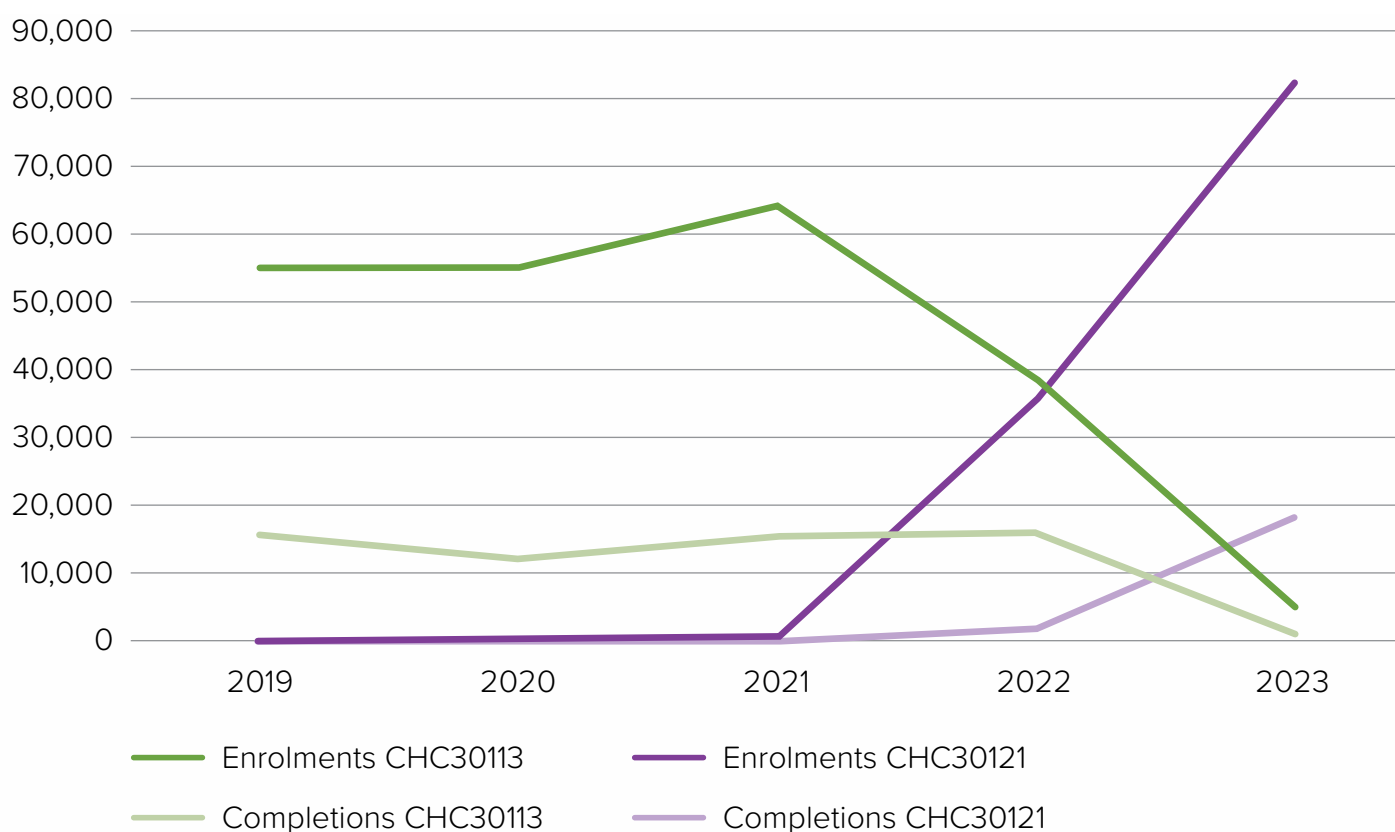
■ Enrolments   ■ Completions

Table 4: Enrolments and completions in CEC qualifications, 2019–2023[32]

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Enrolments	138,440	135,865	156,390	152,150	150,510
Completions	39,870	32,025	40,850	49,885	33,860

Table 4, above, shows that while enrolments across all CEC qualifications have risen since 2019, completion numbers per year over this period have fluctuated. While there may be several reasons for this, examination of completions at the level of specific qualifications provides some potential insights.

Figure 2: Trends in enrolment numbers, and in completion numbers, for Certificate III in ECEC[33]

Legend:
- Enrolments CHC30113
- Enrolments CHC30121
- Completions CHC30113
- Completions CHC30121

This figure illustrates the enrolment and completion trends for Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care from 2019 to 2023, showing a clear transition between the superseded CHC30113 qualification and the new CHC30121 qualification. It highlights a successful transition between qualifications, with a significant uptake of CHC30121. However, the slower rise in completions compared to enrolments suggests challenges in course retention and completion rates, which may require further investigation.

Figure 3: Trends in enrolment numbers, and in completion numbers, for Diploma of ECEC[34]
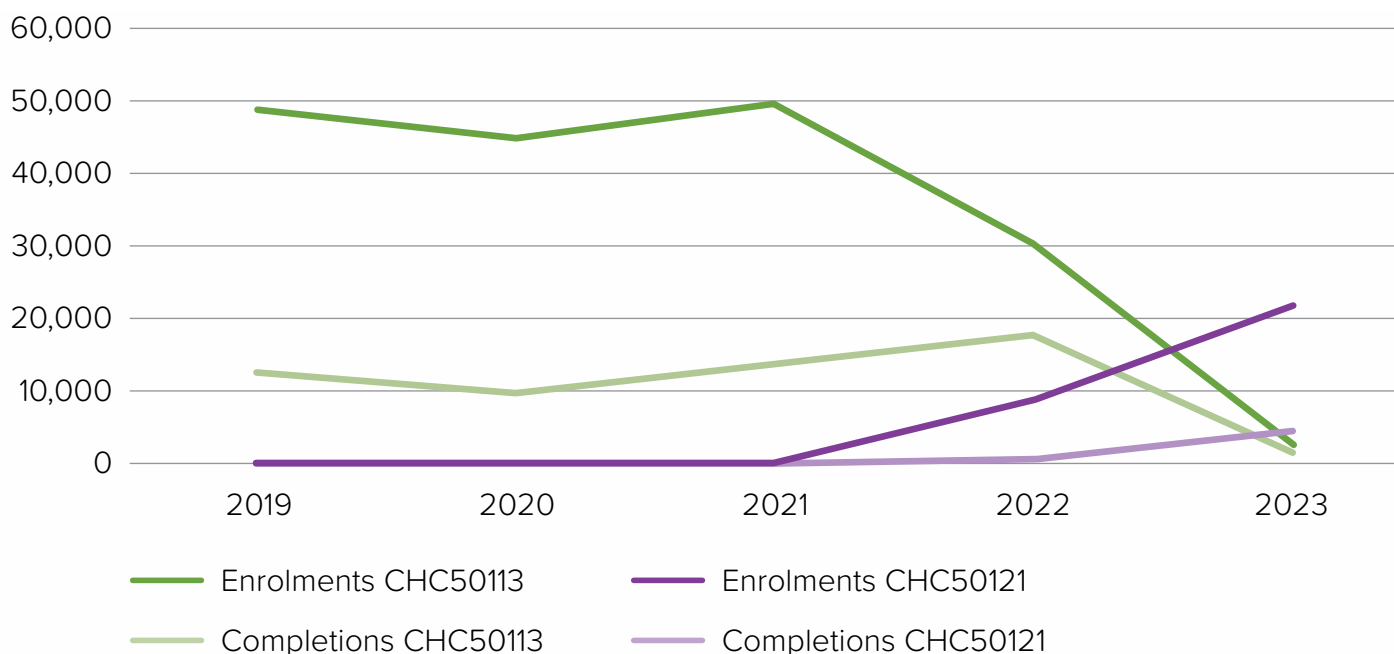

Figure 3 shows the transition from CHC50113 to the new CHC50121 qualification. This trend indicates a successful transition between qualifications, with increasing uptake of CHC50121. However, the slower rise in completions compared to enrolments suggests course retention challenges, similar to those seen in the Certificate III transition. Ensuring adequate support for students to complete their qualifications will be essential in meeting workforce demands in the early childhood education sector.
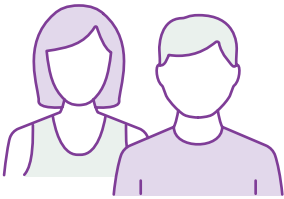
Gender

Enrolments and completions for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by gender, 2023[35]

Females accounted for **93.8%** **of enrolments** and **94.2%** **of completions**

Males represented **5.6%** **of enrolments** and **5.3%** **of completions**

People who identified as **'Other'** made up **0.2%** **of enrolments** and **0.1%** **of completions**

Not known: Enrolments 0.4%; Completions 0.4%

Analysis of the student cohort engaging with CEC qualifications in 2023 highlights a vast majority of students are female, with women comprising approximately 94% of both completions and enrolments.
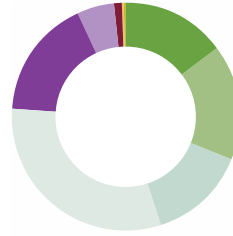
Age

Enrolments for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by age, 2023[36]
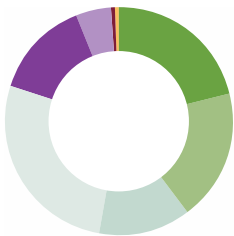
- 14 years and under **0%**
- 15 to 19 years **21.2%**
- 20 to 24 years **18.6%**
- 25 to 29 years **13.1%**
- 30 to 39 years **27.0%**
- 40 to 49 years **14.0%**
- 50 to 59 years **4.8%**
- 60 to 64 years **0.8%**
- 65 years and over **0.3%**
- Not known **0%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. Categories shown as 0% may represent values less than 0.5%.

Completions for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by age, 2023[37]

- 14 years and under **0%**
- 15 to 19 years **15.0%**
- 20 to 24 years **16.4%**
- 25 to 29 years **13.8%**
- 30 to 39 years **31.1%**
- 40 to 49 years **16.9%**
- 50 to 59 years **5.5%**
- 60 to 64 years **0.9%**
- 65 years and over **0.3%**
- Not known **0.2%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. Categories shown as 0% may represent values less than 0.5%.

Students aged 30–39 make up the cohort with the highest proportion of both completions and enrolments, though there is a fairly even spread among other age groups, tapering off in the 50–59 bracket.
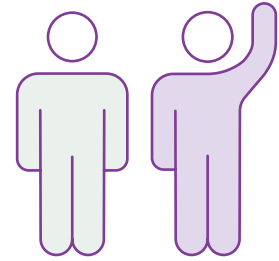
First Nations

Enrolments and completions for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by Indigenous identity, 2023[38]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners represented **5.3% of enrolments** and **2.4% of completions**

Non-indigenous learners accounted for **86.4% of enrolments** and **76.2% of completions**

Not known status comprised **8.3% of enrolments** and **21.5% of completions**

Reflecting the relatively low rate of First Nations representation within the CEC sector itself, First Nations students continue to be underrepresented among CEC qualification completions. It should be noted, however, that a relatively high proportion of completions have a 'not known' categorisation for First Nations status, potentially indicating a slight undercounting.

Disability

Enrolments and completions for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by students living with disability, 2023[39]

Learners with a disability made up **6.8% of enrolments** and **4.1% of completions**

Learners without a disability represented **84.1% of enrolments** and **77.9% of completions**

Not known status comprised **9.1% of enrolments** and **18.0% of completions**
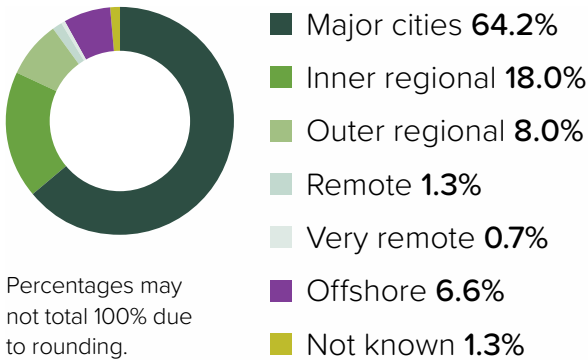
While, as with First Nations status, a significant proportion of CEC students did not record whether or not they live with a disability or other long-term condition, students who did identify as in this cohort made up 6.8% of enrolments and 4.1% of completions in 2023.
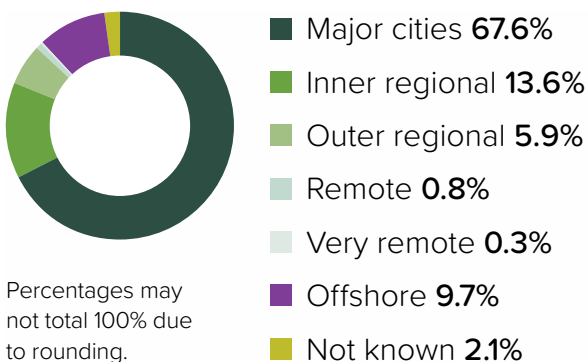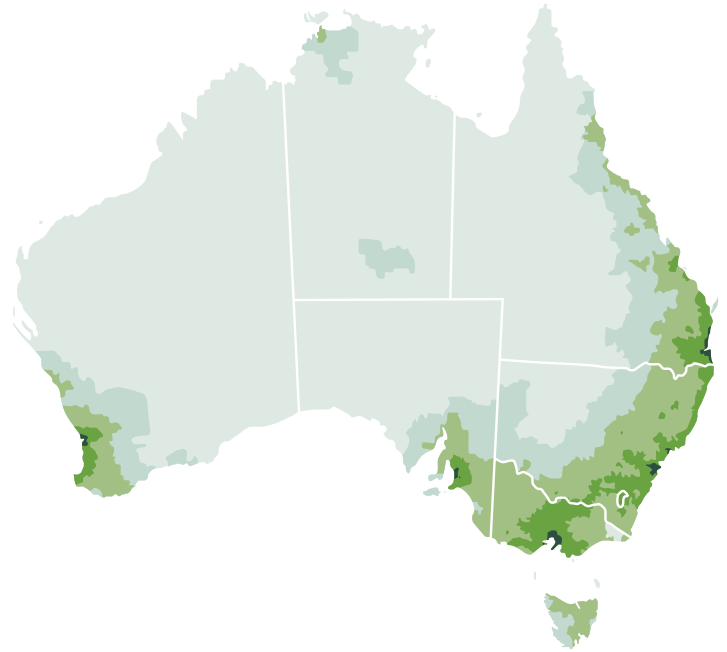
Geographic location

Enrolments for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by remoteness, 2023[41]

- ■ Major cities **64.2%**
- ■ Inner regional **18.0%**
- ■ Outer regional **8.0%**
- ■ Remote **1.3%**
- ■ Very remote **0.7%**
- ■ Offshore **6.6%**
- ■ Not known **1.3%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Completions for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by remoteness, 2023[42]

- ■ Major cities **67.6%**
- ■ Inner regional **13.6%**
- ■ Outer regional **5.9%**
- ■ Remote **0.8%**
- ■ Very remote **0.3%**
- ■ Offshore **9.7%**
- ■ Not known **2.1%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Students living in major cities account for around two-thirds of both enrolment and completions, joined by those living in inner regional and outer regional communities, as well as offshore (predominantly international-based) students to make up the vast majority of both student cohorts.

Major cities had the highest **enrolments (64.2%)** and **completions (67.6%)**
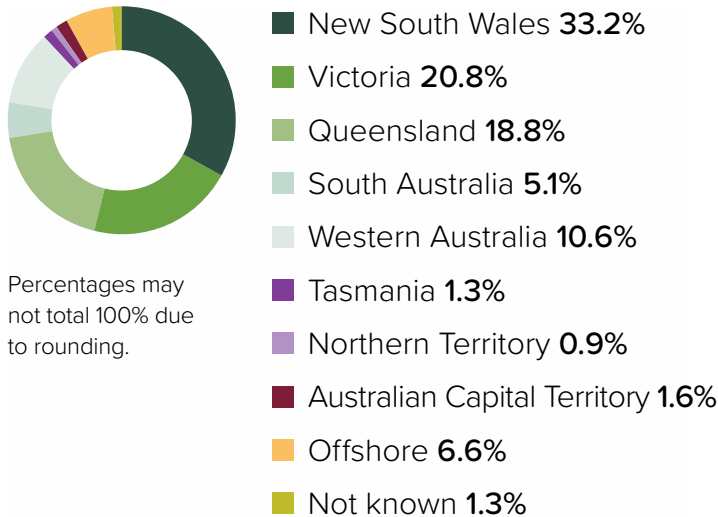
Students in **Very remote** and **Remote** areas comprise approximately **2%** of **overall enrolments** and **1.1% completions**
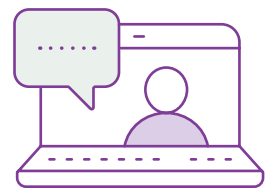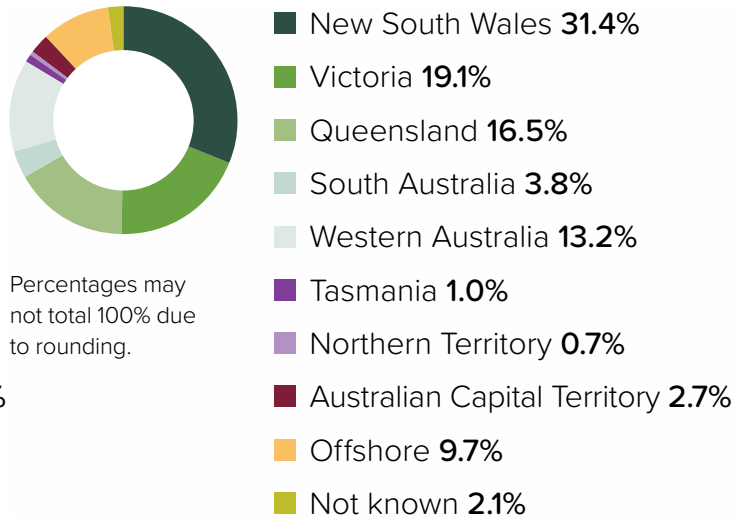
Geographic location

State/territory

Enrolments for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by state, 2023[43]

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

- New South Wales **33.2%**
- Victoria **20.8%**
- Queensland **18.8%**
- South Australia **5.1%**
- Western Australia **10.6%**
- Tasmania **1.3%**
- Northern Territory **0.9%**
- Australian Capital Territory **1.6%**
- Offshore **6.6%**
- Not known **1.3%**

Completions for CEC qualifications (under the CHC training package) by state, 2023[44]

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

- New South Wales **31.4%**
- Victoria **19.1%**
- Queensland **16.5%**
- South Australia **3.8%**
- Western Australia **13.2%**
- Tasmania **1.0%**
- Northern Territory **0.7%**
- Australian Capital Territory **2.7%**
- Offshore **9.7%**
- Not known **2.1%**

New South Wales leads in both enrolments (33.2%) and completions (31.4%), closely followed by Victoria and Queensland. Western Australia accounted for 13.2% of completions and offshore students comprised almost 10%, with all other states and territories recording between 0.7% and 3.8%.

Victoria and **New South Wales** led enrolments and completions in children's education and care qualifications.

1.4 Traineeships

In September 2024, 22,271 educators were in training, nearly 1,000 more than a year earlier. One third (33.9%) of trainees were aged 15 to 19, with a further 30.1% aged 20 to 24 years.

RATEP ECEC

Since 1990, TAFE Queensland and James Cook University have delivered the Bachelor of Education and Teacher Aide qualifications to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their home communities with support of the Queensland Government through the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP).

In 2018, the RATEP was expanded to include early childhood education and care (RATEP ECEC) which provides a culturally aware and supportive pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to pursue a career in the sector.

Lead RATEP ECEC teacher at TAFE Queensland, Stacy Walters, oversees the delivery of the Certificate III and Diploma ECEC across six remote communities, spending three weeks each term delivering face-to-face training in the Torres Strait.

As an Aboriginal woman from the Goomeri Nation in Gunnedah, New South Wales, Stacy is an outstanding role model for her students. Her strong cultural connections and ability to adapt teaching methods to meet the unique needs of her students and their communities is breaking down barriers for remote students, enabling them to successfully complete their qualification.

"Seeing First Nations students shine – that's my passion and hopefully my legacy. I live for it. I love it," said Stacy.

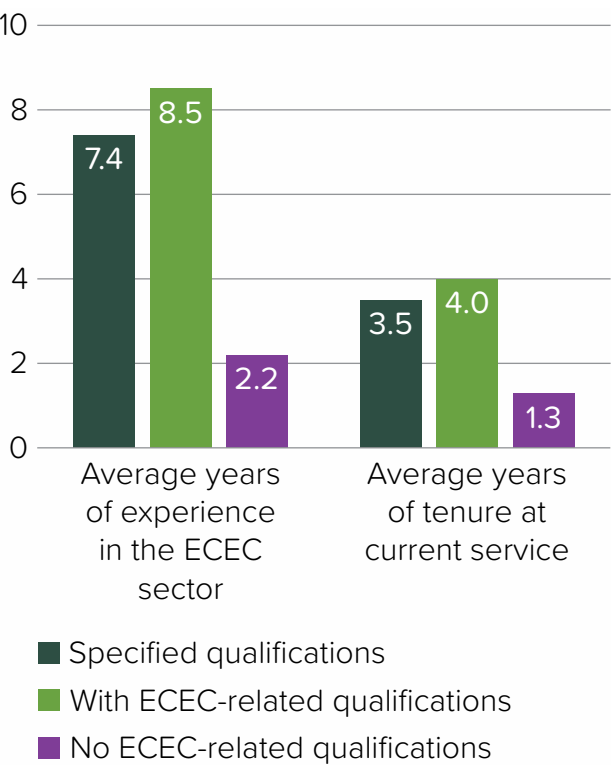The RATEP ECEC program achieves a remarkable 95% completion rate.

Under Stacy's stewardship the RATEP ECEC program is hailed as a proven solution to attracting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote areas to enter the ECEC workforce.

1.5 Workforce mobility, retention and attrition

Accurate, timely and granular data for CEC of priority focus is not available. However, in-sights on the occupational mobility, experience and tenure within ECEC roles are provided via the NWC.

Workers holding a relevant qualification were much more likely to remain in the sector, and with their current service, than those without. Employees in standalone preschools had the highest average years of experience. Tenure in the ECEC sector, and within a worker's current service, is 3–4 times greater among workers with an ECEC-related qualification, and between 2.5 and 3 times greater with the specified qualification (See Figure 4, reproduced from the NWC).

Figure 4: Average years of experience in the ECEC sector and tenure at the current service for paid contact staff with and without ECEC-related qualifications[45]

Legend:
- Specified qualifications
- With ECEC-related qualifications
- No ECEC-related qualifications

Average years of experience in the ECEC sector:
- Specified qualifications: 7.4
- With ECEC-related qualifications: 8.5
- No ECEC-related qualifications: 2.2

Average years of tenure at current service:
- Specified qualifications: 3.5
- With ECEC-related qualifications: 4.0
- No ECEC-related qualifications: 1.3

Workers holding a relevant qualification were much more likely to remain in the sector, and with their current service, than those without.

Occupational mobility varies by occupation. Mobility data suggests notable movement between key occupations under HumanAbility's remit – with educators moving into centre manager, ECT and education roles; and vice versa. This indicates workers upskilling and also workers – such as ECTs – shifting into related roles with less responsibility or administrative demands.

Table 5: Mobility rates, sources and destinations among key occupations, 2020–2021[46]

Occupation (per ANZSCO)	Annual turnover	Top 3 prior occupations (People moving from, and numbers)	Top 3 subsequent occupations (People moving to)
Educators ("Child Carers") #4211	7.2%	Sales Assistants (1,230), Checkout Operators and Cashiers (1000), Waiters (905)	Primary School Teachers (1,840), Welfare Support Workers (785), Education Aides (685) 0), Welfare Support Workers (785), Education Aides (685)
"Child Care Centre Managers" #1341	7.5%	"Child Carers" (555), Early Childhood Teachers (75), Primary School Teachers (45)	"Child Carers" (325), Primary School Teachers (50), Early Childhood Teachers (45)
Early Childhood Teachers #2411	6.1%	"Child Carers" (620), Primary School Teachers (295), Education Aides (165)	Primary School Teachers (490), "Child Carers" (255), Education Aides (85)
"Education aides" #4221	5.6%	"Child Carers" (685), Sales Assistants (570), General Clerks (330)	Primary school teachers (790), secondary school teachers (400), welfare support workers (370)

Updated data on mobility has been collected and will be brought into HumanAbility's dashboard once available.
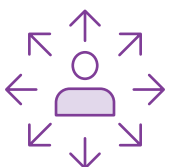
Shortage drivers

For educators, the leading driver behind workforce shortages is a retention gap.[47] This is where there are below average rates of retention of employees by employers, as existing workers exit the sector. This issue is heightened by low numbers of new applicants per vacancy — in this case, the average number of suitably qualified applicants per vacancy is only 1.6.[48] To help address retention gaps, increasing the number of skilled workers is only part of the solution. The occupations themselves need to be made more attractive to retain workers, such as through improved pay, conditions, professional learning, growth, recognition and respect. It is likely that recent reforms and (provisional) FWC decisions could improve attraction and retention.

For ECTs, the shortage driver is a long training gap, indicating "few qualified applicants per vacancy and a long training pathway."[49]

According to the national shortage lists, there is no national shortage of education aides (ANZSCO 4221). However, analysis at the 6-digit occupational level reveals shortages in some jurisdictions for integration aides (in NSW), preschool aides (in NSW), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aides (in South Australia), and Teachers' Aides (in the NT).[50]

The leading driver behind workforce shortages is a retention gap... where there are below average rates of retention of employees by employers, as existing workers exit the sector.

A thriving CEC workforce can drive social and economic benefits for the community, and enable other care and support sectors to thrive

Appropriately qualified and supported staff are better equipped to provide high-quality early education and care, which in turn produces better short and long-term learning and developmental benefits for children, and economic and social benefits for families and communities.[51] For example, developmental issues can be identified and referred to appropriate specialists earlier for greater likelihood of effective early intervention, reducing the demands on other parts of the workforce; and the availability of quality care enables parents working in the care and support sectors to resume or increase their vital work.

Appropriately qualified and supported staff are better equipped to provide high-quality early education and care, which in turn produces better short and long-term learning and developmental benefits for children.

2. Government and reform initiatives

2.1 National initiatives (strategies and agreements)
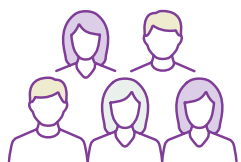
Sector-wide

Shaping Our Future – National Children's ECEC Workforce Strategy

This 10-year strategy (2022–2031) seeks to increase and ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce by supporting the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the sector's workforce. HumanAbility is delivering Workforce Strategy Action FA3-2 under the leadership and ability focus area related to microcredentials via a targeted research project in 2025–2026.[52]

HumanAbility is also reviewing training qualifications to ensure they are contemporary and meeting industry, government and community expectations, and contributing to a skilled workforce delivery quality early childhood education services. This includes reviewing entry pathways to higher qualifications to encourage upskilling. This work contributes to the Strategy's Action FA5-3 "Continue the ongoing focus on the quality of vocational education and training".

Further to this, HumanAbility's core functions and activities, workforce planning, research projects and training packages reviews underway and planned, contribute to four of the other six focus areas of ECEC Workforce Strategy.

Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA)

A four-year, $2 billion agreement between the Australian Government and all states and territories to collaborate to improve preschool participation and outcomes.[53] Key reforms include:

- a requirement for jurisdictions to pass on the Australian Government's per-child funding contribution for 15 hrs/preschool in the year before school to non-government early learning centres/long day care centres if this is where a child accesses preschool
- the development of a Preschool Outcomes Measure (POM) that will include foundational skills such as executive function and oral language and literacy[54]
- initiatives to strengthen participation and outcomes for children from vulnerable and marginalised cohorts, including First Nations children.

This initiative, among work being done at state and territory levels, reinforces the importance of growing the workforce, ensuring quality qualifications that appropriately equip graduates, and elevating the status of the professions (occupations) delivering preschool and developing children's foundational skills and knowledge.

National School Reform Agreement

This landmark 10-year agreement between the Australian Government, all states and territories, and non-government school sectors, sets out the eight national policy initiatives, reform directions and school funding between January 2025 and December 2034. It directly influences the work and working conditions of school teachers, principals, education aides, and other CEC occupations.

National Skills Agreement (NSA) and VET sector investment

The NSA seeks to transform the VET sector to improve outcomes for learners, industry, the economy and nation. Initiatives that are relevant to CEC include Fee-Free TAFE courses, including short courses, Certificate III, IV and Diploma level,[55] and the Centre of Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care at TAFE SA – which, along with the work of HumanAbility and others, will support capability uplift "through the sharing of high-quality training products, research, and industry demonstrations of innovative practice."[56] This centre is guided also by the recommendations of South Australia's Royal Commission into ECEC.[57]

HumanAbility's core work as sector steward means it is actively engaged in the identification, prioritisation and review of training packages and research towards these national goals (see sections 3 and 4), through ongoing engagement with government, industry, and training providers. HumanAbility is also actively involved with the work of the TAFE SA Centre of Excellence, including its Steering Committee.

Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031[58]

A joint initiative of the Commonwealth and states and territories, the National Framework was developed to reduce child abuse and neglect, and its impact across generations. One of four key focus areas relates to strengthening the child and family sector through the building of workforce capability. This includes an additional focus on developing the First Nations workforce in key sectors.

Actions in the current Framework's Action Plan (2023–2026) align with and reinforce HumanAbility's ongoing work to build sustainable, skilled and supported children and family services workforces. Specifically, it identifies the importance of trauma-informed practice and the value of this being included in training products and professional learning, which HumanAbility will explore in its microcredentials for professional learning research project, and its review of ECEC qualifications.

New and revised industrial agreements

A majority of employees in early childhood occupations remain reliant on award pay rates.[59] These rates are shifting in what early analysis suggests is a positive direction, with developments including:

- **The Fair Work Commission's provisional decision in its review of five priority awards**, including the Children's Services Award 2010, which finds that these workers have had their pay historically undervalued based on gender.[60]

- **Expansion of the ECEC Multi-Employer Agreement 2024–2026**, to bring in 169 more employers since January 2025,[61] covering an estimated 38,000 employees across 229 employers.[62] The objective of this agreement is to facilitate access to the Commonwealth's ECEC Worker Retention Payment. While it is national in coverage, it excludes workers in standalone preschool services and some other CEC types, although there is potential scope for separate agreements for these subsectors in future. At the time of writing, a further 61 employers have applied to join the agreement.[63]

- **Goodstart Early Learning** – a new, approved enterprise agreement covering 15,521 employees across 650 services across Australia.[64] Staff will receive a 10% pay increase over 12 months, with the first increase of 5% having occurred in December 2024, in line with the Australian Government's Worker Retention Payment of 15%.

2.2 Commonwealth and jurisdictional initiatives

Extensive work is also underway by individual governments at Federal, state and local levels. Some of these pre-date the intergovernmental strategies, while some respond to or reinforce them. Government initiatives include:

- **Major inquiries** to better understand the challenges and solutions using different lenses or with different areas of focus (e.g. JSA's workforce capacity study versus the South Australian Royal Commission focussed on child and community needs).

- **Wage boosts, scholarships, and other funding incentives** seeking to attract and retain workers by removing or reducing financial barriers to joining or remaining in the workforce.

- **Strengthening the quality of ECEC programs and services**, especially by:
  - increasing the number of services meeting and exceeding the NQF
  - improving educational quality and developmental outcomes by using evidence-based early childhood pedagogy and practices and evidence around children's growth, learning and development
  - improving safety and accountability.

- **Improving accessibility**, both in terms of the availability of preschool, OSHC and LDC services (and reduction or removal of "child care deserts") for children, and also the ability of services to meet the needs of children and their families – especially those living with a disability or developmental delay, or experiencing financial insecurity or trauma – and to do this in a way that is culturally responsive. This includes expanding access.

These initiatives are mutually reinforcing and have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for children and communities. They are often nested in one or more strategies, notably: ECEC workforce strategies; broader skills strategies; child development, wellbeing or education strategies; regional and remote strategies; and strategies to Close the Gap between First Nations and non-First Nations Australians.
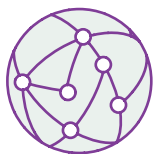
These initiatives are mutually reinforcing and have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for children and communities.

Table 6: Government initiatives affecting the ECEC workforce[65]

Government	Government initiatives
Australian	• The **3-day Guarantee** to subsidised ECEC and removal of activity test, from January 2026, building on earlier reforms aimed to improve access to ECEC. • **The Worker Retention Payment**, which supports a 15% wage increase for ECEC workforce over two years from December 2024. • **Paid placements** – the Workforce Paid Practicum Subsidy, and Commonwealth Prac Payment. • **Responses to the PC, ACCC inquiries and JSA/HumanAbility ECEC Workforce capacity study**, which reported 2023–2024 – recommendations being jointly considered or implemented to varying degrees.[66] • **Rollout of the** Early Years Strategy's **first Action Plan (2024–2027)**,[67] including the expansion of foundational supports for children with complex or additional learning and development needs, a worker retention program, building a universal system including more services in regional and remote areas and more place-based services, and stronger accountability and coordination. • Current PC inquiry into Delivering Quality Care more efficiently (in ECEC and other HumanAbility sectors). • **ECEC Workforce census** – results from 2024 census, recently released, may sharpen or change focus of government initiatives.
ACT	• **Early Childhood Strategy 2020–2025**, includes workforce initiatives focussing on professional learning and development to ensure quality workforce.
Northern Territory	• **Early Childhood Care and Development Plan 2018–2028**, emphases building a skilled and stable workforce through training, PD and support initiatives. • Partnerships with VET, university and dual sector providers to provide On-Country and 'stepping stone' **pathways to EC careers for First Nations people**.
New South Wales	• **Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund**, including the **Flexible Initiatives Trial**, to empower ECEC providers to better meet local needs. • **Start Strong** – expanding access to funded preschool for all children, with additional initiatives for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. • **First Steps** – the NSW Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy. • Parliamentary inquiry into ECEC service quality and safety.

Government	Government initiatives
Queensland	• **Thriving Queensland Kids and LinQ**. • **Queensland EC Workforce Strategy 2023–27**, including additional funding for upskilling initiatives including in ECEC <u>to train 450 educators in child safety, supervision, and regulatory compliance</u>.

South Australia	• Implementing Royal Commission recommendations, including:
	  – **Early Childhood Workforce Strategy**, released June 2024, a comprehensive plan to grow and support the EC workforce including PD pathways and an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy
	  – **3-year-old preschool for all**
	  – Raising quality standards in all services.

Tasmania	• **Early Years and School Aged Care Workforce Strategy** (2021 & Beyond) with Early Childhood Australia – Tasmanian Branch, including a new scholarship program from mid 2025.
Victoria	• **'Best Start, Best Life Workforce Strategy'**, to support the expansion of funded preschool hours (1,200 hours of 4-year-old preschool (pre-prep), and 600 hours of 3-year-old preschool), beginning in 2026 for priority cohorts and in regional and rural areas; and multiple initiatives to grow and uplift the workforce, including through partnerships with universities and RTOs for accelerated courses and scholarships. • **Koorie Kids Shine**, promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's participation in preschool.
Western Australia	• **ECEC Workforce Action Plan**, the regional ECEC workforce Action Plan, and the ECEC Job Ready Program.

Also, potential reforms, strategies and inquiries in adjacent sectors and by non-government actors – such as SNAICC and Early Childhood Australia – could impact on the CEC workforce, **especially where workers work across multiple settings or services, and where they work with First Nations people, those in regional and remote areas, and children (or their families) with disabilities or chronic health issues**.

3. Opportunities and challenges

The Australian CEC workforce figures, reforms and initiatives indicate a highly dynamic and busy policy and training landscape where the pieces are not only shifting but also interacting with each other and broader political and economic forces. However, despite the volume of activity, the workforce challenges identified by HumanAbility in its 2024 Workforce Plan remain, and present opportunities for HumanAbility and the sector. Each of these challenges is discussed below.

Figure 5: The seven workforce challenges identified for the care and support sectors

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

3.1 Labour force shortages

While the ECEC workforce has more than doubled over the last decade,[68] demand for all roles and especially educators and ECTs is high, growing and vastly outpacing the supply of graduates. The gap is expected to grow in response to:

- policy reforms to significantly expand access to early learning
- population growth
- lower numbers of course completions than enrolments two to four years earlier.

HumanAbility analysis of CEC occupations at the 6-digit level found that 22 of the 27 occupations had shortages in one or more jurisdictions, and 11 have national shortages. The shortages are most pronounced for educator and ECT roles, although the severity of the shortages, as evidenced by vacancy rates and waiver requests, has eased since October 2024.[69]

Figure 6: Vacancy rates for ECTs and educators compared to all occupations, Feb 2019 – Feb 2024[70]
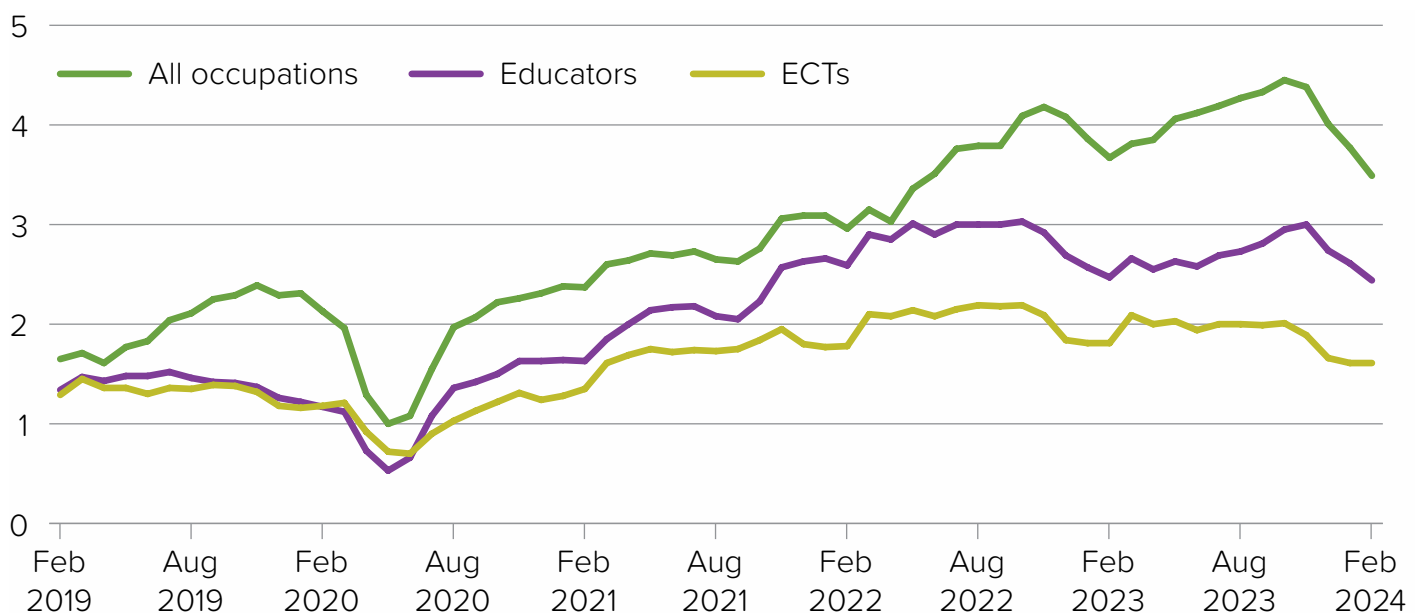
While aggregate supply is expected to increase by 2% a year over the next decade, this is woefully inadequate to meet forecast workforce demand. Modelling undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics for Jobs and Skills Australia's 2024 ECEC Workforce Capacity Study indicates that meeting current unmet demand at sustainable staffing levels would require the ECEC workforce to grow by an extra 16%. Implementing universal access to ECEC to up to 30 hours over three days, and implementing universal preschool for 3-year olds and 4-year olds, will mean staffing levels will likely need to grow by 3% per year.[71] All shortages are more pronounced in outer regional areas and especially remote and very remote areas. This directly impacts on service quality and availability for children.

Figure 7 (below) breaks down, by key ECEC occupations, the widening gaps between supply and demand shown by this modelling. The modelling warns of stark, and increasing, shortfalls among all parts of the workforce over the decade to 2034, with the largest gap between core supply estimate and projected demand under a 'committed policies' scenario occurring in the Early Childhood Teacher occupation.
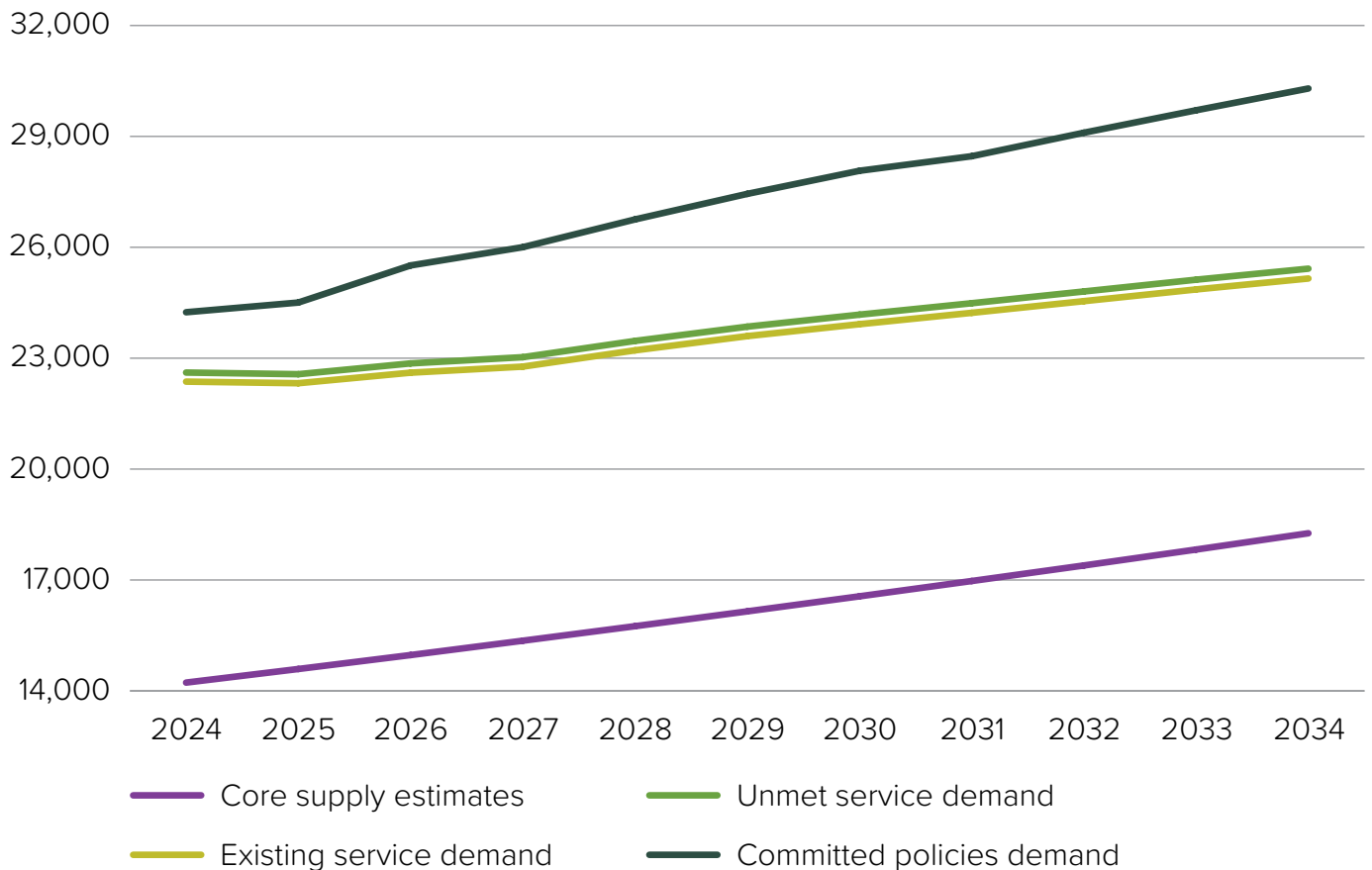
Figure 7: The growing gap between supply and demand for key ECEC occupations[72]

Child Carers: Supply vs demand scenarios
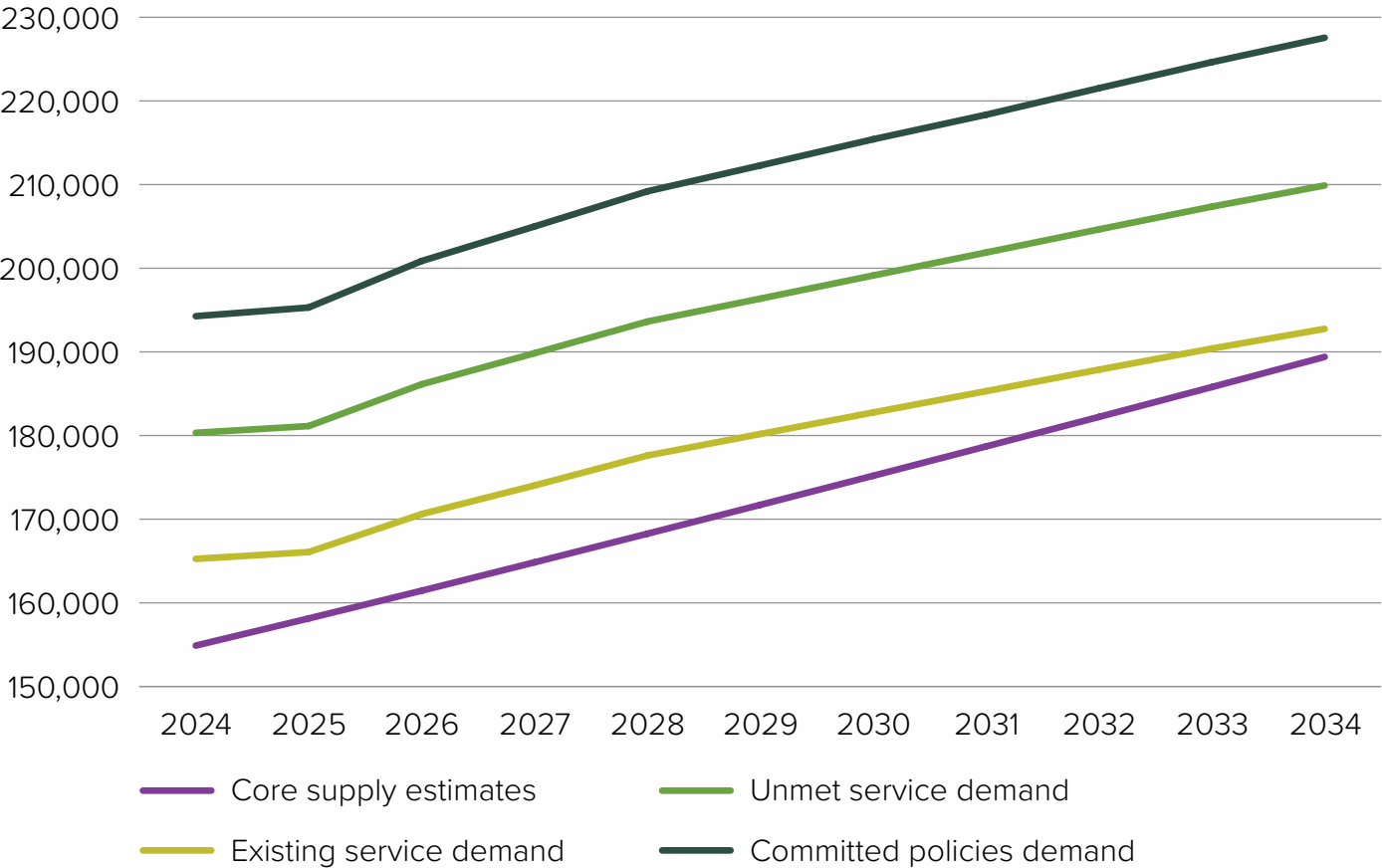
Early Childhood Teacher: Supply vs demand scenarios

Legend:
- Core supply estimates
- Unmet service demand
- Existing service demand
- Committed policies demand
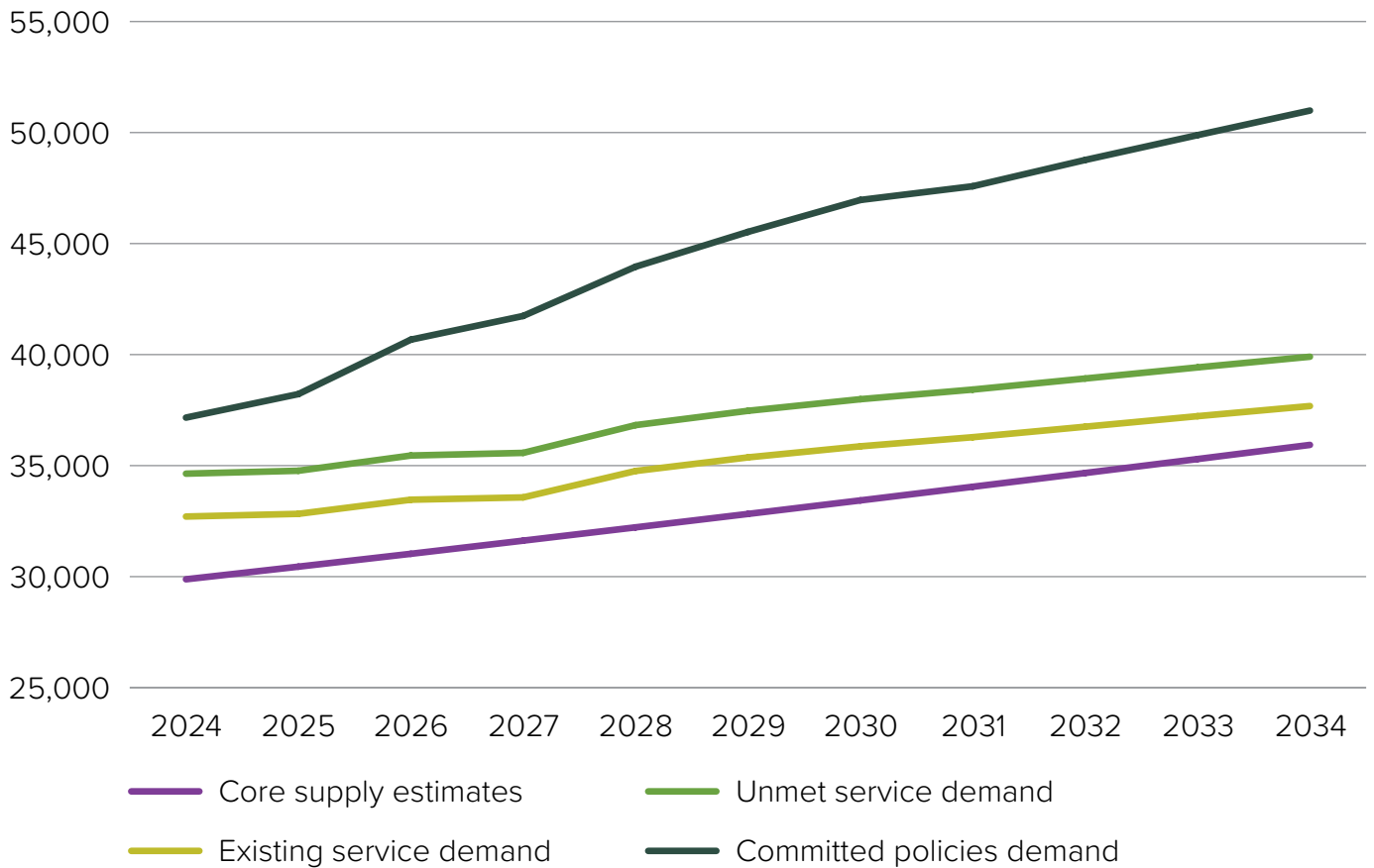
Child Care Centre Manager: Supply vs demand scenarios

Legend:
- Core supply estimates
- Unmet service demand
- Existing service demand
- Committed policies demand

Labour shortages have led to an increasing reliance on trainees and people 'working towards' their qualifications, a rise in staff working overtime (not always paid), and sustained levels of providers using staffing 'waivers' based on educator-to-child ratios. For example, traineeships have more than doubled from 6,785 in 2019 to 14,570 in 2023, but the number of completions has not increased at the same rate, moving from 4,745 to 6,840.[73]

Nationally, 8.3% of services operating under the NQS held a staffing waiver in quarter 4, 2024, although this ranged from 16.1% in South Australia to 1% in Victoria. Very remote, outer regional, and remote areas had higher rates of staffing waivers. The majority of these waivers relate to services' inability to meet the requirement (in some cases) of having a minimum of two early childhood teachers (ECTs),[74] with for-profit services three times more likely to hold waivers than not-for-profit community managed services or school and government provided services.[75] This indicates that, although shortages exist across the board, persistent difficulties remain in attracting and retaining staff with higher (generally four-year Bachelor's degree) qualifications into the sector.

Figure 8: Proportion of ECEC services under the NQS with a waiver by quarter and waiver category[76]
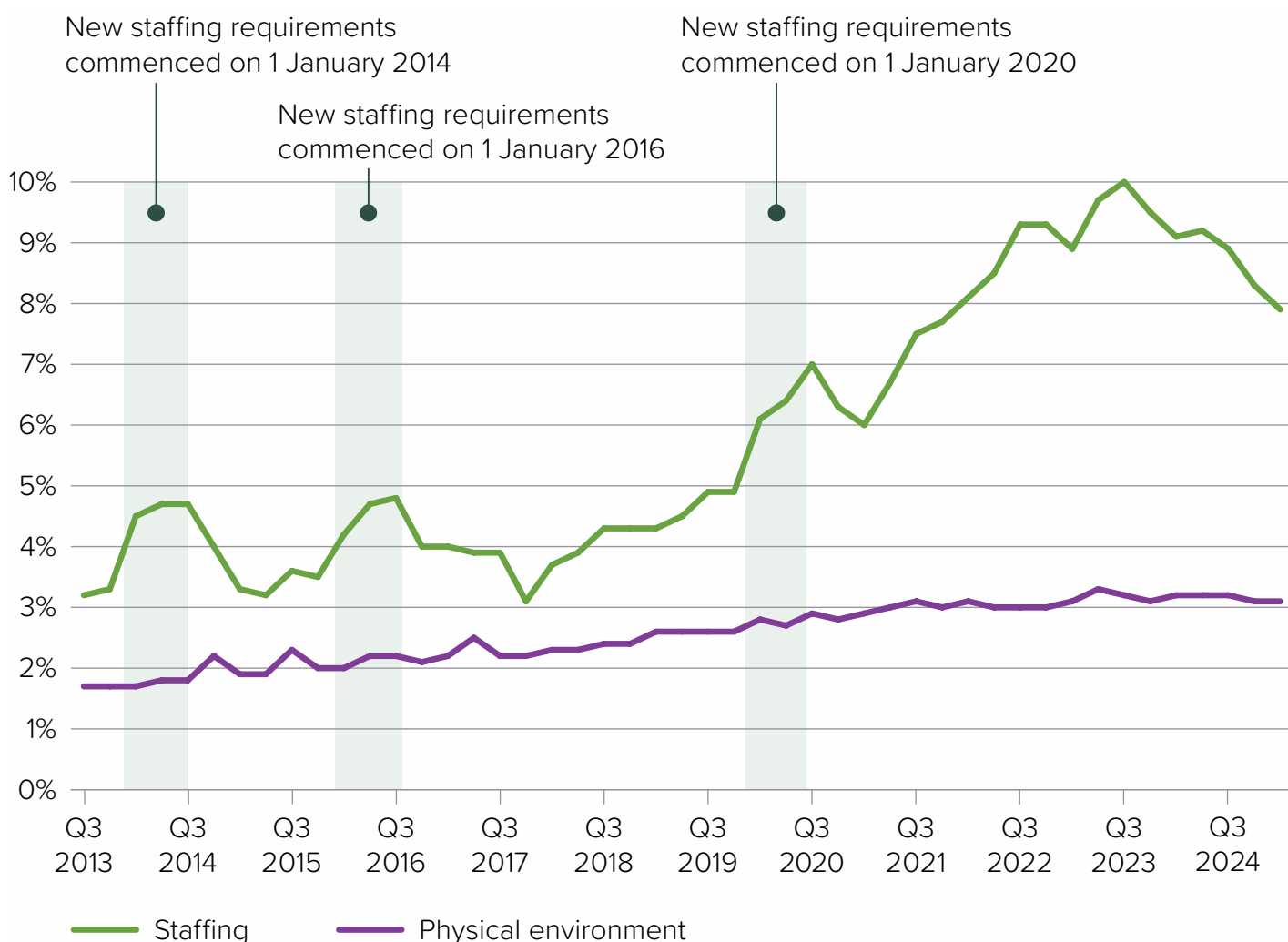
Waivers and staff shortages in services put pressure on current employees and directly contribute to burnout, absenteeism, attrition and higher incidence of safety incidents and other quality concerns. The rate of breaches has been rising, as has the rate of serious incidents.[77] These are more likely in for-profit services.[78] While quality ratings have improved since 2013, quality varies by service type, provider type, and with distance from major cities.[79]

Exacerbating these issues, there are relatively low rates of intention among the current workforce to remain in the sector. Almost half of all staff members across ECEC service types report they are likely to leave the sector within the next three years, with figures highest in FDC, followed by LDC settings.[80] While OSHC educators also have lowish retention, this is largely explained by the high proportion of university students who work in this role during their degree, before leaving to take up a position in their field.

> **"There's an exodus of OSHC workers in each year as staff move in, or out, of uni courses. Constant recruitment needed."**
> Stakeholder

Figure 9: Educator intentions to remain in the sector by service type[81]

Legend: ■ More than 3 years ■ Between 1–3 years ■ Between 6–12 months ■ Less than 6 months

Service type	More than 3 years	Between 1–3 years	Between 6–12 months	Less than 6 months
FDC	63	25	6	6
CBDC	51	25	12	12
OSHC	30	38	18	14
All care types	48	28	13	12
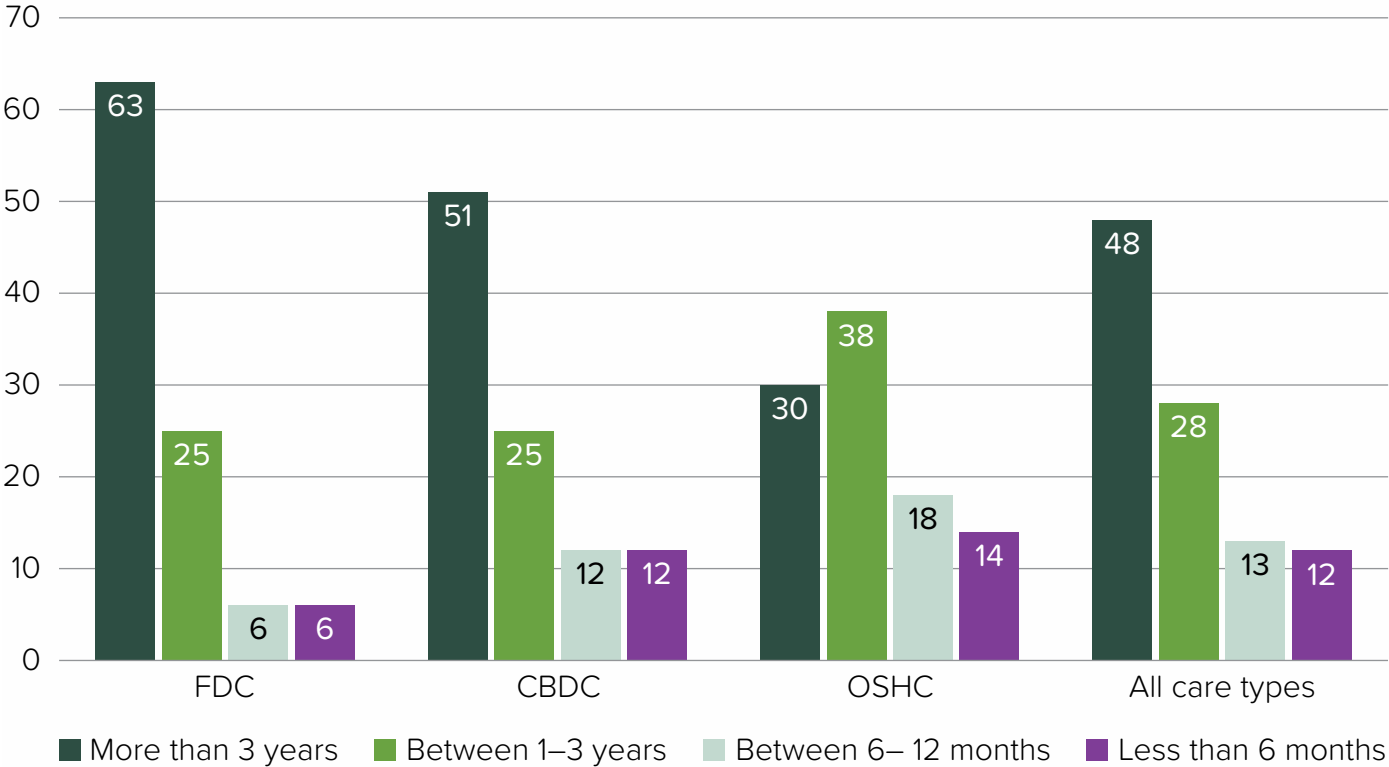
Trade union research supports these findings: a 2021 United Workers Union poll of over 4,000 educators, for instance, found that 46% of staff thought about leaving the sector 'all the time' or 'most of the time'; that 82% of current educators felt rushed when performing key caring and educational tasks; and that over 75% of educators strongly agreed that turn-over negatively impacts on children's learning, developmental and emotional wellbeing.[82]

Multiple factors contribute to this, including salary/pay, career progression opportunities, and professional learning opportunities (see Figure 10). This indicates that – while improvements to the award pay rate (on which 45% of the workforce are paid, with a further 42% paid above award) are welcome, especially in a cost-of-living crisis – pay is not the only major consideration for workers.

"In 2025, employers will need to be both innovative and [adaptable] to attract and retain the top talent in the ECEC sector, demonstrating to their current and future employees that professional growth, wellbeing and diversity are all priorities."[83]

"Employers that offer development opportunities recognise and value their workforce are more successful in retaining staff."
Stakeholder

"Centres are losing staff to opportunities offering better pay and conditions, including teacher aides."
Stakeholder

Figure 10: Educator ratings of various aspects of their jobs (2024)[84]

Salary/pay

■ Very good **9%**
■ Good **23%**
■ Moderate **29%**
■ Poor **22%**
■ Very poor **17%**

Employment conditions, including leave and flexible arrangements
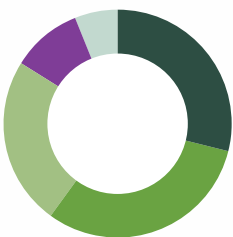
■ Very good **29%**
■ Good **31%**
■ Moderate **24%**
■ Poor **10%**
■ Very poor **6%**

Recognition from manager/supervisor

■ Very good **34%**
■ Good **31%**
■ Moderate **21%**
■ Poor **9%**
■ Very poor **6%**

Career progression opportunities
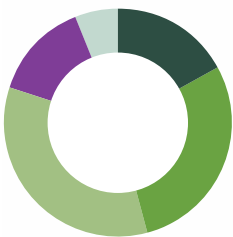
■ Very good **17%**
■ Good **29%**
■ Moderate **34%**
■ Poor **14%**
■ Very poor **6%**

Opportunities for professional development and learning

■ Very good **28%**
■ Good **32%**
■ Moderate **27%**
■ Poor **9%**
■ Very poor **5%**

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

While enrolments in ECEC occupation qualifications have increased significantly, completions have not increased at the same rate. In 2023 (the most recent year of data available), as in previous years, the proportion of learners completing these qualifications who identify as First Nations, and those who disclose living with a disability, is roughly half the proportion of these same cohorts that enrol.[85] This indicates a huge loss of potential talent and diversity due to various barriers, potentially including inadequate cultural responsiveness and safety, and inadequate adjustments. This is of concern given the need for up-skilling in these areas to support inclusive practice for all children.

Together, these challenges reinforce the vital importance of:

• Attracting more workers to all parts of the workforce pipeline;

• Improving completion rates for all courses – total time in the sector is more than four times higher for workers with ECEC qualifications than no qualifications;[86] and

• Retaining existing workers, including through better conditions (ratios, professional support, professional learning and wellbeing initiatives) and improved wages (not-withstanding the recent wage increase, ECEC workers are still paid less than people in other occupations with similar qualification levels, which is particularly tough in a cost-of-living crisis).

3.2 Skills shortages and gaps

The proportion of workers categorised as educators, child care centre managers, ECTs and education aides holding a qualification, or undertaking professional development, has significantly increased since 2010 and continues to rise. For example, in ECEC, the proportion of staff (working with children) who undertook professional development (PD) in the last 12 months increased from 74.9% in 2021 to 88.7% in 2024. For these workers, the most common type of PD was in child safety (71.3%), followed by supporting complex behaviours (32.8%), and pedagogy or practice (28.9%).[87]

Despite this, skills gaps remain across these occupations. HumanAbility's stakeholder engagements and desktop research indicate the most pressing gaps and issues include:

• **Inclusion and support** for children with additional needs (notably children with complex behaviours, and children living with neurodiversity or disability).

> **"Specialist skills are needed in behaviour support, trauma informed education support, and supporting children with complex needs."**
> Stakeholder

• **Evidence-based pedagogies and practice tailored to the ages and stages of the children**, including understanding how children learn and develop across all developmental domains, and how to apply evidence-based learning frameworks such as the Early Years Learning Framework or Early Years Learning Trajectories.

• **Cultural safety and responsiveness for First Nations** workers, learners, children, families and communities. For example, the Capacity study in ECEC found "There is not sufficient First Nations curriculum coverage in either Certificate III or Diploma ECEC and higher education qualifications, including relating to cultural safety. The current unit (CHCECE054) offered within the ECEC Training Package is not sufficient for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to engage with culture within an early learning education context."[88] There are already many promising models in place across Australia, such as the Boori Milumba model, which demonstrates the multiple, reinforcing ways cultural safety and responsiveness can be developed, and the ways that cultural frameworks, professional learning, staffing (including cultural leader roles), and ways of engaging with children, families and the community can meet "the cultural, learning and development, strengths and needs" of First Nations infants and toddlers and their families.[89]

- **Leadership** (as a room leader, service leader, pedagogical leader or subject matter expert), especially as it relates to NQS quality areas. For example, the JSA Capacity Study found: "ECEC staff report a lack of leadership structure and capacity with the sector which often results in administrative overload – including complying with regulation and managing parent expectations – which is a psychosocial hazard that detracts from job satisfaction and drives attrition."

- **Educators and ECTs who speak a language other than English** (LOTE), with new workforce census data showing one in five children attending CCS services have a LOTE background, rising to almost 40% in FDC services, and the PC finding (2.3) that "a range of supports can support the inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds." This reinforces analysis of likely trends affecting recruitment published by the Sector.[91]

> **"ECEC staff report a lack of leadership structure and capacity with the sector which often results in administrative overload – including complying with regulation and managing parent expectations – which is a psychosocial hazard that detracts from job satisfaction and drives attrition."[90]**

OSHC Services for Children with Disabilities in Regional Areas

Lifely is a disability service provider with 40 years' experience supporting regional Australians with a disability and their families. Lifely is part of a pilot funded by the Victorian Department of Education to provide free, high intensity Outside of School Hours Care (OSHC).

This unique model provides after school care and school holiday programs for children with complex disability and high support needs. Unlike typical OSHC services, Lifely's program caters for children from five to eighteen years old.

Bobbi Cox is the Children's Services Manager at Lifely. Bobbi manages a team of 180 staff across Lifely's four high-intensity OSHC sites located in Bendigo, Sunbury and Melton.

Bobbi said that even though the prescribed minimum staffing ratios are the same for all OSHC services, the OHSC Coordinator at each Lifely site has a large multidisciplinary team to deliver the high-intensity OSHC service. While the combination of skills and experience from the various professionals is necessary to deliver a high quality and inclusive service that meets the individual needs of each child, it has the added benefit for staff learning and development. "Our staff bring and share skills, expertise and professional practice from their various disciplines which has been incredibly valuable for staff development and provides opportunity for them in terms of career pathways".

One of the challenges with any OSHC service is the limited number of work hours available per week. With the learning and development opportunities at Lifely's high-intensity OSHC staff can pick up additional paid shifts across any of the organisation's seven departments, reducing burn out and supporting career longevity.

3.3 Training, qualifications and pathways

The content of the foundational qualifications – Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care – may not be fit for purpose, with major concerns raised by the Productivity Commission, the JSA and HumanAbility's stakeholders, including industry, around graduates' preparedness and completion rates.[92] Concerns include:

- **Inadequate content on how infants and children learn and develop, how to teach them in evidence-based and appropriate ways, and how to use the planning and assessment cycle**. This includes quality content on early literacy, numeracy, music and other core knowledge and capabilities for staff to support early learning in a way that achieves positive outcomes for children (i.e. intentional play, how to read a book, or playing with blocks).

- **Delivery mechanisms which can make success more difficult** (for example, for some cohorts, block-mode is difficult to balance with work and family responsibilities, while delivery in schools and in services without infants or younger toddlers can make it difficult or impossible to meet core requirements with different age levels). Furthermore, staff shortages influence the ability of services to release staff for course classes and study.

- **Qualifications being overly compliance-focussed and complex in some areas** (especially for the Certificate III in ECEC) but too broad in others.

Together, these issues result in some workers feeling that their needs are not met by their courses and discontinuing their studies, or exiting the profession, which exacerbates low completion rates and workforce shortages.

> **"The Certificate III and Diploma of ECEC need to be reviewed in partnership."**
> Stakeholder

> **"Certificate III in ECEC and the Cert IV school-based education support qualifications don't meet the needs of the industry."**
> Stakeholder

> **"Foundation skills need to be embedded across Training Packages"**
> Stakeholder
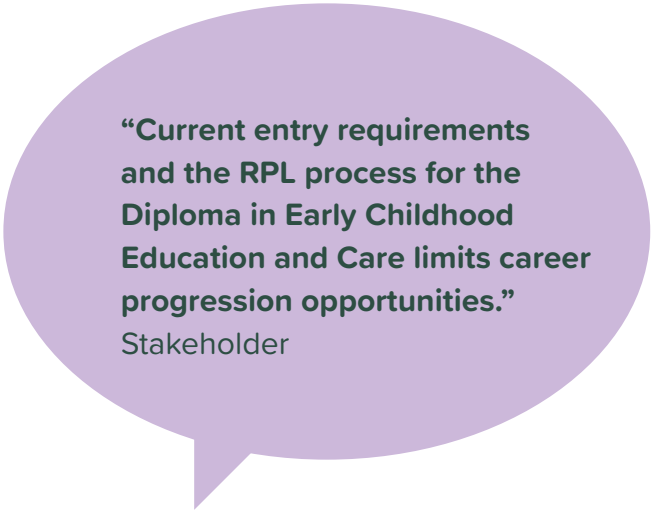
Additional concerns include:

- **Low interest or ability among workers holding a Certificate III to progress to a Diploma**. The pay differential may not be high enough to incentivise this, given the additional responsibilities the progression entails; or the three-month time period to transition from a Certificate III traineeship to a Diploma (retaining all incentives) may not be feasible for a learner or for their employer, who may not have the necessary position vacant at the right time. Additionally, HumanAbility heard that the complexity of the Certificate III in Early Childhood dissuades some learners from further study, and that educators with a Certificate III prior to the CHC30113 could not get entry to the Diploma. A HumanAbility project recently examined this issue.

- **Movement of workers who upskill to a Bachelor's degree into school teaching roles with better wages, pay progression, conditions, and career development opportunities.**

- **Course completion numbers that continue to lag far below enrolment numbers in any year.** A mix of factors is known to contribute to this, with factors varying across courses, jurisdictions, RTO types, individual RTOs and individual learners. These factors include: inadequate support from some employers of workers undertaking these qualifications; course content; and lack of cultural safety and responsiveness (for First Nations people) and reasonable adjustments (for people with disabilities and chronic health conditions).

> **"Current entry requirements and the RPL process for the Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care limits career progression opportunities."**
> Stakeholder

- **The role and effects of truncated/accelerated courses** for ECEC have grown in popularity and are now offered by institutions across Australia, sometimes with scholarships and other financial incentives. They were also recommended by the Productivity Commission.[93] But some stakeholders are concerned that these do not properly prepare workers and could result in higher rates of course non-completion, burnout, and workforce attrition, ultimately being counterproductive. At this stage it is too early to have solid evidence.

- **Appropriate career recognition and progression for the First Nations workforce.** Current systems to recognise prior learning and experience can be inflexible and pose barriers to qualification, especially for First Nations people providing care and education for children at services that don't operate under the NQF. SNAICC has recommended a number of mutually reinforcing actions to support these goals, consistent with the Shaping Our Future ECEC strategy, and the First Nations Teacher Strategy.[94]

- **Opportunities for improved, more accessible, more supported and more graduated pathways into educator roles**, such as through pre-employment programs, improved recognition of prior learning (RPL) (JSA Recommendation 23), and reassessing Skill Sets for different service types (e.g. JSA Capacity Study Recommendation 3), especially for First Nations people (e.g. Productivity Commission Recommendation 3.9).

- **Traineeships,** which are more common in early childhood than other HumanAbility sectors. These include 20% allocation of paid work time for off-the-job learning.[95] Stakeholders have raised concerns around implementation – particularly whether, in the context of labour shortages and short-staffing, trainees receive the required study time as well as appropriate mentoring and support. There is also interest in 'Grow Your Own' models, in which communities (typically regional, remote or co-hort-based) identify or recruit trainees to work in community services. This promising model includes On Country approaches, which provide cultural responsiveness and safety for First Nations trainees.

- **Unpaid placements** and/or costs incurred during placements (including travel, foregone income, and cost of accommodation if placement is away from home).

- **Access to initial training and ongoing PD in regional and remote areas,** which would also help with provision of access/service availability in these areas.

- **Lack of leadership opportunities and incentives.** There is only a small financial boost to progress to room leader, to invest in getting a Diploma, or to become centre manager/director. The creation of more (new or additional) paraservice roles could help – such as educational leaders to share and strengthen evidence-based practices and address skills and capability gaps.[96] Furthermore, although the sector requires staff who are skilled in a wide range of specialisations, the ways careers are structured offer relatively few opportunities for specialisation or career progression when compared to other sectors. JSA and the PC, among others, have suggested specialised or bespoke training pathways, including traineeships, for some settings, such as In Home Care, OSHC, and FDC.

- **Access to funded training for international students.**

- **Overseas credentials –** which need to be examined.

Access to initial training and ongoing PD in regional and remote areas would help with provision of access/service availability in these areas.

3.4 Diversity and inclusivity

Children's education and care remains heavily female dominated, with a higher proportion than average of people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. While the cultural and language diversity is an asset appreciated by many families – especially those of the same backgrounds – and within family day care settings, continued vigilance is required to ensure these workers are fully valued, included and respected by and in the broader Australian community.

More can also be done to attract and retain men in this important sector that can positively impact the lives of children. This can include, and go beyond, improved wages and working conditions.

And more can and should be done to attract and retain First Nations people to CEC courses and roles through increased and sustained cultural safety and responsiveness in places of study, training and employment. This insight is reinforced by NCVER data showing low commencement rates and even lower completion rates, pointing to systemic issues in the training system. There are opportunities to leverage positive innovations and inclusive, supportive practices across many RTOs and universities to attract and support First Nations learners. These practices include providing training for all teachers, trainers, assessors, lecturers and tutors in how to be culturally responsive, and reviewing RPL systems. Lessons can also be learnt from remote and On Country traineeship models, particularly those (co) developed with First Nations people and communities, which research and consultations with First Nation stakeholders indicate have had success across diverse settings. Scaling these models requires resolving a few issues, including around undertaking of traineeships with services that aren't regulated under the NWF, and continued funding uncertainty for many ACCOS, including around the retention package.
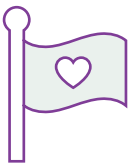
More can and should be done to attract and retain First Nations people to CEC courses and roles through increased and sustained cultural safety and responsiveness in places of study, training and employment.

3.5 Data and evidence gaps

The children's education and care sector benefits from many rich data sets to support workforce planning, skills development and industry strategy. These include the National Workforce Census, the quarterly and other reports of ACECQA on the National Quality Standard, the Early Childhood Development Census, and the Australian Teacher Workforce Data, which provides information on initial teacher education and the teacher workforce through an interactive portal. These complement the information available through JSA (such as the Vocational Education and Training National Data Asset (VNDA), the Nowcast of Employment by Region and Occupation (NERO), and employment projections); the ABS (notably Census data and the Labour Force Survey); and NCVER (VET students and courses, apprentices and trainees, and student outcomes data).

However, data gaps and inconsistencies remain. Many of these will be alleviated by the implementation of OSCA, with greater granularity and modernisation around roles, and the continued maturation and growing participation rates in the highly-valued NWC, including from preschool services not within LDCs. More information is also needed around the First Nations workforce at all points of the pipeline – before accredited training, accredited training in vocational and university settings, in the workforce (NQS, school and other settings), and outside the workforce.

Data gaps and inconsistencies make workforce planning and research difficult.[97] This includes inconsistencies between ABS Labour Force Survey data, the National Workforce Census, the NWC and NCVER's collections, and insufficient data on the First Nations workforce – which should align with First Nations data sovereignty principles, including First Nations input and control around collection, storage and use.

Data gaps and inconsistencies make workforce planning and research difficult. This includes inconsistencies between ABS Labour Force Survey data, the National Workforce Census, the NWC and NCVER's collections, and insufficient data on the First Nations workforce

3.6 Policy settings

Children's education and care is a highly dynamic space, with many welcome reforms for the workforce (and children and families) following state and national level inquiries – including wage boost; paid placements; replacement of ANZSCO with OSCA to provide greater granularity and more accurate language around roles; the three-day early learning guarantee; and workforce strategies at national, jurisdictional and service levels.

More work remains, however, including continued and stronger focus on ensuring quality, most notably in child learning (effective education pedagogy and practice) and child safety. This comes amidst rapid growth in for-profit services, which can be driven by a profit motive with negative implications for workers and children, and which casts a pall over the quality and professionalism of the whole sector.

Private for-profit services are far less likely to be meeting or exceeding the NQS.[98] Conversely, not-for-profit services and state/territory or local government managed services are nearly four times as likely to exceed the NQS.[99] It is also concerning that quality of care (as measured against the NQS) falls with distance from major cities.[100] This reflects:

- the greater difficulties that services in regional, rural and remote areas experience in attracting and retaining suitably qualified workers
- the higher cost of delivering services in remote locations
- the resulting inappropriateness of demand-side funding models in 'persistently thin markets', as established by the Productivity Commission and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in their major inquiries from 2023–2024.[101]

Policy and regulatory changes have been suggested in and to these inquiries, including by HumanAbility stakeholders, with implications for the workforce. These include:

- Moving from a supply-side funding approach (which encourages profit-driven providers and was identified as the major contributor of ECEC 'deserts' in outer regional and remote areas) to a supply-side approach with funding conditional on providing high quality services, and supports to achieve it, including to attract and retain qualified staff.
- Capping the amount of profit allowed.
- More frequent checks for all services – especially those assed as Not Yet Meeting the National Quality Standard and those that have had serious incidents and breaches – with real consequences for not improving, to ensure safe spaces for children and those caring for them.

Regulations vary in every jurisdiction (e.g. ratios of educator to child) and across service types (LDC, FDC, OSHC, preschool).[102] While these can reflect different operational environments and provide a natural policy laboratory to learn which settings work best where, for whom, and in which circumstances, they can also create barriers for research, sharing of good practices, and resources. These regulatory differences could also unhelpfully inhibit staff mobility, such as for workers seeking to move interstate and/or to regional and remote services offering incentives to attract vital staff.

Systems can be better aligned, both within government (i.e. across government programs and departments) and also across levels of government (through national strategies), to improve coordination, effectiveness and efficiency in meeting the needs of the sector and the workforce to provide quality care and education.

HumanAbility's policy work, current training package development work, activity submissions (for future training package development work), and research plans directly respond to these challenges and opportunities raised by industry, other stakeholders, government and research evidence. How and when HumanAbility responds is set out in the next section.

4. Roadmap

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Children's education and care	**Review entry requirements for the Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care** **Status:** Underway **Overview:** Draft submissions are finalised and submitted to the Assurance body for consideration. The training products have been provided to Skills Ministers with an evaluation report and recommendations for endorsements. **Timing:** Due to be completed by July 2025.	
Children's education and care	**Review the *CHC Out of School Hours Care* qualifications** **Status:** Underway **Overview:** Public consultation is completed. Feedback from the consultation surveys is being collated, analysed and added to the consultation log. Feedback will inform further review of drafts and next steps. **Timing:** Late 2024 – Nov 2025	

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Children's education and care	**Review School Age Education and Care Qualifications** **Overview:** The recent project to transition the 10983NAT Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care has highlighted several issues including variation on qualification level to support states or sectors' contexts, the specificity in assessment requirements do not facilitate cross sector application of the units by RTOs, and the need to examine pathways between early childhood and school aged education and care qualifications. Qualifications in scope: • CHC50221 Diploma of School Age Education and Care • Review and development of qualifications required at the lower AQF levels and the potential pathways/ skills sets, etc **Status:** Activity submission to be developed **Timing:** Commencing February 2026 (subject to approval)	
Children's education and care	**Identify and report children and young people at risk project** This project will replace the superseded unit CHCPRT001 *Identify and respond to children and young people at risk* with the updated unit CHCPRT025 Identify and report children and young people at risk in all applicable CHC qualifications. **Responsibility:** HumanAbility **Status:** commenced February 2025 **Timing:** to be completed August 2025	

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Children's education and care	**Review Early Childhood Education and Care qualification** **Status:** Commenced June 2025 To ensure responsiveness to current and emerging industry skills needs. The project will support responses to skills and training related issues identified in Jobs and Skills Australia's 'The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession', the Productivity Commission's 'A path to universal early childhood care education and care: Inquiry report' and the Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework. The project will also support HumanAbility to deliver on key priorities identified in The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022–2031). Qualifications in scope: • CHC50121 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care • CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care. **Timing:** To be completed in November 2026	

Icon	Label	Icon	Label	Icon	Label	Icon	Label
	Labour force shortages		Skills gaps		Training and qualification issues		Limited career pathways
	Lack of diversity and inclusion		Data deficiencies		Policy and regulatory settings		

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Children's education and care	**Review of the School Based Education Support Qualifications** **Status:** Activity submission to be developed The project to transition the 10983NAT Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care also highlighted cross sectoral employment between Teaching Assistants and workers in Outside School Hours Care. The current units and assessment requirements however restrict cross sectoral application. Reviewing these qualifications at the same time as the ECEC review would facilitate a process to examine unit application across sectors and opportunities to increase pathways. The National Standards for Teaching Assistants were also released in 2021. A review presents the opportunity to examine alignment with the standards and emerging practice and research to ensure workforce readiness of graduates. Qualifications in scope: • CHC30221 Certificate III in School Based Education Support • CHC40221 Certificate IV in School Based Education Support **Timing:** Commencing February 2026 (subject to approval)	
Cross-sectoral	**Rural and Remote sectoral analysis** Analysis of regional and remote workforces in aged care, disability and health, identifying gaps and opportunities specific to these regions. **Lead:** TAFE Centre of Excellence Health Care and Support	

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative		Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	**Response to the Australian Apprenticeship Review** Work alongside stakeholders to respond to recommendation 2.13 of the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System – Skills for tomorrow: Shaping the future of Australian apprenticeships **Responsibility:** HumanAbility		👤 🧩 ⬡ 🫁
Cross-sectoral	**Productivity Commission 5 Pillars Inquiry** Analysis of productivity gains in the care and support workforce. To contribute to the Productivity Commission Quality Care and five pillars inquiry. **Responsibility:** HumanAbility and the Productivity Commission		✏️
Cross-sectoral	**Migration strategy** Encourage government to commence consultations on an Essential Skills Pathway (as per the Migration Strategy) to grow the workforce, whilst maintaining ethical recruitment standards. **Responsibility:** Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs		👤 ✏️
Cross-sectoral	**Inclusion and Diversity** **Issues paper:** Understanding the changing demographics of the Care and Support Workforce. Lived and living experience and peer workforce engagement Host lived experience consultations (disability, community services). Establish a Technical Committee – Mental Health Peer work. **Responsibility:** HumanAbility		👤 🫁

👤	Labour force shortages	🧩	Skills gaps	🎓	Training and qualification issues	⬡	Limited career pathways
🫁	Lack of diversity and inclusion	🔍	Data deficiencies	✏️	Policy and regulatory settings		

Industry sector	Initiative		Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	**Technology and Artificial Intelligence** **Targeted engagement:** Technology, AI and the Care and Support Workforce **Discussion paper:** For example: Augmentation of the care and support workforce, worker pipelines into care and support. Collaboration with Future Skills Organisation (FSO) on their Digital Skills project. **Responsibility:** HumanAbility		
Cross-sectoral	**Research the drivers of low completion rates in key qualifications** **Status:** Commenced June 2025 **Overview:** This project will examine qualification completion rates in our sectors and subsectors; identify risk factors and protective factors; and design strategies to bolster completion rates. Evidence and solutions will be drawn from workshops, interviews, documentary analysis and extensive data analysis and triangulation. Deliverables include reports, issues papers, and enrolment and completion data from NCVER on HumanAbility's bespoke, interactive dashboards. **Timing:** 2025–2026		

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	**Microcredentials: Examining the current use of shorter forms of training to support future guidance of skills development in the care and support sectors**	

Microcredentials: Examining the current use of shorter forms of training to support future guidance of skills development in the care and support sectors

Improve access to an increasing range of microcredentials for educators and teachers in areas of identified need

Status: Commencing mid-2025

Overview: Microcredentials are rapidly increasing in number and variety, and have been identified by stakeholders from all sectors, and by the Workforce Working Group of the Education Ministers Meeting, as a potential or partial solution for quality professional learning.

This project will: a) identify, categorise and quantify current microcredentials in our sectors (structure, content, relationships to existing accredited training); 2) map current micro-credential offerings using the categorisation; 3) analyse skills and knowledge gaps that may be suitably addressed through quality microcredentials; and 4) develop a framework and recommendations for how microcredentials could support professional learning.

Together, this provides practical tools and advice for employers, learners and peak bodies.

Timing: To be completed by the end of 2027.

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	**Earn While You Learn (EWYL) models** **Status:** Launched June 2025 **Overview:** This project responds to challenges including workforce shortages, retention and skill development (especially in regional and remote areas) and placement poverty through consideration of strengthening the use of Earn While You Learn models in the care and support sectors. The objectives are to identify and categorise all the EWYL models used in or suited to HumanAbility sectors, map these to the most critical skills and occupation gaps, and codevelop models based on most promising examples. It will develop clear, evidence-based and practical guidance and solutions drawing on quantitative data, documentary analysis and stakeholder engagement. **Timing:** 2025–2026	
Cross-sectoral	**VET Care and Support Workforce research** **Status:** Underway **Overview:** The first stage of this research project sought to understand the profile of the VET workforce in our sectors, including pathways in and out. Through multiple surveys (reaching over 1000 responses), workshops and interviews, we discovered rich insights. Initial findings were shared in April 2025, with full findings from stage one to be shared later in the year. Stage two of this research will investigate sector-specific challenges and issues, while stage three will investigate and support industry led solutions to these challenges. **Timing:** 2024–2026	

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	**Data and Evidence Gaps research**	

Status: Commencing 2025

Overview: The care and support sectors face many intersecting data challenges, including lack of granularity, timeliness, accessibility, incomparability, inaccuracy and missing information. Noting that the introduction of OSCA will address some of these issues when it comes into effect, this research project responds to remaining challenges using a mixed-methods approach, to 1) identify and map stakeholder data gaps; 2) understand the implications of the data gaps; and 3) identify or develop strategies to address these gaps, including triaging or sequencing our priorities, and identifying the external stakeholders best-placed to implement solutions in the short and long term.

Timing: Commencing 2025

Dependent on: Australian Government departments engaging with HumanAbility on existing data available, providing data to HumanAbility and/or undertaking to develop nationally consistent approaches to data collection where this does not exist. It also will be influenced by implementation of OSCA.

Labour force shortages

Skills gaps

Training and qualification issues

Limited career pathways

Lack of diversity and inclusion

Data deficiencies

Policy and regulatory settings

References

1   These roles fall into three ANZSIC industry groups – '871 Child Care Services', '801 Preschool Education' and '802 School Education'.

2   The occupations under HumanAbility's core remit fall under four 4-digit ANZSCO labels and codes: 4211 "child carers" (educators) including "child care worker #4221-11, Family Day Care Worker #4211-12, Nanny #4211-13, and Out of School Hours Care Worker #4211-14; 4221 "education aides", including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers #2421-11, Integration Aide #4221, Preschool Aide #4221-15, and Teachers Aide #4221-16); 1341 "Child Care Centre Managers" (early childhood centre directors), and 2411 Early Childhood (pre-primary school) teachers (including #2411-11), also known as preschool teachers or kinder teachers. Note this final group works can work with all age groups form 6 weeks onwards in both long day care and preschool settings. OSCA is being iteratively introduced from December 2024 and will be fully implemented following the 2026 census. However, the data sets used to prepare the 2025 workforce plan relies on the ANZSCO labels. OSCA will provide greater accuracy, granularity and professional recognition.

3   The cultural domain refers to community cohesion aspects of integrated care, such as knowing how to work with and across a diverse community

4   Australian Education Research Organisation (2024) *Linking quality and child development in early childhood education and care: Technical report*, Australian Education Research Organisation, accessed 19 March 2025.

5   Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; The Front Project and PWC (2019) *A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia* [PDF 1152KB] , PWC, accessed, 27 March 2025; Victoria Government Department of Treasury and Finance (2022) *Summary report Economic Impacts of the Best Start, Best Life Extension*, Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance, accessed 27 March 2025.

6   Australian Bureau of Statistics (November 2024) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*, ABS website. This data was trended by JSA based on the 2021 Census.

7   Jobs and Skills Australia, Employment Projections produced by Victoria University, 2024.

8   Female, First Nations, Outside capital cities: Four quarter averages were calculated using ABS (November 2024) 'EQ06 – Employed persons by Industry group of main job (ANZSIC), Sex, State and Territory, November 1984 onwards (Pivot Table)' [data set], *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*, ABS website. Figures on the number or proportion of First Nations people should be treated with caution as they likely underreport actual figures. There are many valid reasons why First Nations people disclose their cultural identity, and also valid reasons why they do not.

9　　　Female share, Part-time share, Current employment by state: Four quarter averages were calculated using ABS (November 2024) 'EQ06 - Employed persons by Industry group of main job (ANZSIC), Sex, State and Territory, November 1984 onwards (Pivot Table)' [data set], *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*, ABS website; First Nations, Outside of capital city: ABS (2021) Occupation (OCCP) by Indigenous Status (INGP) and Greater Capital City Statistical Area (UR) [Census TableBuilder Pro], ABS website; Employment: ABS, Labour Force Australia, detailed, November 2024, data trended by Jobs and Skills Australia; Employment Projections: Jobs and Skills Australia, Employment Projections produced by Victoria University, 2024.

10　　Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*, JSA. The most recent figure for First Nations people drawn from the 2024 EEC workforce census.

11　　Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) *Customised report based on Labour Force Survey, four-quarter average*.

12　　Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 28 March 2025

13　　Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*, JSA. The most recent figure for First Nations people drawn from the 2024 EEC workforce census.

14　　Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 28 March 2025.

15　　The ANZSCO label education aide covers 4 different roles: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Worker, Integration Aide, Preschool Aide, and Teachers Aide. These occupational titles are no longer preferred or widely used in industry, and will be replaced by new titles under different groupings. See footnote 2. For further information on the changes, see ABS (2024) *OSCA – Occupation Standard Classification for Australia, 2024*, Version 1.0, ABS website. A changing and unknown minority of education aides work in one or more other sectors, sometimes while simultaneously working in CEC. These other sectors are typically health, community (human) services, and aged and disability care.

16　　LDCs are also known or referred to as Centre Based Day Care (CBDC) services, and sometimes as early learning and care centres. HumanAbility uses LDCs – the term preferred by the sector.

17　　Standalone preschools – sometimes referred to as dedicated preschools – are ECEC services only offering preschool (as opposed to a preschool program operating within a primary school, or within an LDC).

18　　Other essential occupations work in CEC but are not included in the data for this sector. These include support staff such as administrative staff, cooks, and maintenance staff. There are also a number of allied health roles that support this sector such as psychologists, social workers, speech, behaviour and occupational therapists. Some of these roles are discussed in the profiles of health sector, and of the aged care and disability services sector.

19　　Jobs and Skills Australia (2025), *Jobs and Skills Atlas Pro* ('Occupation' view).

20　　Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) *Customised report based on Labour Force Survey, four-quarter average*.

21　　Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 28 March 2025.

22　　The ECEC National Workforce Census (NWC) is commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education and is the only national census of its type in Australia. The 2024 NWC achieved a 97.4% response rate across Child Care Subsidy (CCS) approved services which includes OSHC, Vacation Care (VC), FDC and IHC services. Standalone preschools were invited, but their participation was not mandatory. The numbers of services that participated in the 2024 NWC were: 8909 LDC services; 4,287 OSHC services; 3,217 VAC services, 365 FDC services, 31 IHC services and 2,181 preschool services. The NWC estimates 4,551 additional people in the ECEC workforce in 2024 then HumanAbility's estimates using the ABS labour force statistics. The discrepancy is explained by the fact the total staff count for the NWC includes workers in ECEC services that perform occupations not under HumanAbility's remit (such as cooks and cleaners), b) includes volunteers, and c) includes some double-counting. When the totals for just "child carers" and ECT occupations are compared – HumanAbility's combined total is 243,800, versus NWC's 240,041, or adjusted 'count' of 211,518, largely explained by the fact the NWC participation from standalone preschools was voluntary. Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025. Note, see pages 12 and 18 for methodological notes.

23　　This includes accounting for double-counting assumptions, such as those employed in OSHC and in vacation care. Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025.

24   For instance, there are no national qualification requirements to work as an educator in OSHC settings; although six states and territories do have specific requirements. In contrast, in LDC settings the National Quality Framework requires that educators across the country must be qualified to (or actively working towards) at least an AQF Certificate III level qualification, with additional requirements at the service level, whereby services must have a minimum number of diploma qualified educators (early childhood teachers) according to the number of children attending. Further complexity is added to this framework with at least one state, New South Wales, having separate educator: child ratios relating to this diploma qualified workforce. Jurisdictional regulations also differ in terms of whether diploma qualified early childhood teachers need to hold a formal teacher registration (with no such requirement under the NQF). See The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQAs) Qualification Requirements webpage for more details: ACECQA (2025), _Qualification Requirements_, ACECQA, accessed 22 May 2025.

25   Department of Education (2025) _Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report_, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 18 April 2025.

26   Where there were less than 5 people in a group the proportion of staff was been suppressed. Department of Education (2025) _Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report_, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025.

27   Department of Education (2025) _Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report_, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025.

28   Department of Education (2025) _Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report_, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025.

29   Department of Education (2025) _Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report_, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025. and HumanAbility (2025) _Outside School Hours Care Interim Report_. HumanAbility. accessed 24 April 2025.

30   Jobs and Skills Australia, _Employment Projections_ produced by Victoria University, 2024.

31   NCVER (2025) _Total VET students and courses_ [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, accessed 12 November 2024.

32   NCVER (2025) _Total VET students and courses_ [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

33   NCVER (2025) _Total VET students and courses_ [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, accessed 14 February 2025.

34   NCVER (2025) _Total VET students and courses_ [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, accessed 14 February 2025.

35   NCVER (2025) _Total VET students and courses_ [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

36   NCVER (2025) _Total VET students and courses_ [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

37   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

38   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

39   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

40   Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) *Remoteness Areas*, ABS Website, accessed 1 May 2025.

41   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

42   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

43   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

44   NCVER (2025) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website, extracted 12 November 2024.

45   Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 22 April 2025.

46   Jobs and Skills Australia (2023) *Data on Occupation Mobility* [data set], JSA, accessed 10 April 2025. Annual turnover figures is based on 'percentage of the occupation moving out of that occupation in 2020–2021 and thus should be treated with caution, particularly in Victoria due to the numerous and long lockdowns.

47   Jobs and Skills Australia, Occupation Shortage List, accessed October 2024, Occupation Shortage List.

48   Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) ORIMA/Lighthouse – December 2024, 'Survey of Employers who have recently advertised, [Accessed via JSA Atlas Pro on 11 April 2025].

49   Jobs and Skills Australia (2025) Atlas Pro, Occupation View.
JSA defines a long training pathway as "a qualification corresponding to Certificate III or above," and notes this this type of shortage "suggests that there is a need to increase the number of available skilled workers [but that there are] significant time lags in the training process."

50   Jobs and Skills Australia (n.d.) *Occupation Shortage List*, JSA website, accessed 13 May 2025.

51   Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025.

52   The leadership and capability focus area covers workforce culture, professional development, leadership and mentoring, and management capability. HumanAbility is delivering action FA3-2 'Improve access to an increase range of microcredentials for educators and teachers in areas of identified need'. Education Ministers' Meeting; ACECQA (2021) *Shaping Our Future" A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022–2031* ACECQA, accessed 20 March 2025.

53 Department of Education (2025) *Preschool Reform Agreement*, DE website, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 30 May 2025.

54 Department of Education (2025) *Preschool Outcomes Measure*, DE website, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 15 March 2025.

55 Each state and territory determine which courses quality for Fee-Free TAFE.

56 TAFESA (2025) *TAFE SA Centre of Excellence: Early Childhood Education and Care*, TAFESA website, accessed 27 March 2025.

57 TAFESA (2025) *TAFE SA Centre of Excellence: Early Childhood Education and Care*, TAFESA website, accessed 27 March 2025.

58 Department of Social Services (2021) *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*, Commonwealth of Australia, accessed 27 March 2025.

59 Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*, JSA.

60 Fair Work Commission (2025) *Decision Summary of the Gender-based under evaluation decision*, Fair Work Commission, accessed 10 April 2025.

61 Fair Work Commission (2025) Approved Variation to Agreement, 28/01/25 (33 additional employers); Approved Variation to Agreement, 18/03/25 (136 additional employers), accessed 10 April 2025. Note – this data changes monthly and was correct at time of writing.

62 Fair Work Commission (2024) Original Approved Agreement, accessed 10 April 2025.

63 Fair Work Commission (2025) Early Childhood Education and Care Supported Bargaining Agreement information page, accessed 10 April 2025.

64 The Sector (2025) Goodstart educators secure 10 per cent pay rise before Christmas, IEU NSW/ACT reports, accessed 10 April 2025.

65 This table is not comprehensive of all initiatives by each government. Further detail is available upon request from HumanAbility and individual governments.

66 Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*, JSA; Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care: inquiry report*, No. 106, PC; ACCC (2023) *Childcare Inquiry: Final report*, ACCC.

67 Department of Social Services (2024) *Early Years Strategy 2024–2034*, DSS, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 30 May 2025.

68 Data drawn from Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025. Productivity Commission data was combined with ABS (various) Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, ABS website. Growth has been largest in LDC and OHSC.

69 Jobs and Skills Australia (n.d.) *Occupation Shortage List*, JSA website, accessed October 2024; Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2025) *NQF Snapshot Waivers*, ACECQA, accessed 24 March 2025. Analysis performed using 6-digit codes on JSA's interactive occupation shortage list website, and of waiver data from ACECQA's Quarterly Snapshot (Waivers).

70 'Educators' is based on the ANZSCO occupation group 'child carers'. Vacancies are on a three-month moving average basis and are not trended or seasonally adjusted. The indicative vacancy rate is the number of vacancies for each occupation divided by the sum of the number of people working in the occupation and the number of vacancies, then multiplied by 100. Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care: inquiry report*, No. 106, PC.

71 Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*, accessed 7 April 2025.

72 Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession*, accessed 7 April 2025.

73 Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; NCVER (2023) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website.

74 Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2025) *Qualifications for centre-based services with children preschool age or under*, ACECQA, accessed 20 May 2025.

75 Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Data Tables* [data set], Productivity Commission website, accessed 7 April 2025. Drawing on published and unpublished ACECQA data.

76 Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2025) *NQF Snapshot Waivers*, ACECQA, accessed 11 April 2025.

77 Part of this rise is attributable by an increase in the number and proportion of incidents being reported. For instance, ACECQA found that high quality services reported more serious incidents, likely due to a stricter reporting regime in these services. ACECQA (2023) *Serious incidents – injury, trauma or illness. Occasional Paper 9*, ACECQA, accessed 12 May 2025.

78 Steering Committee for the Report on Government Services (2025).

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80 Department of Education (2024a, unpublished) available in Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Data Tables* [data set], Productivity Commission website, accessed 6 April 2025.

81 Percentage of surveyed staff. Department of Education (2024a, (unpublished) available in Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Data Tables* [data set], Productivity Commission website, accessed 6 April 2025.

82 United Workers Union (2021) *Exhausted, undervalued and leaving: The crisis in early education* [PDF 818KB], UWU, accessed 7 April 2025.

83 Lucas F (29 January 2025) *How is the recruitment landscape changing in the ECEC sector in 2025?* [Media Release] The Sector, accessed 7 April 2025.

84 Department of Education (2024) unpublished data available in Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Data Tables* [data set], Productivity Commission website, accessed 7 April 2025. Note, data was collected before the wage boost was announced by the Australian government.

85 NCVER (2024) *Total VET students and courses* [VOCSTATS], NCVER website. * indicates qualification has been superseded. First Nations and disability enrolments are based on the numbers of learners that disclose this status. For each of these, between 2% and 12% of learners did not disclose their identity in the survey.

86 Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025.

87 Department of Education (2025) *Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census 2024 National Report*, DE, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 1 April 2025.

88 Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession: Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study*, JSA, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 25 May 2025.

89 Department of Education (2024) *The Boori Milumba Model: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific service-led intensive Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) model,* DE, Australian Government, Canberra, 13 May 2025.

90 Jobs and Skills Australia (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession: Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study*, JSA, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 25 May 2025.

91 Lucas F (29 January 2025) *How is the recruitment landscape changing in the ECEC sector in 2025?* [Media Release] The Sector, accessed 30 May 2025.

92 Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; JSA (2024) *The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession: Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study*, JSA, accessed 25 May 2025 (Finding 10 and Recommendation 2).

93   Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report Volume 1*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025 (Finding 3.4 and Recommendation 3.5).

94   Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2024) *National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022–2023)*, ACECQA, accessed 30 May 2025.

95   See Fair Work Commission, Schedule E of the Miscellaneous Award 2020, which requires that 20% of a trainees' ordinary hours be allocated to approved training, which can be conducted on-the-job, off the job, or a combination of both. Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) (2020) Miscellaneous Award 2020 FWO, accessed 13 May 2025.

96   HumanAbility understands educational leader or pedagogical leader is already a requirement of the NQF (Regulation 118). But our stakeholder consultations and national research has shown that the person holding these roles is spread too thin across too many services (especially in FDC contexts) or across other roles (such as room leader) which reduces their capacity to support and strengthen quality pedagogy. Additionally, there is opportunity for more services to create or support specialist roles, such as in areas of skills gaps, such as trauma-informed care and education, or supporting with children on the spectrum.

97   These data gaps have been identified by stakeholders, by Jobs and Skills Australia, by the Productivity Commission and by HumanAbility.

98   Some stakeholders, including First Nations people and representatives, have queried whether the NQS is fit for purpose and have articulated the value in a review of the NQS which would include how quality is defined, including by Aboriginal Community Control Organisations.

99   Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2025) *Quarterly Snapshot*, ACECQA website, accessed 24 April 2025.

100   Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2025) *Quarterly Snapshot*, ACECQA website, accessed 24 April 2025.

101   Productivity Commission (2024) *A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Productivity Commission, accessed 25 March 2025; ACCC (2023) *Childcare inquiry, final report – December 2023*, ACCC, accessed 20 April 2025.

102   Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2025) *Educator to child ratios*, ACECQA website, accessed 27 March 2025.

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