

Office for
Early Childhood
Development



Government of
South Australia

South Australia's Early Childhood Workforce Strategy



Acknowledgement of Country

From the heart:

We acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples as the First peoples of South Australia and as custodians of the lands, waters, skies and communities where we live, learn and raise children.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as having the longest living culture, raising children safe and strong in their identity, community, culture, and connection to country.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and their role as the first knowledge sharers for children. We follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal peoples, working with and for children, are central in shaping our work. Their wisdom, advice, and guidance enriches our practices, creating a more inclusive and culturally safe environment for children and families.

We respect Aboriginal peoples' ways of being, doing and wise practices guiding our continual learning. Together we walk and build stronger, more supportive communities for all children.

Terminology

In South Australia, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which the staff of the Government of South Australia works. We respect preference to use the term 'Aboriginal peoples' to acknowledge in written and spoken language both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.





Contents

Foreword	2
About this strategy	4
What we have heard so far	6
Strategy implementation	7
Our focus areas	9
Our initiatives and actions	10
1. Attracting future teachers and educators to the sector	10
2. Training, development and transition to work	12
3. Retention through valuing and sustaining the early childhood workforce	16
4. Growing and supporting the Aboriginal early childhood workforce	20
5. Developing a multi-disciplinary workforce	22
6. Ensuring robust evidence and evaluation	24
Next steps	26
References	28

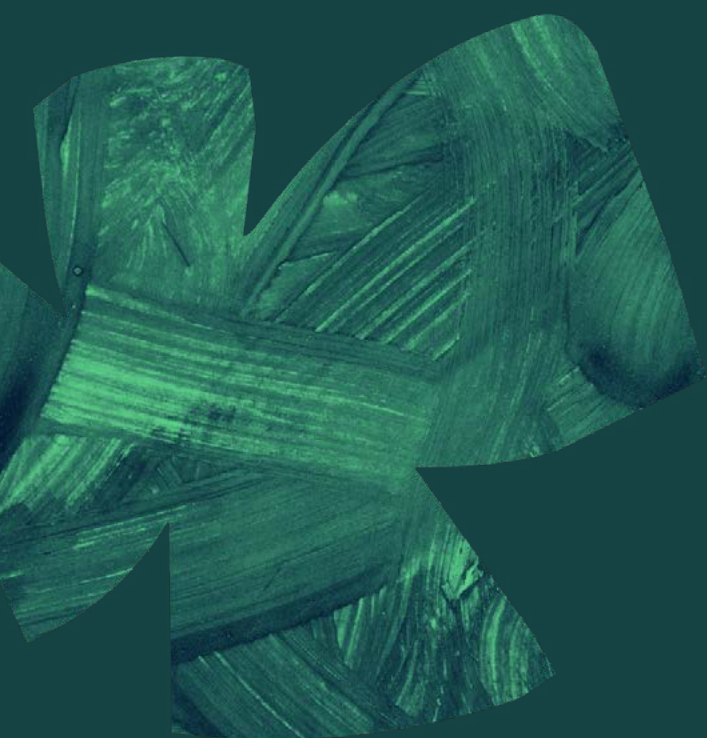
Foreword

Every child deserves a flying start. A strong, valued early childhood workforce is fundamental to achieving this. That is why we are investing a record \$96.6 million over 4 years to grow and support the early childhood workforce and provide support for quality teaching and learning in preparation for universal 3-year-old preschool delivery.

The staged implementation of universal 3-year-old preschool across South Australia, which will happen between 2026 and 2032, will drive significant additional demand for early childhood teachers and educators in our state. We acknowledge that this is our most significant workforce challenge to date – and one we are fully prepared to meet head on.

Our first priority is to grow the number of qualified early childhood teachers and educators, and support our existing, highly skilled workforce. We are also committed to ensuring early childhood services have access to the expertise required to make 3-year-old preschool a success – such as allied health and community services professionals. Growing and supporting the Aboriginal early childhood workforce is important for Aboriginal children. The benefits of Aboriginal peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing extend to all children.

This strategy is an important step towards addressing the long-standing workforce challenges faced across the sector. We are under no illusion about the level of effort that this requires and recognise that we can't do this alone. We are committed to working in close partnership with the profession, sector experts, service providers, Aboriginal communities, tertiary education providers, peak bodies, unions and other stakeholders to design and deliver the strategy's actions.



We know this investment in 3-year-old preschool must be made in a way that upholds our strong commitment to quality. This includes support for early childhood teachers with planning time and professional learning in both government and non-government preschool settings, as well as access to quality curriculum resources.

We're also closely monitoring the national landscape, aligning our efforts with those of the Commonwealth. We welcome the recent Federal Budget announcements regarding support for a wage increase in the early childhood sector, and financial support for early childhood teaching students to undertake placements. The Government of South Australia will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth on policies to benefit the early childhood workforce.

We know it's important that our early childhood workforce is valued and supported, regardless of the setting in which they are delivering preschool programs.

Throughout the roll-out of 3-year-old preschool, we will carefully monitor workforce growth and service quality. We will evaluate our actions and make necessary adjustments – to maximise the benefits of our investment in the early childhood workforce and secure the best outcomes for South Australian children.



Hon Blair Boyer MP

Minister for Education,
Training and Skills

About this strategy

We have accepted an ambitious 20-year goal to guide our reforms: to reduce the rate of South Australian children entering school developmentally vulnerable from the current 23.8 per cent to 15 per cent. We know that children who engage in quality early childhood education have better outcomes in the long term, and that all children benefit from participating in 2 years of preschool. This is why we have committed to implementing 3-year-old preschool across South Australia from 2026 to 2032.

Our early childhood workforce is the lynchpin to the success of this strategy. To ensure every child can access 3-year-old preschool by 2032, we need to significantly expand the size of our current early childhood workforce and sustain this growth over time. There are already pressures on the early childhood sector. In South Australia, the workforce shortage in early childhood services is particularly acute, with 27 per cent of providers operating without a fully qualified teacher at the end of 2023. Regional and remote communities also continue to face exacerbated workforce challenges.

We need to start the important work of growing our quality early childhood workforce straight away. This strategy aims to grow a quality, sustainable early childhood workforce in South Australia with a particular focus on the workforce needed to deliver 3-year-old preschool.

It contains a suite of initiatives that are designed to address the challenges and barriers to growing and sustaining the early childhood workforce. This includes developing and supporting the roles of early childhood teachers, educators and leaders, as well as specific initiatives for allied health and community services professionals. We recognise that these roles are all integral to the delivery of universal 3-year-old preschool and the broader early childhood reforms in South Australia. This strategy also places a particular emphasis on the significance of engaging and supporting Aboriginal peoples to work in early childhood.

In staging, designing and implementing the initiatives of this strategy, we will work in partnership with the profession, service providers, higher education and vocational education and training (VET) providers, peak bodies and unions, with all playing a part in the delivery of successful workforce reforms.

We will take action in the context of the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy 2022–2031 and we will continue to collaborate with the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to support its delivery.

Continuous quality improvement of early childhood services will be supported by the Education Standards Board SA through increased frequency of assessment and ratings.

This strategy is dynamic – it will be monitored and evaluated throughout the entirety of the government's reforms. We will look to learn from innovative practices already underway in services and other jurisdictions. We will also undertake research, obtain evidence of which actions have the most impact, and refine the strategy based on the knowledge uncovered.





What we have heard so far

In early 2024, the Office for Early Childhood Development held a series of co-design workshops and consultation sessions with various organisations and agencies.

These included:

- early childhood service providers
- the Department for Education
- higher education and VET providers
- peak bodies and unions
- Aboriginal organisations
- other government agencies.

Through this process, we heard about the persistent workforce challenges faced across the early childhood sector. These challenges are well documented, and include:

- limited career advancement opportunities
- low pay and poor conditions
- limited access to affordable or flexible education programs, particularly for those already working in the sector
- demanding work conditions
- poor perception and societal attitudes about the significance of early childhood careers.¹

We also heard that a mix of actions across the workforce pipeline is required to address these challenges. We must be creative and willing to try new, innovative solutions, as well as evidence-informed, best practice interventions.

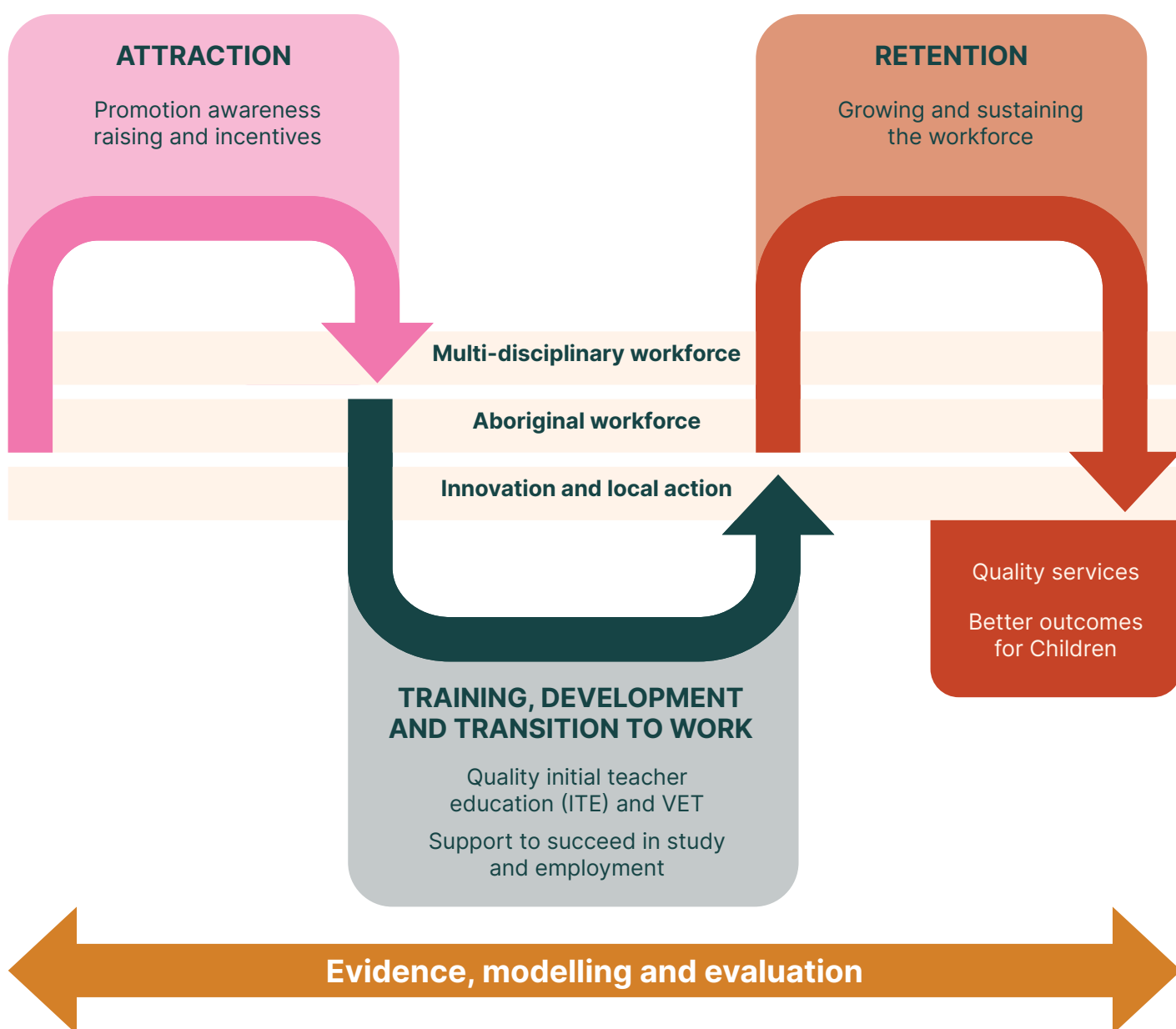
A series of principles were developed with the sector to guide the implementation of the workforce strategy. In implementing this strategy, we will:

- maintain a strong focus on quality as we grow the workforce
- ensure initiatives are accessible and equitable to all services
- look for local initiatives, as well as systemic actions
- focus on ways to attract and retain people who are traditionally underrepresented in the early childhood workforce
- implement dynamic and flexible initiatives, responding and adjusting to what we observe on the ground
- design initiatives collaboratively for better chances of success.

Strategy implementation

The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care found that to increase the early childhood workforce, while ensuring quality and building diversity, we need to focus on the following key areas: attraction, training and development, transition to work and early career support, and retention.







In addition to these focus areas, this strategy includes explicit actions to build a multi-disciplinary workforce and an Aboriginal workforce, and encourage opportunities for innovation and local action. We will work to build the evidence base for action and evaluate the strategy throughout its implementation.





Our focus areas

The focus areas and actions outlined in this strategy are informed by a strong and well understood evidence base. Insights from stakeholders through extensive co-design and ongoing consultations are also reflected in this strategy.

Focus Area	Aim	Action
 1. Attracting future teachers and educators to the sector	To increase the number, quality and diversity of people interested in a career in the early childhood sector.	1.1 Attraction campaign 1.2 Location incentives
 2. Training, development and transition to work	To ensure that training programs are effective, students are supported to succeed, placements help students to be job-ready, and teachers and educators are set up for success upon entering the workforce.	2.1 Study and employment financial support program 2.2 Placement improvement program 2.3 Innovative and supported learning pathways
 3. Retention through valuing and sustaining the early childhood workforce	To promote positive workplaces with conditions that support effective teaching, ongoing learning, strong leadership and career pathways.	3.1 Career support 3.2 Innovation and local action fund 3.3 Supporting teacher and educator practice
 4. Growing and supporting the Aboriginal early childhood workforce	To increase the number of Aboriginal teachers and educators working in the early childhood sector.	4.1 Aboriginal early childhood workforce strategy
 5. Developing a multi-disciplinary workforce	To support the growth of the allied health professional and community services workforce in early childhood.	5.1 A multi-disciplinary approach in early childhood
 6. Ensuring robust evidence and evaluation	To contribute to planning for the roll-out of 3-year-old preschool and design and implement actions based on evidence.	6.1 An evidence base on diversity 6.2 Strategy evaluation

Our initiatives and actions

The following section unpacks the specific challenges and actions for each element of South Australia’s Early Childhood Workforce Strategy.



1. Attracting future teachers and educators to the sector

Our aim: to increase the number, quality and diversity of people interested in a career in the early childhood sector.

1.1 Attraction campaign	
Why we are taking action	What we will do
<p>Quality attraction campaigns play a pivotal role in addressing workforce challenges and enhancing the perception of early childhood pathways and careers.^{2 3 4 5}</p> <p>Through our co-design workshops, we heard that it is time to elevate early childhood. It needs to be highlighted as a respected and integral part of the education profession.</p> <p>Ensuring that everyone knows about the exciting entry points, pathways, and career opportunities in the early childhood sector is important to lifting perceptions.</p> <p>Attraction campaigns for the sector (as part of a package of incentives) are a staple and have been used in Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland.^{6 7 8 9}</p>	<p>Implement a multi-year attraction campaign aimed at building an early childhood workforce that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• raises public awareness of the early childhood reforms• highlights options for those seeking to explore and commence a pathway into early childhood education.• captures the attention of current and prospective students at critical times for selecting university preferences• upskills and recruits more people to early childhood certificates, diplomas and degrees in South Australia to grow the workforce• highlights the rewards and opportunities within the early childhood education sector (such as study support) and showcase educators’ and teachers’ impact on early childhood development. <p>This campaign will commence from July 2024.</p>
Complementary initiatives	

- The **Industry Immersion Program** gives students in years 7 to 10 unique first-hand exposure to employers and workplaces in an industry or sector, including early childhood. (Government of South Australia)
- **Flexible Industry Pathways** give senior secondary students an industry-endorsed route to employment, better preparing young people for real-world jobs and creating a pipeline of skilled workers for South Australia. This includes school-based vocational education and training such as traineeships with recognised pathways into the early childhood sector. (Government of South Australia)
- Early childhood education is one of the priority skills areas featured in TAFE SA’s **‘Go Get It’** student recruitment campaign. The state-wide campaign is aligned to key South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) intake periods, and drives applications for TAFE SA courses across metropolitan and regional campuses. This includes TV, outdoor, digital, print and radio media placements. (Government of South Australia)

FLEXIBLE INDUSTRY PROGRAMS

Flexible Industry Programs (FIPs) provide an industry-endorsed pathway to entry-level employment, better preparing young people for real-world jobs, and creating a pipeline of young, skilled workers for South Australia's growing industries.

The Early Childhood and Education FIP includes a combination of:

- vocational education and training (including the CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care)
- customised South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) curriculum
- additional industry-specific requirements (Working with Children Check and RRHAN-EC)
- mentoring and support to help students succeed in their chosen career.

In 2023, approximately 490 government secondary students undertook a VET qualification in early childhood and education. This is the third-highest number of student enrolments by industry, only following the building/construction and automotive sectors.

1.2 Location incentives

Why we are taking action

Through our engagement with stakeholders, we learned that there are qualified teachers, including those with birth to 5 education university degrees (now recognised by the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia), who are eager to rejoin the workforce and deliver 3-year-old preschool.

We also heard that regional and remote areas are facing critical shortages of early childhood teachers and educators.

Location incentives play a critical role in helping to support hard-to-staff areas.^{10 11 12 13} Financial incentives have been used successfully in Victoria and New South Wales to encourage qualified people to re-enter the workforce to deliver 3-year-old preschool and relocate from other parts of Australia or overseas.

What we will do

A range of location incentives will be available to target particular challenges.

These will be designed in partnership with the sector to ensure incentives are appropriately calibrated and targeted to address workforce gaps.

Location incentives will be available from mid-2025.

Complementary initiatives

- The **Country Education Strategy** sets the direction for education in country areas over a 7-year period. The strategy is focused on ensuring quality leadership and expert teaching in every country school and preschool in South Australia.. It offers a range of workforce initiatives, including supporting country placements for pre-service teachers, supports and incentives to graduates for successful transition to their first teaching role in country locations, and country housing services for teachers and leaders relocating to country schools and preschools. (Government of South Australia)
- From 2024, all eligible teachers and leaders in regional schools and preschools will receive **the country loading allowance** as long as they are in the country, including those who had previously received the allowance, but their entitlement had expired. This will help attract teachers to work in the country, and support teacher retention in regional areas, ensuring staffing continuity for student learning. (Government of South Australia)



2. Training, development and transition to work

Our aim: to ensure that training programs are effective, students are supported to succeed, placements help students to be job-ready, and teachers and educators are set up for success upon entering the workforce.

2.1 Study and employment financial support program

Why we are taking action

We heard that, despite the growing need, enrolments in early childhood undergraduate programs are dropping, and completion rates vary widely.

We also heard that teachers and educators must be set up for success upon entering the workforce, and throughout their early career. Initial teacher education (ITE) and VET programs must be effective, students need to be supported to succeed, and placements must help students to be job-ready.

Financial support during study and employment is important for helping individuals to complete their studies, transition into jobs, and stay employed.^{14 15 16} Financial support can significantly boost access to higher education and increase enrolment in university degree programs.

Victoria's financial incentives for early childhood study and work have been highly successful in reducing financial barriers, increasing accessibility, attracting diverse candidates, and promoting retention. This has contributed to the growth of educator and teacher roles in funded preschools by 50 per cent in just 4 years.

What we will do

The **QualifySA Early Childhood Financial Support Program** will launch in July 2024.

This program will be available to school leavers, career changers, existing students studying eligible early childhood qualifications, and educators looking to upskill. The program will include support throughout study and into initial years of employment, with:

- up to **\$25,000** available for those studying to become early childhood teachers, and up to **\$34,000** available for Aboriginal candidates
- up to **\$7,000** available for Certificate III educators upskilling to become diploma-qualified educators, and up to **\$9,000** available for Aboriginal candidates.

Additional support will be available for Aboriginal candidates seeking to study an early childhood qualification, and people living and studying in regional and remote areas.

Support payments will be staged over the course of a person's study and into the initial years of employment. This is an incentive to progress to completion of study and to then transition to sustained employment in the early childhood sector.

Complementary initiatives

- **Subsidised vocational education and training courses** in early childhood are available to support training in priority areas through a range of registered training organisations (RTOs). Students undertaking a subsidised course can also access additional supports throughout their training, such as help to find secure housing and manage financial stress, access to career and course information and foundational skills programs (Government of South Australia).
- **Fee Free TAFE** and vocational education is a joint initiative of the Australian Government and Government of South Australia, providing tuition-free training places to students wanting to train, retrain or upskill. Early childhood education and care is a priority sector under this initiative. TAFE SA will offer more Fee Free TAFE places for early childhood courses at the certificate III and diploma level from 2025 to support students to gain new skills or upskill as educators. (Australian Government and Government of South Australia)

FEE FREE TAFE - LEARNING NEW SKILLS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

More than 4,000 fee free places have been made available at TAFE SA in 2024 to assist students seeking to train, retrain or upskill in key sectors experiencing a skills shortage, including early childhood.

Jack Kirk, 21, is pursuing his interest in working with children by studying the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care at TAFE SA. "I enjoy being around children and I wanted to get back into studying, so I thought the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, which is a 12-month course, was a good starting point," he says. Jack says his decision to commit to full-time study was made easier by receiving a fee-free place as part of the Fee Free TAFE initiative. "Studying requires such a time commitment so it's good to know the fee is taken care of and I can focus on the course," he says.

Jack says he's been impressed with the support services available to students at TAFE SA since starting his training in February. Jack's first work placement, at a family-run childcare centre in Adelaide's western suburbs, is providing him with useful on-the-job experience, which he says is supporting what he has learned in the classroom. "It doesn't feel like any job I've had before, it's really fulfilling, and I can see that I can make a difference in children's lives."

2.2 Placement improvement programs

Why we are taking action

Placements play an essential role on the path to becoming qualified.¹⁷

Through our engagement, we heard that placements are vital for early childhood students to enhance their skills and gain diverse experience in a range of settings. However, significant barriers such as time and financial burdens hinder completion.

Poor placement experiences can deter pre-service teachers and educators from careers in the sector and reduce their work-readiness.¹⁸ Poor experiences may also deter employers from accepting future placements in their service. Many people cannot afford to go without income while completing placements.¹⁹ Placements that involve travelling long distances and staying away from home create additional challenges for those in remote and regional areas.

What we will do

Commencing in June 2025, we will form partnerships with education providers and employers in the sector to develop placement improvement programs.

These will increase the quality and experience of placements for future educators and teachers as well as employers with a focus on supporting employers to improve the quality and availability of a diverse range of placement opportunities.

Complementary initiatives

- From July 2025, a new **Commonwealth Prac Payment** (CPP) will be introduced to help students manage the costs associated with undertaking a mandatory placement (also known as a practicum) as part of a higher education course in teaching (among other courses). The payment of \$319.50 per week will be means-tested and available for students while undertaking a placement. (Australian Government)

2.3 Innovative and supported learning pathways

Why we are taking action

We heard that people need increased support to successfully complete early childhood qualifications, and that upskilling is key to boosting the number and quality of early childhood teachers.

The National VET Completions report identifies that tailored support can significantly improve completion rates in VET programs by addressing diverse needs.²⁰ New qualification pathways, such as traineeships, provide hands-on learning and smooth the transition into professional roles. Traineeships not only support practical learning experiences and opportunities for professional development, but also the transition into professional employment.²¹

VET qualifications can produce more job-ready graduates than higher education qualifications alone.²² The National Council for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) found that pathways from VET to higher education that include credit for VET qualifications and experience in the workplace, and flexible study options allowing those with VET qualifications to undertake degrees while working in the industry are important.

The transition from VET to university can be difficult, partly due to the lower levels of individual support at university.²³ Educators upskilling to a university degree with a higher Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) level will require additional support to successfully complete a teaching degree.²⁴

New training pathways and ‘taster’ courses will provide opportunities for people who may be considering a career in early childhood to explore opportunities before committing to formal training or employment.

To meet the needs of the sector, partnering with universities, TAFE and other registered training organisations (RTOs) to develop innovative and supported learning pathways is critical.

What we will do

Supported traineeships – We will partner with external providers to provide supported traineeships at the certificate III and diploma level. Priority cohorts will be identified for these traineeships through targeted advertising and recruitment (commencing early 2025).

Diploma upskill program – We will provide targeted support to diploma-qualified educators undertaking specific early childhood teaching degrees while they work. Support may include access to mentoring, coaching and professional development resources (commencing early 2025).

Wraparound support programs – We will work with universities, registered training organisations and other partners to develop wraparound support programs for students studying to become early childhood educators or teachers. This could include resumé and interview preparation, workshops to increase practical understanding of the sector, study support and monthly check-ins, and access to a community of practice. These programs will be particularly targeted at underrepresented groups in the early childhood workforce, including people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people in regional and remote areas, and those first in family to undertake tertiary study (commencing mid-2025).

University partnerships – We will form partnerships with universities, registered training organisations and the sector to develop birth to 5 degrees from mid-year 2024. These will be supported by the Teachers Registration and Standards Regulations 2024, which have been amended to support minimum qualification requirements for early childhood teachers in South Australia.

Pre-certificate level courses – We will work with stakeholders to develop and use innovative learning pathways that provide alternative options to enter the sector (such as ‘taste tester’ courses) to build a more diverse workforce (commencing July 2024).

Early childhood trainer and assessor workforce – We will work with Skills SA to develop the capacity and capability of the early childhood educator trainer and assessor workforce to ensure that VET students have access to quality trainers (commencing early 2025).

Complementary initiatives

- Findon Technical College has an early childhood and education industry training program for year 10 to 12 students to develop the knowledge and skills required to get a head start on a career in the sector through VET and the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). (Government of South Australia)
- HumanAbility has been established as a Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) with responsibility for early childhood education and care. HumanAbility is responsible for identifying skills and workforce needs for the sector, mapping career pathways across education sectors, developing contemporary VET training products, supporting collaboration between industry and training providers to improve training and assessment practice, and acting as a source of intelligence on issues affecting the sector. (Australian Government)

TEACHERS REGISTRATION CHANGE

The Teachers Registration and Standards Regulations 2024 have been amended to support minimum qualification requirements for early childhood teachers holding a qualification approved by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Teachers holding an ACECQA approved qualification (excluding holders of the Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate) will be eligible for registration to provide education in early childhood settings in South Australia.

Changes were made in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care to:

- broaden the range of qualifications that may be accepted for the purposes of registration as a teacher in South Australia
- allow people with a qualification focused on birth to age 5, including 3-year degrees, to qualify as specialist early childhood teachers.

This is expected to bring more teachers into the early childhood sector and allow for specialisation in early childhood teaching.

FINDON TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Findon Technical College, the first of 5 purpose-built facilities being constructed across South Australia, will set the standard for vocational programs in senior secondary education. Co-located and run in conjunction with Findon High School, students at the technical college can get a head start on a career in early childhood.

The technical college supports students in years 10 to 12 to complete their SACE while undertaking VET study in specialist facilities. The co-designed industry training program and innovative project-based learning, delivered in partnership with employers and guarantees students their first job after completion.



3. Retention through valuing and sustaining the early childhood workforce

Our aim: to promote positive workplaces that provide conditions that support effective teaching, ongoing learning, strong leadership and career pathways.

3.1 Career support

Why we are taking action

There are often high expectations from service providers for newly graduated early childhood teachers.²⁵ Within some early childhood education services, there is a lack of ongoing career support to help early childhood teachers learn, develop, and grow. Moreover, newly graduated early childhood teachers may be the only degree-qualified person within their service.

We heard that there needs to be more coaching and mentoring provided throughout the first 5 years of an early childhood teacher's career.

Mentoring can help early childhood teachers to learn, develop and grow by strengthening confidence,²⁶ deepening their sense of belonging in the community, fostering identity in the field, enhancing the skill set of mentees, offering emotional support and wellbeing, and leading to better outcomes for the children.^{27 28}

Mentoring benefits both mentees and mentors. Support from a mentor can increase the likelihood that individuals stay in the profession and develop their professional identity.²⁹ Mentoring also provides an important career development opportunity for experienced teachers and educators to expand their coaching and mentoring capabilities.

To ensure we have enough mentors and coaches, we need to leverage the expertise of experienced teachers and ensure they receive professional learning in evidence-informed coaching and mentoring methodology.

What we will do

Career support will be provided in the first 5 years of a teacher's career, including those upskilling or re-entering the sector through:

- **mentor support** to help provisionally registered teachers move to full teacher registration with the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia
- the Provisionally Registered Teacher Funding Program, offering **grants to early education and care services** supporting provisionally registered teachers to move to full registration
- **coaching** for early childhood teachers and educators re-entering the workforce
- **professional learning in coaching and mentoring** for experienced teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills to support early career teachers.

Complementary initiatives

- The early career teacher development program supports graduate teachers in the Department for Education through a 2-year program, including a site-based mentor supporting transition from graduate to proficient career stage. (Government of South Australia)

Future Leaders Program

Each year, the Future Leaders Program identifies the leadership potential of up to 100 emerging and experienced principals and emerging preschool directors who are ready to move into site and system leadership roles within 1 to 3 years. Future Leaders participants engage in a variety of activities which, when combined, create an opportunity to provide them with individualised feedback about their leadership and targeted development guidance to fast-track their preparation to meet the department's leadership requirements.

Pip Fisher participated in Future Leaders in 2018. She says that the program changed her perspective on leadership and she was able to approach the role with less judgement and more courage to take risks. "It increased my confidence," she reflects. Upon completing the program, Pip was successful in winning 3 Preschool Director roles over 5 years, saying "I could choose where I wanted to work." Pip has recently moved into an Early Childhood Leader role and is now supporting early childhood educators and coordinators on the Anangu Lands.

3.2 Innovation and local action fund

Why we are taking action

Workforce diversity is important to raise quality outcomes for all children. Targeted approaches are needed to address barriers to building a diverse workforce and addressing recruitment and retention challenges in rural and regional areas and hard-to-staff locations.

The problems faced in regional and remote communities both across the world and specifically in Australia, are complex and vary from location to location.^{30 31 32}

We heard that local communities play a crucial role in effectively attracting and retaining early childhood professionals. A tailored approach to the unique needs of each community when building a workforce strategy is needed.^{33 34}

New approaches are needed to develop a more diverse workforce, including consideration of age, gender, culture and abilities of educators and teachers. Understanding and leveraging the unique characteristics and needs of communities can lead to more successful and sustainable workforce strategies.

What we will do

From early 2026, the innovation and local action fund will provide grants in priority areas to implement strategies that will work best for them in promoting staff attraction, retention and wellbeing.

Funded initiatives will need to demonstrate how they are tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each community, and consider factors such as geographic isolation, limited resources, higher turnover rates, community engagement and diversity in the workforce.

We will work with the sector to design the guidelines to ensure it is responsive to local and emerging needs.

Complementary initiatives

- A **practicum exchange network** will be established in late 2024 to enable early childhood educators studying a certificate III, diploma or initial teacher education (ITE) course to search for and arrange practicum exchange opportunities to create a diversity of experiences, networking and support opportunities to develop skill and knowledge transfer. Participants undertaking an exchange in regional or remote areas can apply for a living and travel allowance. (Australian Government)

3.3 Supporting teacher and educator practice

Why we are taking action	What we will do
<p>Lack of access to professional development can contribute significantly to the decline in quality of children's learning programs and effectiveness of interactions between educators and children. Additionally, access to paid professional development and other supports, such as professional networks, are strongly related to educator retention.</p> <p>We heard that to enhance early childhood education and keep children at the centre, we need to support teachers and educators with effective strategies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid professional development to boost the quality of children's learning outcomes, and access to ongoing training and professional networks • support, resources, and guidance, helping teachers and educators implement engaging and appropriate educational programs • a focus on supporting small providers, as they often feel isolated. <p>By focusing on these areas, we can create a supportive, quality early childhood education sector centred on children's needs.</p> <p>Leadership is second only to teaching as an influence on children's learning outcomes.³⁵ Effective leaders provide teachers and educators with support, resources, professional learning and guidance to develop and implement engaging and developmentally appropriate educational programs.</p> <p>We heard that early childhood teachers and educational leaders working for small providers (operating 1 or 2 services) can feel professionally isolated. A systemic pedagogical support program will underpin the effective use of curriculum resources and tools developed to support the roll-out of 3-year-old preschool.</p>	<p>From early 2025, we will support teacher and educator practice, and quality uplift of services. We will design and implement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a biennial early childhood conference to provide a high-profile opportunity for professional learning and help build the profile of the sector • a professional learning calendar to support high level, culturally responsive teaching and learning practice and build knowledge, confidence and capacity in supporting children with diverse needs, including those who have experienced trauma or are neuro-divergent • a publicly available Early Years Learning Framework with curriculum resources and tools to support quality teaching and learning and enhance teacher and educator knowledge of child development • an Early Childhood Leaders Network that will create opportunities for early childhood teachers and leaders to share perspectives and critically reflect on their practice • early childhood leadership forums to support early childhood leaders to prepare for 3-year-old preschool, providing a platform to build professional relationships share change management advice, enhance their leadership skills, and build a shared vision of high-quality preschool • an aspiring and experienced early childhood leadership program to emphasise the importance of leadership in delivering quality services, enhancing leaders' understanding of their roles and responsibilities and building capacity for fostering a positive organisational culture.

Complementary initiatives

- Professional development subsidies are available to support early childhood educators, teachers and centre managers to build capacity and skills in early childhood workforce and allow services to maintain adult-to-child ratios while staff complete training. (Australian Government)
- Services employing early childhood teachers to deliver 3-year-old preschool as it rolls out from 2026 will receive additional funding to support better working conditions. This means that early childhood teachers will receive additional non-contact time per week, as well as additional professional development time. (Government of South Australia)
- Consistent with recommendation 30 of the Royal Commission, the Office for Early Childhood Development (OECD) and the Education Standards Board SA will work together to help services, rated as working towards National Quality Standard (NQS), to raise their quality. The OECD is currently developing a targeted quality support program, designed to support services rated as working towards, to meet and exceed the NQS. (Government of South Australia)





4. Growing and supporting the Aboriginal early childhood workforce

Our aim: to increase the number of Aboriginal peoples working in the early childhood sector.

4.1 Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy

Why we are taking action

Aboriginal early childhood teachers, educators and leaders play a critical role in the workforce and in how early childhood education is delivered to Aboriginal children and how those children, families and communities connect with early childhood services.

We heard that an essential element of attracting and retaining an Aboriginal early childhood workforce is the need to create targeted strategies to build wellbeing and cultural safety in services. Moreover, that we need to provide local learning and employment opportunities, for Aboriginal peoples to live, learn and work on Country and within their communities.

Connection is essential for Aboriginal candidates, and Aboriginal peoples' ways of teaching and engaging have shown an enriched environment for healthy brain development throughout life.^{36 37} These connections could strengthen the sense of community in the early childhood sector specifically, and the benefits of Aboriginal peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing, extend to all children.

Developing a specific Aboriginal early childhood workforce strategy (AECWS), co-designed with Aboriginal communities, aligns with national policy priorities, including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

A well-funded, co-designed and community-led AECWS creates a genuine opportunity to address barriers, build and strengthen pathways for Aboriginal peoples into and within the early childhood workforce.

What we will do

In late 2024, we will co-design an Aboriginal early childhood workforce strategy that will be community-led and implemented. A dedicated portion of the overall workforce fund has been set aside for this.

- This work will have strong links with the co-design of Aboriginal 3-year-old preschool. Through the co-design process **we will walk alongside Aboriginal community members and sector experts** to develop initiatives that **support the attraction, retention and growth of Aboriginal peoples working in early childhood**.
- We will look to develop partnerships with **Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOS)** to build and strengthen **learning and career pathways** for Aboriginal peoples **in early childhood**.
- We will also look to build capacity within the early childhood sector to ensure that **cultural safety and responsiveness** is a responsibility shared across all staff in a service.

This foundational work will set the direction for further reforms that are tailored to the needs of Aboriginal communities.

Other initiatives, in addition to the development of the Aboriginal early childhood workforce strategy, are underway to support the growing Aboriginal early childhood workforce.

A portion of the **QualifySA Early Childhood financial support packages** has been allocated specifically for Aboriginal candidates seeking to study an early childhood qualification.

4.1 Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy (continued)

Complementary initiatives

- **Amy Levai Aboriginal Teaching Scholarships** provide financial support for Aboriginal senior secondary school students embarking on an initial teacher education program (including early childhood). They can apply for a \$5,000 scholarship to use at their discretion to support their studies. Those already enrolled in an initial teacher education program can apply for a \$20,000 scholarship to support their studies. (Government of South Australia)
- Under the **National Skills Agreement** \$8.71m of Australian Government funding, matched by the Government of South Australia, will implement initiatives focused on the 4 priority reform areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. These will increase self-determination and shared decision making, leading to policies and programs that better reflect the needs of Aboriginal peoples. Skills SA is working with Aboriginal communities and peak bodies to support training pathways for Aboriginal learners seeking to build, deepen or broaden their skills. This includes:
 - > developing culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal learners
 - > strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled RTO sector
 - > building capability of RTOs and employers to assist Aboriginal learners, apprentices and trainees to achieve successful outcomes.





5. Developing a multi-disciplinary workforce

Our aim: to support the growth of the allied health professional and community services workforce in early childhood.

5.1 A multi-disciplinary approach in early childhood

Why we are taking action

Allied health and community services professionals play a vital role in improving child outcomes^{38 39 40 41} promoting early intervention and support, fostering inclusive practice, building professional collaboration and capacity, and engaging parents and families.

We heard that to build a universal early childhood development system that supports healthy child development, we must also invest in South Australian allied health, social and community services professionals.

Stronger connections between these related workforces and early childhood education will enable integrated support to be delivered across South Australia. This will improve the ability to tailor supports to the needs of individual children and families and lift learning and development outcomes for at-risk children, including those with additional support needs.

What we will do

We will work with other government agencies and the sector to develop a **multi-disciplinary workforce strategy for early childhood**. This will identify actions to support stronger connections between the allied health and community services workforces and early childhood services and set the direction for further reforms.

A high degree of collaboration is needed to identify initiatives that are mutually beneficial across each sector, grow the capabilities and overall size of the workforce, and build the capability and confidence of teachers and educators in working with children and families with additional needs.

The first year of this work will develop a multi-disciplinary workforce strategy for early childhood to set the direction for concrete reforms over the later years. The work will focus on identifying reforms that are mutually beneficial and deliver benefit to each sector, growing the capabilities and overall size of the workforce.

Planning and policy development is expected to occur over 2024-25, with reform initiatives implemented from the second half of 2025.

Complementary initiatives

- The **National Allied Health Workforce Strategy** is currently being developed to help address national allied health workforce issues and consider how these may vary across sectors where allied health professionals work, to better align the supply of allied health professionals with existing and predicted need. The Strategy is due for completion in early 2025. (Australian Government)
- The Department for Education and South Australian universities have agreed to work together to strengthen allied health placement opportunities in schools. (Government of South Australia)





6. Ensuring robust evidence and evaluation

Our aim: to contribute to planning for the roll out of 3-year-old preschool and design and implement actions based on evidence.

6.1 Evidence base on diversity

Why we are taking action

Through our engagement with stakeholders, we heard that we must improve diversity in the sector to promote representation, inclusivity and cultural competence. We heard that fostering diversity within the workforce will mean it is better equipped to meet the needs of all children and families across the community, including those with complex needs.

Data relating to the diversity of the early childhood sector in Australia is still being developed.^{42 43} Diversity is a recognised strength that can support children and families from diverse groups and staff retention. However, there is limited evidence on what works to increase diversity in the workforce.

What we will do

We will work with key stakeholders in the sector to understand what works in increasing diversity of the workforce. We will explore how different abilities and backgrounds add value to the sector.

This includes undertaking a sector planning survey to help detailed planning for services across local communities.

Our deeper knowledge will support various initiatives in this strategy by helping us identify how best to attract and support people from a diverse cross-section of the community. This work will start from early 2025.

Complementary initiatives

- **Jobs and Skills Australia** is undertaking a capacity study on the workforce needs of Australia's early childhood education and care sector in partnership with HumanAbility, the Jobs and Skills Council with responsibility for the Children's Education and Care, Aged and Disability, Health, Human Services and Sport and Recreation industries. The study will provide critical evidence and insights to support current and future workforce planning and help inform policy around workforce supply and demand in the sector, including opportunities for, and barriers to, full participation in the workforce by priority cohorts. (Australian Government)
- The **South Australian Skills Commission** (Commission) has a range of functions under the South Australian Skills Act 2008, including advising the Minister for Education, Skills and Training on strategies and priorities for workforce development. The Early Educators, Health, Human Services, Sport and Recreation Industry Skills Council (ISC) has been established as one of ten ISCs to advise the Commission on a range of issues and projects relating to skills and workforce development, including workforce diversity within its sectors. The ISC also works closely with HumanAbility on workforce projects and qualification development and review in the care and support sectors.

6.2 Strategy evaluation

Why we are taking action

Regular monitoring and evaluation promote accountability, providing stakeholders with clear evidence of progress and areas needing attention. This transparency builds trust and confidence in our efforts.

By assessing the impact of our initiatives, we can determine which strategies are most effective in achieving our goals, allowing us to focus resources on efforts that have the greatest impact to build the early childhood workforce.

As we gather data and insights, we can adapt our approach in real time, fine-tuning initiatives based on what is most effective. This dynamic response helps in addressing emerging challenges and leveraging new opportunities. Evaluation will inform better decision-making on where to allocate resources, ensuring that investments are made in the most impactful areas.

What we will do

- We will monitor, evaluate, and refine the strategy throughout the life of the reforms.
- We will also conduct smaller and more targeted evaluation of specific initiatives, particularly where new approaches are being trialled.
- Emerging evidence from other jurisdictions and sectors, and complementary initiatives will also be regularly reviewed and considered.
- As the reform progresses, and the sector responds to the various initiatives in place, we will adjust our response based on what is working.



Next steps

We will continue to collaborate with the early childhood sector, higher education providers, unions, local government, and other stakeholders to design the actions in this strategy as we work towards the collective goal of valuing, growing and sustaining our early childhood workforce in South Australia.

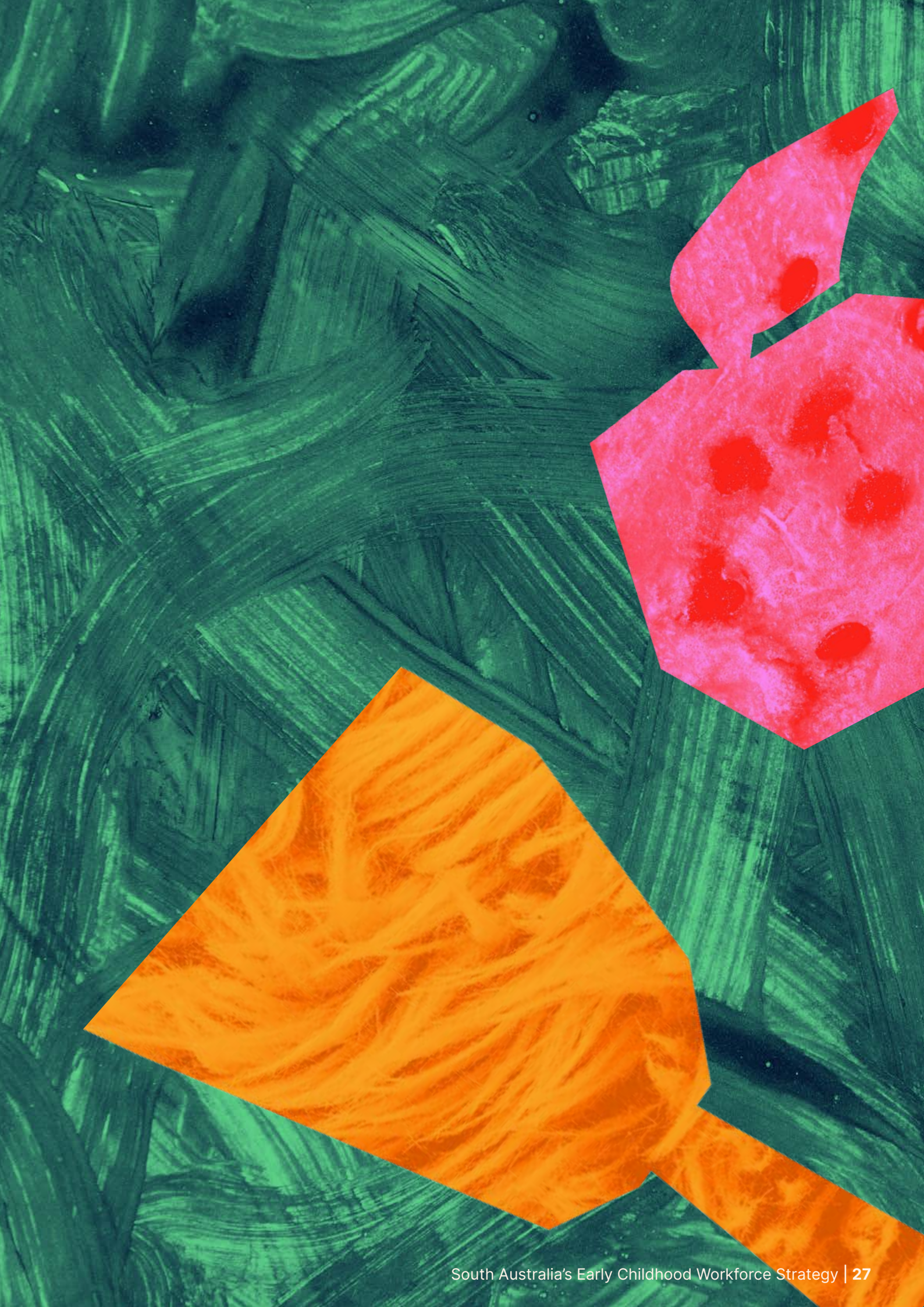
Our first priorities are to:

- launch the workforce attraction campaign
- launch the QualifySA Early Childhood Financial Support Program
- co-design an Aboriginal early childhood workforce strategy with Aboriginal stakeholders
- undertake detailed design on a range of the other initiatives described in this document.

These actions will involve close partnership with early childhood stakeholders – an essential ingredient for success.

More information about the strategy's actions can be found at <https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au>





References

1. Workforce Literature Review: Early Childhood Education Directorate - Early Childhood Education Workforce issues in Australian and international contexts. (2018). In <https://education.nsw.gov.au/>. NSW Government.
2. Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L. J. E. (2018). The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.
3. Austin, L. J. E., Whitebook, M., & Dombro, A. L. (2018). Attracting and Retaining Early Childhood Educators: A Review of the Research. RAND Corporation
4. Whitebook, M., & Sakai, L. (2020). Investing in the Early Childhood Education Workforce: A Workforce-First Approach. National Institute for Early Education Research
5. Whitebook, M., & Phillips, D. (2016). Early Childhood Education Workforce: A Systematic Review of Attraction, Retention, and Professional Development. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 37(2), 118-146.
6. Early Childhood Australia (Tas) and the Tasmanian Department of Education. (2017). The early years & school age care sectors workforce plan for Tasmania 2017-2020. <https://employment.eyesac.com.au/>
7. NSW Department of Education. (2018). Early childhood education workforce strategy 2018-2022.
8. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2019). Early childhood scholarships and incentives program guidelines. f
9. Queensland Department of Education and Training. (2020). Early childhood education and care: Workforce action plan 2016-2019.
10. Lennon, M. L. (2015). Recruitment and retention strategies in rural nursing: A scoping review, *Online Journal of Rural Nursing and Health Care* 15(1), 76-92.
11. Morrissey, T. W., Vinopal, K., Lekies, K. S., & Nesman, T. M. (2015). Challenges and opportunities for early childhood education and care workforce development in rural communities, *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 30(6), 1-17.
12. Johnson, R. C. (2019). Strategies for recruiting early childhood educators to rural areas: Perspectives from stakeholders in one state, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(1), 73-83.
13. Smith, M. L., & Hayslip, W. (2019). Attracting and retaining teachers in rural schools: State strategies and national initiatives, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27(60), 1-29.
14. Desjardins, S. L., & Dunder, H. (1999). The impact of financial aid on persistence: A different story for low-income students? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 70(6), 706-725.
15. Stinebrickner, R., & Stinebrickner, T. R. (2003). Working during school and academic performance. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 21(2), 473-491.
16. Dynarski, S. (2000). Hope for Whom? Financial Aid for the Middle Class and Its Impact on College Attendance. *National Tax Journal*, 53(3), 629-662.
17. Taylor, M. (2018). Understanding stories of professional formation during early childhood education and care practice placements. *Irish Educational Studies*, 37(2), 227-241.
18. Trede, F., & McEwen, C. (2015). Early workplace learning experiences: what are the pedagogical possibilities beyond retention and employability?. *Higher Education*, 69, 19-32.
19. Desjardins, S. L., & Dunder, H. (1999). The impact of financial aid on persistence: A different story for low-income students? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 70(6), 706-725.
20. Skills SA. (2023). National VET Completions Report.
21. Melhuish, E., Ereky-Stevens, K., Petrogiannis, K., Ariescu, A., Penderi, E., Rentzou, K., & Slot, P. (2015). A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development. CARE project.
22. Wibrow, B. (2022). VET and higher education pathways — do outcomes differ for the same occupation, NCVER, Adelaide

23. Barber, Tracy & Netherton, Clare & Bettles, Alicia & Moors-Mailei, Amanda. (2015). Navigating VET to university: Students' perceptions of their transition to university study. *Student Success*.
24. Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L. J. (2016). Degrees in context: Asking the right questions about preparing skilled and effective teachers of young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 44(6), 523-532.
25. Education Services Australia (2021). "Shaping Our Future" A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high quality children's education and care workforce 2022-2031.
26. Harris, A., Jones, M., & Adams, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Mentoring programs in schools: Supporting educators' professional growth and development*. Routledge.
27. Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. (2010). Investigating the impact of leadership development on student learning outcomes. *Educational Leadership Review*, 11(2), 65-78.
28. Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. Wallace Foundation.
29. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/practical-guides/mentoring>
30. Peterson, S. S., McIntyre, L., & Heppner, D. (2018). Northern rural and indigenous teachers' experiences and perceptions of rural teaching and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 7(3), 189-205.
31. Axford, N., Phillips, C., & Gleeson, D. (2018). The experience of remote area nurses working in aged care: A mixed-methods study. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 26(3), 165-171.
32. Sims, M., Rigney, L. I., Angel, M. E., & Lowe, K. (2016). Working with communities: A reflection on factors that influence remote Indigenous early childhood educators' workforce participation. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 41(2), 4-12.
33. Doherty, A., West, S., Jones, C., & Lonsdale, T. (2018). Building workforce capacity in early childhood education and care services in remote Australia: Staff perceptions of the implementation of a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) program. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 43(3), 50-60.
34. Ball, J., Perry, B., & Edwards, D. (2019). Remote early childhood education in Australia: Building sustainable practice. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 44(3), 239-250.
35. Harris, A., Jones, M., & Adams, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Mentoring programs in schools: Supporting educators' professional growth and development*. Routledge.
36. Murrup-Stewart, C., Whyman, T., Jobson, L., & Adams, K. (2021). "Connection to culture is like a massive lifeline": Yarning with Aboriginal young people about culture and social and emotional wellbeing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(10), 1833-1846.
37. Zubrick, S., & Silburn, S. (2006). Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health survey: improving the Educational experiences of Aboriginal children and Young people.
38. Spiker, D., Hebbeler, K., & Mallik, S. (2005). Inclusive early childhood education and care and its impact on children with special needs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20(2), 108-126.
39. Rous, B., & Hallam, R. (2012). Collaboration between educators and community support workers in implementing inclusive practices for children with disabilities. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 98-105.
40. Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Ou, S. R., Arteaga, I. A., & White, B. A. (2011). Effects of a comprehensive early childhood intervention on adult health and well-being. *Child Development*, 82(1), 73-93.
41. Mackintosh, A., Desha, L., & Gow, E. (2013). The impact of training and support from allied health professionals on educator confidence and competence in supporting children with diverse needs. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 38(4), 65-72.
42. Jackson, J. L. (2018). *Towards inclusive workforce development: socio-economic diversity in the Australian early childhood workforce and its implications for practice* (Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University).
43. Gide, S., Wong, S., Press, F., & Davis, B. (2022). Cultural diversity in the Australian early childhood education workforce: What do we know, what don't we know and why is it important?. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 47(1), 48-61.



**Government of
South Australia**

earlychildhood.sa.gov.au