

## IEU POLICY - Early Childhood Education and Care

### Preamble

Early childhood education and care occurs within a range of settings including preschools, kindergartens and early childhood education units which may or may not be integrated with primary schools; childcare settings including long day care and early intervention programmes for children with special needs and out of school hours care (OSHC).

Quality early childhood education and care is essential because of the positive impacts on the health and well being of the children who access these services. Extensive research exists which demonstrates that cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development are enhanced where children access quality early childhood education and care.

Quality early childhood education and care can also help with integration and language skills and reduce disadvantage on entry into the school system. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit the most from high quality early childhood education programmes.

Affordable early childhood education and care is a critical issue for many families and it serves a vital function for ensuring equity and broader objectives, including workforce participation. Social changes in Australia over recent decades have impacted on families resulting in more and more families relying on early childhood services to support their work force participation and work/life balance.

Thus along with workplace flexibility, early childhood education and care is an essential mechanism to erode obstacles to equality of opportunity by assisting parents to reconcile the competing demands of income earning and family responsibilities.

Importantly, cost should not be a barrier to parents being able to choose the form of early childhood education and care which best suits their circumstances.

The value of the provision of early childhood education and care is wide ranging and within this context Federal and State/Territory Governments have a shared responsibility for

ensuring the delivery of quality and accessible early childhood education and care to all Australian children.

Significant to achieving this, is the collective strength of IEU early childhood education and care members.

### Policy Principles

IEU believes it is a universal right of all children to have access to quality early childhood education and care in the years before school.

Quality early childhood education and care is delivered through:

- Qualified early childhood education teachers supported by other early childhood education professionals (teacher assistants, childcare employees and support staff)<sup>1</sup>;
- Quality Early Childhood Education Programmes; and
- Quality Learning Environments.

Quality early childhood education and care takes account of:

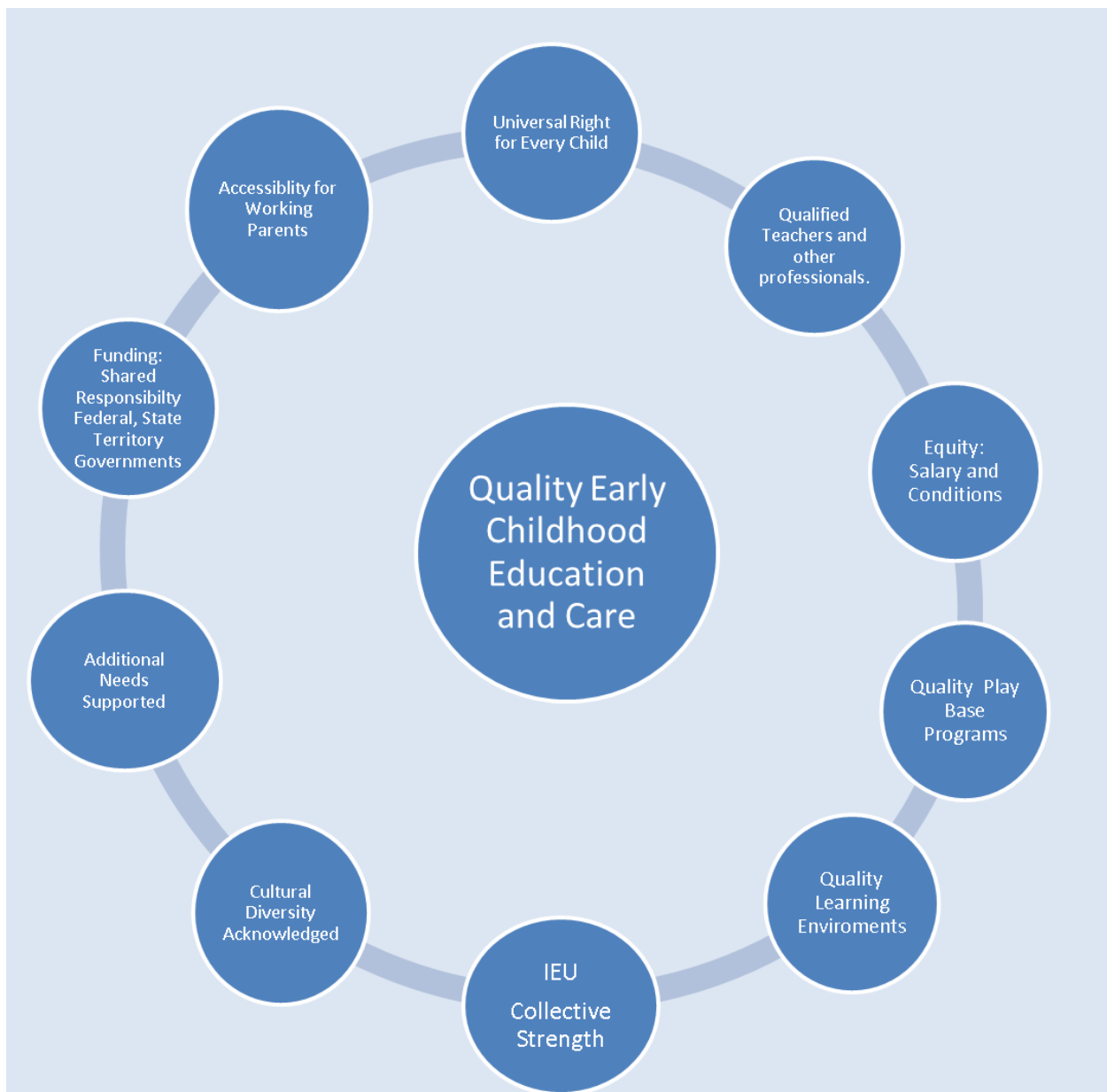
- Cultural Diversity;
- Special Needs; and
- Rural and Remote Needs.

Quality early childhood education and care is only able to be delivered where there is a guarantee for:

- Certainty of Government funding ; and
- Accessibility of services.
- Affordable to parents

---

<sup>1</sup> It is noted that under the National Quality Framework, all early childhood education staff are termed “educators” The IEU seeks to differentiate this group into university qualified early childhood teachers and those who assist in the delivery of a early childhood education programme such as childcare workers and teacher assistants and support staff (early childhood education professional staff)



### 1 Qualified Early Childhood Education and Care Professionals

The attraction and retention of qualified, experienced early childhood education professionals is fundamental to the delivery of quality educational outcomes and requires that early childhood professionals receive salaries and conditions appropriate to their qualifications and responsibilities and comparable to those working in government and non-government schools.

In particular, university qualified teachers must receive salaries and conditions that are comparable to those of teachers in school settings if such qualified staff are to be attracted to and retained by the sector. The IEU rejects the use of Modern Award salary rates and conditions as benchmarks for teachers and other early childhood education professionals. Such rates and conditions are

significantly less than those salaries and conditions payable in other educational settings.

The IEU recognises the essential role of other early childhood education professionals in their support of the early childhood teacher and the delivery of the programme. It is equally important that such staff are able to access appropriate classification structures and employment conditions which recognise the skills, knowledge and qualifications required by the role.

The IEU believes that all early childhood education professionals should have access to relevant, affordable and accessible professional development on an ongoing basis.

The IEU recognises the very intensive work demands placed on early childhood education teachers and other early childhood education professionals. It is unacceptable for early childhood education professionals to be placed in a situation where work demands must be fulfilled outside paid hours of engagement.

The work life balance needs of those working in the early childhood education and care must have equal priority in any discussion regarding meeting the needs of the parents.

IEU supports industrial provisions for early childhood education professionals which appropriately provide sufficient time dedicated to teaching and/or implementing an educational programme as well as sufficient time to undertake other duties. In particular, non-contact time and administration time must be provided to staff so that they are able to undertake and complete those tasks required in relation to planning and implementing an educational programme as well as implementing regulatory requirements.

## **2 Quality Programmes Delivered Through Play Based Curriculum**

IEU supports the delivery of quality early childhood education and care programmes that are play based and child focused, thus directed primarily to the education and development of the child.

IEU recognises that early childhood qualified teachers possess the necessary high order pedagogical knowledge and skills necessary to design a play based programme which caters for the individual child's needs, interests and abilities, thus providing children with the opportunity to learn about the world they live in through interactions with their environment and their relationships with other people.

## **3 Quality Learning Environments**

The IEU acknowledges that children benefit from long term, stable education and care relationships and thus emphasises the importance of retention of qualified early childhood professionals in the provision of quality learning environments.

IEU acknowledges that one of the foundations of successful outcomes for children are reflected in child/staff ratios.

The OECD research has identified that quality early childhood education and care is supported by staff/child ratios of at least:

- 1 adult to 3 children for infants;
- 1 adult to 4 children for one- two year olds; and
- 1 adult to 8 children for three to five year olds.

The IEU believes that commitment to quality early childhood education and care demands the implementation of the OECD ratios and calls upon Federal and State/ Territory Governments to provide the funding needed to achieve such ratios.

Provision of a safe yet stimulating play environment is another important element for quality learning.

The IEU believes that Federal and State/Territory Governments have responsibility to ensure the continued capital investment in the not for profit sector to ensure quality infrastructure.

## **4 Reflection and Respect of Cultural Diversity**

The IEU believes that the cultural knowledge, language and values of Indigenous children and children from culturally diverse backgrounds must be reflected and acknowledged in early childhood education and care programmes.

The IEU believes that the delivery of affordable early childhood learning programmes delivered by a qualified teacher to Indigenous children living in remote communities is an essential element in assisting children to make transition to schooling for these communities.

## **5 Supporting Additional Needs**

Early detection and support is essential for children with additional needs in the early childhood years.

The IEU believes that children with additional needs must be provided with a properly resourced early childhood education programme which meets their needs. However, the expectation that early childhood education professionals can cater to all these needs without the additional funded support of other professionals is not only unreasonable but also negatively impacts on the learning potential of students.

Access to professional support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and counselling is vital to the success of students with additional needs.

The IEU believes that a significant and immediate increase in funding is required to provide adequate and appropriate supports and resources for children with additional needs including access to specialised multidiscipline services and professional support staff.

## **6 Supporting Rural and Remote Areas**

The IEU believes it is vital to provide services in rural and remote communities with additional support. Each community has its own specific needs and thus IEU believes that the development of early childhood education services must recognise the specific needs of the community.

It is important that Federal and State/Territory Governments develop an understanding of the varying capacities of geographically remote communities to develop and sustain early childhood services and provide funding and support accordingly so that quality services are accessible.

The IEU believes that to ensure quality early childhood education services in remote, rural and Indigenous areas, there must be involvement of the community. This will ensure that services meet the particular needs of the communities and guarantee the viability of services in the longer term.

Staff living in Indigenous communities and in regional and remote areas experience disadvantage due to the high costs associated with living in the area.

The IEU believes that the Federal Government and employers must consider a number of incentives to ensure that appropriately qualified early childhood professionals are prepared for work in remote and rural areas.

Such things as: payment of full HECS fees for teachers willing to work in hard to staff locations for a period; industrial incentives, such as greater recognition for service, relocation allowance as well as appropriate accommodation, should be provided.

## **7 Certainty and Accessibility**

Access to high quality, affordable early childhood education and care is central to enabling workforce participation of parents whilst ensuring the best outcomes for children. However, it is not possible for parents alone to provide sufficient funding to achieve appropriate wages and conditions which are necessary for the delivery of quality education, without government funded support.

Public investment into early childhood education and care still continues to fall short of the levels needed to ensure affordable and high quality education and care. Funding arrangements remain inefficient and are not adequately targeted at delivering resources to early childhood education professionals or children.

Often children with additional needs, those from indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse and low income families do not have the same

access to early childhood education and care as the general population (Biddle 2007) and additional funding is needed to reduce barriers to participation for these children.

The IEU believes that Federal and State/Territory governments have a shared responsibility to guarantee the certainty of delivery of high quality, affordable early childhood education and care to all children across Australia.

Government funding must recognise the geographic, socio-economic and cultural factors that may inhibit families' access to services; in particular, rural and remote communities, Indigenous communities, families for whom English is a second language and families where children or parents have a disability.

The IEU believes that Federal Government and State/Territory governments must make a commitment to significantly increase the amount of funding not only to cover the early childhood education and care providers costs in implementing various national reforms but also to guarantee that equitable salaries and conditions for education professionals.

The IEU believes that Federal and State/Territory governments must fund the cost of employing appropriately qualified staff and that their salaries must be comparable with those employed in the school sector. Furthermore, funding should be sufficient to ensure access to ongoing professional development and the provision of resources to care for and educate children. This is necessary to ensure certainty and equity of access to early childhood education and care for all Australian children.

The IEU supports direct service funding and further calls for:

- Such government funding to be directly linked to salaries with the intention of achieving parity of salaries with teachers in schools;
- A prescribed allocation of government funding to be set aside for ongoing professional development of early childhood professionals; and
- Increased accountability by services to demonstrate how the subsidy has been used; in particular, the link between subsidy and staff wages and professional development should be clearly shown.