

**29 April 2023**

**Feedback on the National Early years Strategy.**

THE Early Childhood Teacher Education Council (ECTEC) NSW/ACT is a network of course coordinators from universities and higher education providers across NSW and the ACT, responsible for the initial teacher education programs for early childhood teachers. ECTEC welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the National Early Years Strategy Discussion paper.

**Membership:**

Convenor: [REDACTED], Southern Cross University;

E: [REDACTED]

**Members:**

- [REDACTED], Avondale University
- [REDACTED], Charles Sturt University
- [REDACTED], Excelsia College
- [REDACTED] Macquarie University
- [REDACTED], Macquarie University
- [REDACTED], Southern Cross University
- [REDACTED], TAFE NSW
- [REDACTED], University of Newcastle
- [REDACTED], University of New England
- [REDACTED], University of New England
- [REDACTED] University of Notre Dame
- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] University of Sydney
- [REDACTED], University of Wollongong
- [REDACTED], University of Wollongong
- [REDACTED], Western Sydney University
- [REDACTED], Western Sydney University.

ECTEC supports the development of a National Early Years Strategy to priorities the wellbeing, education and development of Australia’s children by creating an integrated approach to the early years (p.2).

ECTEC’S feedback:

Questions	Responses
1. Do you have any comments on the proposed structure of the Strategy?	Can the principles and evidence feed into the Vision. In this way the Evidence (e.g. research base) informs the principles and informs the vision and each component of the strategy.
2. What vision should our nation have for Australia’s youngest children?	To provide environments for all children so that they all can reach their full potential. This requires family support to care and educate their children; children’s health, wellbeing and learning needs are met; there is equity of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. Access to quality education is a right for all and is accessible regardless of income or location. Children have access to ECEC that is responsive to their learning style, development needs and personal dispositions. Early childhood teachers and educators must be highly qualified and competent. The ECEC workforce needs to be paid a respectable salary in line with other teachers and educators, and with work conditions that match. Children and families are supported in ways that demonstrate respect and honouring of diversity and inclusion, with First Nations children and families prioritised and respected as the first peoples of this country. First Nations children and families have access to an education and care system that is culturally responsive, provides education in first languages where relevant and supports in place responsive solutions to current barriers to quality education and care. First Nations children and families are empowered to guide all decision making that affects education and care. First nations’ perspectives should be embedded throughout the Strategy.
3. What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?	All children reach their full potential in all aspects of development including physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language domains, with optimum health status through access to the best health care and education regardless of income or geographical location.

	<p>First Nations children are able to have full access to their culture and learn in first languages and practice Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing</p> <p>Children with disabilities or other forms of disadvantage are able to reach their full potential through having access to the best health care and health resources</p> <p>All children are able to have their cultures and diversity celebrated and respected, including from LGBTQIA+ families.</p>
4. What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why?	<p>We agree with those listed at Attachment A</p> <p>We would add- A Voice to parliament so that empowerment is given to First Nations peoples in decisions that affect them; Anti-discrimination act; UN convention on the rights of the child; Policy on removing the Activity test.</p>
5. What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children—particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged circumstances?	<p>Improve access to wrap-around health and well-being services and quality ECEC services. Remove cost barriers and activity test and hours caps on access to wrap around health and wellbeing services and ECEC. Address workforce issues and shortages for ECEC workforce and allied health professionals.</p>
6. What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?	<p>Communication between Ministers in related portfolios</p> <p>Communication between State and Federal policymakers;</p> <p>Increased consistency in policy in ECEC services across the country with a less fragmented, cumbersome system;</p> <p>Development of policies in consultation with all relevant stakeholders with a truly collaborative cross-sector approach;</p> <p>Provision of ongoing committed funding to services and programs not short project-based contingent funding that runs out and disappears leaving communities vulnerable again.</p>
7. What principles should be included in the Strategy?	<p>Prioritise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child and family voices in decision making</li> <li>• Priorities of equity, quality, accessibility and affordability in all decision making</li> <li>• Meeting the UN convention on the rights of the child in decision making</li> <li>• Inclusion and visibility of a diversity of voices</li> <li>• Strength-based approaches that acknowledge diverse ways of knowing, doing and being.</li> </ul>

<p>8. Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the Strategy?</p>	<p>The bottom line is that the Strategy can only happen if the ECEC workforce is well qualified, and there are adequate EC teachers, educators, and therapists, who are well paid with good work conditions.</p> <p>Embed First Nations concepts on knowing, being and doing and approaches to learning. This consultation should take place with place with SNAICC and other relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.</p> <p>Consider other frameworks and interventions regarding children’s education that should also be considered where appropriate.</p>
<p>General comments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency with terminology – i.e. this document refers to ECEC services, yet there have been recent discussions around this term being reframed as ECE services. As a guiding document, the terminology that is used here will be critical in guiding the appropriate terminology across the sector. Another example on p. 6, there is a reference to the first five years. While we know this is of crucial importance, there is more of a current emphasis and significance on the use of the first 2000 days instead of 5 years. The term ‘0-5’ is used, but current professional language needs to be embedded – so ‘birth – 5’ should be used instead.</li> <li>In some sections there is a focus on 0-5 years, and in other sections it refers to 0-2 years (p. 9). While we recognise that the first 1000 days is highly significant and may need to be specified separately, this is not the way this reads. If there is a focus on the first 1000 days, then on the first 2000 days separately, this could be made clearer in the final document.</li> <li>• There is reference to ‘high quality early childhood programs’ – while this is essential, what components are reflected here to achieve high quality? The ECEC workforce needs to underpin this Strategy- currently there is a shortage of ECEC teachers and educators across Australia. Instead of just ‘high quality programs’, reference to the environment curriculum, and the educators/teachers is important.</li> <li>• The transition beyond birth to five settings into the next stage of schooling should be acknowledged. Although this is not the focus, providing some linking may prevent a silo approach to early years always being very separate from the formal school</li> </ul>

	<p>stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The consultation process is very welcome and appreciated that the voice of members of the community can contribute. However, it did not appear there was an opportunity for children’s voice to be captured. The inclusion of child-friendly, and child-centred processes would increase the agency of children in the development of this strategy.</li> <li>• While the overall structure of the strategy looks good, it is very generic, so it is hard to comment on at this time. It is important that the outcomes are measurable and the evidence clear as to how the vision will be achieved. Overall the introductory information within this discussion paper is relevant and appropriate. Public consultation is important- the sharing of the ownership has been stated, but it is not clear how this consultation will be continued. What is the plan from here in continuing the opportunity for representation across the early years?</li> <li>• Grammar error on page 16 first sentence should be evaluate not evaluated.</li> </ul>
--	---