

Information kit for careers advisers

'Education has the power to transform lives ... This begins with making sure that every young child has the opportunity to benefit from structured play-based learning before they start school, because this helps build the social, emotional and cognitive skills they need to succeed in the years to come.'

- Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, 2019.



About early childhood education and care

The human brain develops more rapidly in the first few years of life than at any other time. Children's experiences in the years before school are critically important for everything that follows. For this reason, early childhood education and care (ECEC) - also known as 'early learning' - matters enormously for children and families.

Half of Australian's children aged 0-5 years attend ECEC services, including preschool/kindergarten and long day care services. To provide these services, the Australian ECEC sector employs more than 223,000 educators.

What's changed?

Australia's ECEC sector has changed in significant ways since the introduction of the [National Quality Framework](#) in 2012. All early childhood educators now require formal qualifications in order to work with children, and there is a comprehensive National Quality Standard that governs educators' work.

What's coming up?

In the last few years, the Australian Government and governments in several states and territories have announced new investments in early learning worth billions of dollars.

These reforms will make early learning, including preschool/kindergarten, available and affordable for many more children.

A bigger early learning system means thousands of new jobs for early childhood teachers and educators.

Job prospects

There's never been a better time to start a career in early learning.

There is currently a shortage of early childhood educators across Australia, at all qualification levels. Demand will grow over the coming decade.

In 2023, the Australian Government [forecast](#) that Australia will need an additional 38,200 early childhood educators (including degree-qualified teachers) by 2033.

In January 2024, there were 6,979 [vacancies](#) advertised online for early childhood educators and teachers across Australia. Among the members of the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA), there were 4,957 positions vacant.

Attributes and skills

Guiding children's learning, development and wellbeing in the years before school is sophisticated work. It requires the right personal attributes and skills.

Early childhood educators require a good understanding of pedagogy (the science of teaching and learning) and childhood development, as well as practical skills in working with diverse groups of children.

Effective early childhood educators have:

- ★ high levels of emotional intelligence
- ★ a passion for ongoing learning
- ★ a strong focus on community and inclusion
- ★ flexible and creative thinking skills.

Communication and teamwork skills are also essential. Early childhood educators need to cooperate and collaborate with children, parents/carers and their own colleagues.

Early childhood educators are also able to incorporate particular skills and interests into their work with children, such as science, maths, early literacy and the creative arts.

An appetite for continual learning and development sets educators and teachers up for success.



What do early childhood educators do?

The work of early childhood educators is multi-faceted. In their work with children, educators plan, observe, encourage, explain, nurture and inspire. Many early childhood educators also work closely with families and allied health professionals, to provide additional support to children who need it.

“Alongside their professional knowledge educators draw on their creativity, intuition and imagination, including engaging in critical reflection to evaluate and adjust their practice to suit the learners, the time, place and context of learning.”

— Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.

Where do early childhood educators work?

Early childhood educators may choose to work in a variety of settings: long day care centres, preschools/ kindergartens, outside school hours care services, family day care or schools. This information sheet focuses on long day care and preschool/kindergarten.

Roles for early childhood educators

Early childhood educators can create career pathways that include leadership roles and specialisation. Within larger employers, there are frequent opportunities for further development, providing newer educators with the chance to build their experience and advance their careers.

There are different roles and responsibilities in early learning and care services. While job titles vary across services, we can group them as follows:

(a) Educators:

- ★ create inspiring, interesting, and age-appropriate learning environments
- ★ inspire children's curiosity to create and explore their environment
- ★ establish strong relationships with children
- ★ support children's social and emotional development
- ★ create opportunities for every child to reach their potential
- ★ form meaningful partnerships with families to reach the best outcomes for each child.

(b) In addition, Lead Educators:

- ★ lead the development and implementation of an effective educational program in the service
- ★ provide advice and support to other educators, to build an effective early learning team.

(c) In addition, Early Childhood Teachers:

- ★ deliver preschool/kindergarten programs to children in the two years before they start school
- ★ assess each child's learning and development
- ★ scaffold children's learning to develop new concepts, skills and positive attitudes to learning
- ★ support children to become self-reliant and collaborative, with the confidence to transition to school.

(d) Centre Managers:

- ★ monitor and assess the performance of their early learning and care service, ensuring that it meets the National Quality Standard
- ★ build a strong team of educators and support staff
- ★ work with parents to understand the best ways to support their children
- ★ collaborate with other professionals to deliver specialised support for children and families.

There are also opportunities for educators to move into senior leadership and management roles. For example, large ECEC providers operate dozens or hundreds of services, with roles for area managers, pedagogical leaders and quality improvement leaders, to name a few.

In addition, most degree-qualified early childhood teachers are able to teach children from birth into the early years of school, providing flexibility and choice over the course of a career.

Pay and conditions

Pay and conditions for early childhood educators vary across roles, locations and employers. Positions may be permanent (full-time or part-time) or casual.

Some educator roles have pay and conditions set by the relevant industrial award, while others are set above the award (via an enterprise agreement or otherwise).

In many cases, degree-qualified early childhood teachers enjoy the same (or similar) pay working in early learning services as they do in schools. This provision is sometimes based on industrial awards; in other cases, individual employers ensure pay parity.

Conditions of employment for educators may include: time for planning; paid professional development; and support for upskilling. Employers will often provide financial support and study leave for educators undertaking additional study (eg at Bachelor level).

In addition to pay and professional support, educators may also be eligible for benefits such as discounted private health insurance and gym membership. Employers may also offer their educators discounted fees for their own children enrolled in an early learning service.

Other ways to value the profession

New Australian [research](#) shows that early childhood educators working in high-quality services report high levels of job satisfaction. They identify teamwork, good communication and passion as among the key elements of their success. Families also recognise the value of educators' work, with a 2020 [survey](#) finding that 97% of Australian families consider early learning and care 'important' or 'very important'.

Qualifications and pathways

Early childhood educators must hold an approved qualification, or be actively working towards one. Qualifications are assessed and approved by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

There are different pathways into an early childhood education career. It's also common for educators to upskill to higher qualifications over the course of their careers. Many employers will provide financial and/or other support to help their staff to upskill.

Qualification options

	Higher education	Vocational education and training	School-based*/work-based traineeship
Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care			
Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care			
Bachelor of Early Childhood Education			
Graduate Diploma of Early Childhood Education			
Master of Teaching (Early Childhood)			

*Traineeships are available in some schools, along with units of competency from the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care.

Career progression

There are many opportunities to progress and upskill during an early childhood education career. It's common for educators to continue their studies while they work, gaining higher qualifications over the course of their careers. Many employers will provide financial and other support to help their staff to upskill to Bachelor level or beyond. Governments around Australia also provide generous scholarships for further study in early childhood education.

Work experience

Would you like to arrange work experience for your students in an early learning and care service? Our members operate more than 2,300 services across Australia, in every state and territory.

Click [here](#) to complete our work experience request form.

Information for students

Our [Big Roles in Little Lives](#) website contains lots of accessible information about ECEC careers for secondary school students.

About us

Established in 2014, the [Early Learning and Care Council of Australia \(ELACCA\)](#) works to promote the value of quality early learning and care for young children and their families.

Our 18 members include some of the largest early learning and care providers in the country, from all parts of the sector, including both long day care and preschool/ kindergarten. ELACCA members operate more than 2,400 early learning and care services across Australia, educating and nurturing 369,000 children. Together, our members provide around 25% of the nation's early learning and care places.

Contact:

Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA)
PO Box 348, Annandale NSW 2038
E: admin@elacca.org.au
T: 1800 940 400

Did you know?

While 'child care worker' is still a common term, it is no longer used in the early learning and care sector. The preferred term is 'early childhood educator', which reflects the central role of these professionals in supporting children's learning, from birth onwards.

The Australian Government is planning to formally adopt the term 'early childhood educator' in all official documents and data before the end of 2024.

