



By your side

19 December 2025

Select Committee on the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

By email: earlyeducation@parliament.vic.gov.au

Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria

The ASU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee's Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in Victoria. Our members are dedicated to the support, education and safety of children. They are horrified by the allegations and convictions of predators. The matters the Inquiry is examining affect how educators experience the work of ECEC every day. They are matters that educators care deeply about. They are also matters that stand in the way of attracting and retaining a secure, highly skilled workforce.

Our members work in local government, primarily in long day care. Many are long-term employees. Continuity of care is critical to child safety. These conditions are built via secure working arrangements underpinned by adequate staffing ratios, professional development and organisations putting child safety first. Anecdotally we are advised that local government ECEC services have long waiting lists. This is testament to the quality of care provided by this workforce and the non-profit mode of service provision. However, rate capping has damaged service provision in local government providing a perverse incentive for outsourcing ECEC services.

Our responses focus on the following sections of the terms of reference:

- (a) the adequacy of current quality and safety standards across all ECEC service types;
- (b) the quality and oversight of educator training, professional development and qualifications, including a review of the effectiveness of Working with Children Checks and of Registered Training Organisations issuing early childhood certifications;
- (d) the impact of workforce conditions, such as pay, job security, workload and recognition on educator wellbeing, retention and service quality; and
- (e) the adequacy of staff-to-child ratio regulations, including ratios being averaged across entire services rather than applied per room.

Our recommendations draw on decades of experience operating in, and improving, work and employment conditions for members with a focus on high quality service provision.

Recommendations

1. Remove artificial rate capping arrangements that influence local government outsourcing ECEC services
2. Prioritise ongoing, secure workforces as a first step toward improving child safety
3. Work with the Commonwealth government to fully fund ECEC services to meet service demand for minimum staffing levels and staffing levels for additional needs children
4. Enforce child safe standards to improve governance and managerial behaviour in relation to mandatory reporting and raising concerns about child safety and wellbeing

Should you have any questions about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Karen Douglas, ASU Research and Policy Adviser, [REDACTED]. We would be pleased to have the opportunity to appear in hearings.

Sincerely,
Tash Wark
Branch Secretary

'the burnout is real'

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'I really pride myself on being an early childhood educator, and I put the emphasis on educator. I don't think it is recognised for what it actually is...it's just so complex. There are so many children with trauma, so many challenging behaviours, so many more diagnoses...it's just a lot more complex now'

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, work and gather, and pay respects to Elders past and present. We extend our respects to the Traditional Custodians of all the places where our members live and work across the country.
Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was and always will be.

1 The Australian Services Union

The ASU is one of Australia's largest unions, representing over 133,000 members across diverse industries nationally. The Victorian and Tasmanian Authorities and Services Branch represents workers in local government, social and community services, energy, water, information technology, transport, and public authorities.

We organise our workplaces to protect and expand our rights at work. Standing together, we are winning better wages, safer conditions, fairer treatment, and more secure work. Our union is growing because we are stronger together.

Together, we keep our society running and local communities growing. Everyday, we work hard to keep our communities clean, to support our most vulnerable, to power our homes, to deliver us clean water, and to maintain our roads. We deliver the services that our communities need. If we stop our communities stop.

2 The Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce is in crisis. This is a long-standing circumstance embedded in gender wage and work value discrimination. Extensive research lays out structural, cultural and economic disadvantages that accrue in 'feminised' workforces, and that these biases are based in discrimination.¹ Attracting and retaining qualified and skilled workers is a challenge. Low pay, work intensification, minimal professional development opportunities, and insufficient staffing create harsh work and employment arrangements.

Everyday, ECEC educators operate in physically and emotionally complex settings. Children can present with myriad behavioural, physical and social experiences. The education, care and support of children is achieved by educators, the overwhelmingly majority of whom are dedicated to providing safe and highly skilled work, applying their skills in under resourced environments. And this level of care is achieved via the dedication of workers to children and their profession. Failure to sufficiently fund local government ECEC settings unnecessarily burdens educators, and this is against a background of significant labour demand.²

Child safety is paramount. Continuity of care provided by skilled, valued and resourced educators is fundamental to child safety. The ECEC regulatory environment is established to prioritise quality education and care. Equally important are standardised terms and conditions of employment including training and development, career progression, decent wages and fair work practices, particularly those related to grievance and investigative processes. These features are absent in

¹ See Acker 1990, *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations*, Gender and Society, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jun., 1990), pp. 139-158; England, Budig and Folbre 2000, *Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (November 2002), pp. 455-473; Macdonald 2024, *Care Policies*, Journal of Australian Political Economy, No. 92, pp. 86-97.

² Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) (2024), Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study

workforces that are low paid and highly dependent on insecure work arrangements where speaking up against poor workplace practices is a known impediment to work and worker safety.³

The 2025 Victorian Government Rapid Child Safety Review (the Rapid Review) acknowledges the impact of these deficiencies whilst simultaneously creating conditions to suspend an educator's WWCC when unsubstantiated complaints have been made.⁴ Appropriate investigation procedures are fundamental to high quality service provision however, instituting a system that dispenses with natural justice and fails to heed the lessons learned from the 2024 Victorian Government's Reportable Conduct Scheme Review⁵, damages decent educators and creates impediments to attracting and retaining this in demand workforce.

Privatising childcare fails children, their families and the community. The devastation caused by prioritising profit and reputation over care and decency is well documented. The Rapid Review acknowledged this factor, *'The overwhelming conclusion we have reached is that while the current market-driven model for ECEC remains, the risks to quality and safety in early childhood education and care will persist'*.⁶ Nevertheless, the review recommended higher penalties for larger organisations *'to match the seriousness of breaches and also be significant for providers with bigger balance sheets'*.⁷ This response is inadequate. Removing profit motivation, developing secure work and improving conditions of work and employment in the ECEC sector are the solution.

Rate capping has created incentive for local government to contract out ECEC services. The ASU has consistently evidenced the damage done to communities from this ill-conceived policy approach (for a summary see the 2024 [ASU submission](#) to the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Local Government funding and services; Nahum (2021), [Putting a Cap on Community](#)). Our members advise they regularly manage enquiries from families seeking local government ECEC services. They do so as communities know high quality care is provided by local government services.

Several features create the conditions for child safety in ECEC settings. Skilled workers in ongoing employment better enables clear communication, proper oversight, professional development and continuity of care. In Victoria these conditions are not all present. When these features are addressed child safety will improve. This task is possible. It will happen if political actors are willing to take a stand.

³ [Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033](#), p.8.

⁴ [Rapid Child Safety Review 2025](#)

⁵ [Review of Victoria's Reportable Conduct Scheme Final Report](#)

⁶ [Rapid Child Safety Review 2025](#), p.3.

⁷ [Rapid Child Safety Review 2025](#), p.11.

3 ASU Early Childhood and Education Care Workers

3.1 Our survey

The ASU surveyed our local government ECEC members in November 2025 to give them a voice in the [Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Victoria](#). We also undertook qualitative interviews. We asked members to:

- Tell us about their work day;
- Advise how employers apply 'under the roofline' ratios;
- Reflect on their experiences working across ECEC settings; and
- Assess members' views on child safety policies and WWCC.

Participants overwhelmingly operate in long day care centres with 80% of respondents fitting this category, 7% worked in kindergarten settings, 5% in occasional care and others in managerial roles.

Members were candid in their responses.

Some re-lived traumatic experiences.

Member participation was driven by their commitment to see **better** reform for an unnecessarily broken system, a system that relies on the goodwill of decent educators to work hard for limited reward. A system that prioritises profit over education and support. Members took the time in their already overloaded work and family lives to outline how they experience their work, operating in difficult circumstances.

Member responses reflect what we know about the majority of ECEC workers; they are hardworking; deeply committed to children and their families; are hurt by horrendous crimes against children, and they are burnt out and damaged by a system that institutionalises short cuts over child safety.

Case Study - see Appendix 1

I sought guidance from my coordinator and have not really received any...This is pretty dark...I had a child who, I think she was about 10-11 months old, when I worked with her.

And she used to wake up fighting, and she was a baby, you know, like quite a young child. She used to wake up throwing herself back, heavily distressed, pushing you away, you know, and you're trying to comfort this child.

We thank our members for their commitment to providing safe spaces for children, their families and carers and for their unwavering support to build a better ECEC sector.

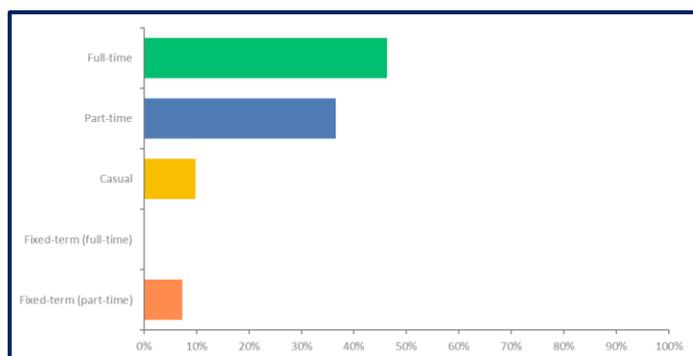
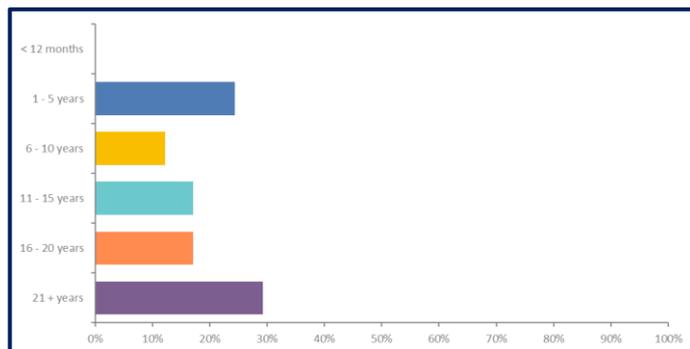
3.1.1 Years of service

Our members have a long-term commitment to their work. 47% have sixteen years or more service. 25% have between 1 – 5 years service. Concerningly, there is a decrease in service between 6 and 10 years.

Fewer workers are in full-time employment; 37% are part-time, 10% casual and 7% fixed-term.

We asked members to estimate how many co-

workers have moved to casual working arrangements or left the service in the previous 12 months.



Question: In your estimation, what percentage (%) of ongoing Educators have changed their employment status to casual staff in the last 12 months?

Question: In your estimation, what percentage (%) of ongoing Educators have left your service provider in the last 12 months?

We then asked members to assess the reasons people are leaving the sector.

Question: In your opinion, what is the main reason Educators are leaving the sector?

Members advise between 20% and 60% of staff have changed working arrangements or left altogether:

Out of 14 positions, by end of last year, only three were permanent staff. Out of five new staff, three have left in the past six months (ASU 41).

A range of reasons were presented to explain this occurrence. Some were practical:

40% A lot of staff don't leave the sector but move to other service locations as it's closer to home or their preferred position is available there (ASU 18).

Many responses related to high workloads, undervaluation and poor treatment from management, driven by funding constraints and resulting system strain:

Management. Treating us like numbers or robots and doing the bare minimum to bring in lots of money. No duty of care or best practice is used (ASU 37).

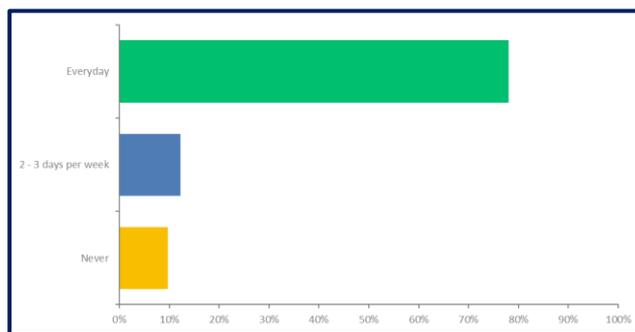
High workload •No respect from management •low pay •High risk of illness •High physical and mental stress •Rotational roster/hours/flexibility •Better conditions elsewhere (ASU 9).

Burn out, negative spotlight on the sector, pay rate vs expectations of the job (ASU 34).

3.1.2 Casual and agency staff

ECEC settings have a heavy reliance on casual and agency staff. The Rapid Review highlights problems associated with insecure work arrangements. Casual and agency educators are not provided with the same level of professional development as ongoing staff. By the very nature of their employment category, these workers struggle to build rapport with children, families and carers. The lack of continuity means ongoing workers carry more of the work responsibilities. This stands in contrast to the requirements of the Early Years Learning Framework, Outcome 1, requiring that ‘Children feel safe, secure and supported’.⁸

Question: How regularly does your service provider employ casual staff?



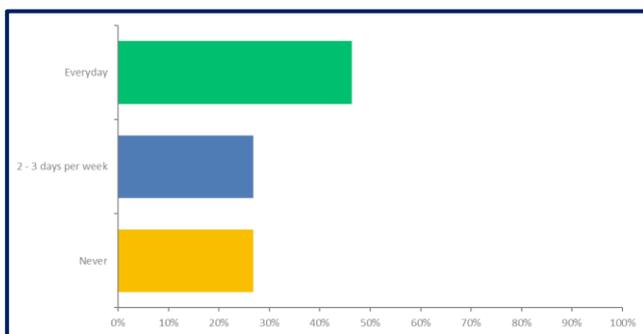
When there are often casual or agency staff that have never been in the room before, or very rarely, it becomes very hard to provide for health and safety and education for children. They require secure attachment to trust an educator, and permanent staff have to mentor a new person everyday (ASU12).

Casual and agency staff aren't able to manage the children with specific needs or to understand the dynamics or routine of the day. Children seek support from permanents (ASU 6).

Certain requirements based on age. Some staff employed are under 18, so cannot be left alone with children or do most tasks. Not allowed to serve food or medication, toileting (ASU 33).

They don't share paperwork with us. We do all obs and assessments and more (ASU 24).

Question: How regularly does your service provider employ agency staff?

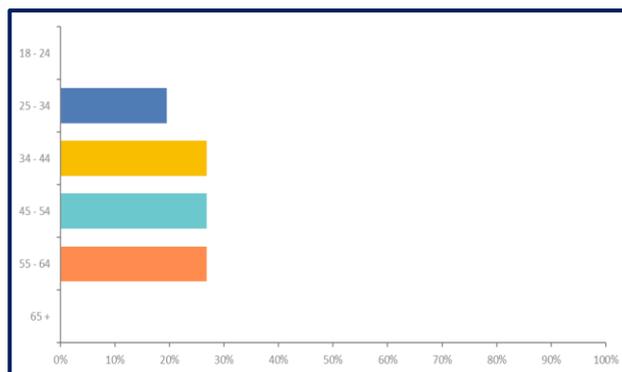


These structural problems can be addressed by government requiring ongoing work as a first employment arrangements and legislating protections.

⁸ Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE] (2022). [Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia \(V2.0\)](#). Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council, p. 31.

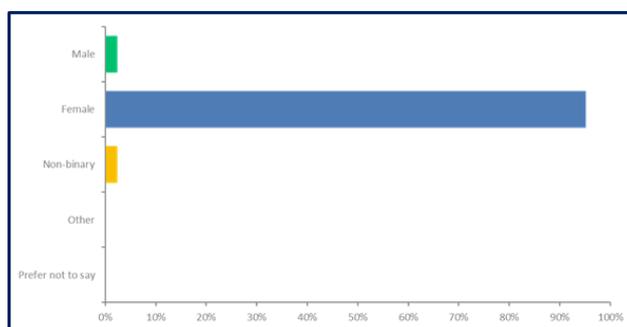
3.1.3 Age

Only 20% of respondents were aged between 25-34 years of age and 53% were aged between 45 and 65 years. As more people head toward the end of their working lives, there are insufficient trained educators entering the system (JSA 2024). Government cannot simply state that more needs to be done to attract and retain a skilled and highly qualified workforce. As legislators, government have the capacity to set policy conditions to train and fund the provision of ECEC services and must do so.



3.1.4 Gender

We have good men working in ECEC settings. Their work days are tainted by the grotesque behaviour of others. Without evidence, some members are accused of unsubstantiated behaviour. Effective systems that respond to credible complaints are one ingredient to child safety. However, the recent *Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025 (SSR)* amendments lack nuance. They do not triage the seriousness of complaints; they do not filter for vexatious or unsubstantiated complaints; and they fail to wrap fair timelines around complaints so that workers and parents and carers know what procedural steps are being undertaken.



Good people with good employment records are harmed by these amendments.

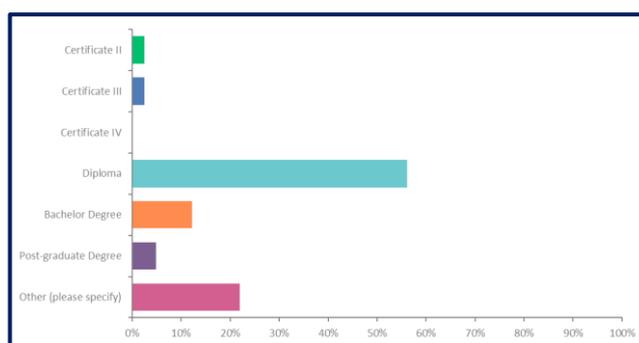
3.1.5 Qualifications

Our members are well qualified. We asked member if their training programme equipped them for the realities of the role. Focusing on Diploma qualified educators a range of education experiences emerged:

with the theory, it sounds all great. It's like cute, nice and meaningful, all of that, but none of it's practical in the working world (ASU 44).

Some reported a strong focus on regulatory requirements:

strong understanding of the required child safety standards and regulatory compliance, which is essential for my daily work (ASU 16)



Developing networks within the sector was a valued outcome of training;

Teachers were knowledgeable and networking with other students was really helpful (ASU 29).

Others noted distinctions between training programmes and the realities of applying skills in fast moving workplaces:

Yes and no. As it trains for key skills of different styles of documentation but the practical role only comes with job experience as everyday is different (ASU 36).

Not much was taught around planning cycles and how to create them. Nothing taught regarding children with extra need such as adhd or autism (ASU 19).

Overall, training programs provided some valuable insights for educators. They also highlight the complexity of the work required to be undertaken in ECEC settings where training cannot account for the entirety of experiences an educator will face. This reality reinforces the need for regular professional development. Ongoing workers report missed opportunities, *'Professional Development is not there or accessible'* (ASU 35). The Rapid Review highlights the need for *'Proper planning for workforce growth linked to a funding model that invests in quality, professional development, and proper conditions is essential'* (2024, p.4). It must be a requirement of employers across all ECEC settings that all employees, regardless of employment category, have regular professional development.

3.1.6 Conclusion

Consistent with national data our educators are majority women, they are older, and they are long-term practitioners thus have accumulated a wealth of educator experience that holds unmapped value. There is deep risk in the accumulated skill and knowledge held currently exiting the sector as this workforce nears retirement at a critical time in the industry. Forward workforce planning must factor in the need to replace these skills and knowledge and ensure a robust well supported workforce into the future, for the protection of both workers and the children they care for and educate.

The local government ECEC sector has a long history of stable employment. Anecdotally, we are advised that there are long waiting lists for enrolments. One interviewee spoke of the children she cared for more than 25 years ago returning to the local government centre she now works in so that she may care for their children.

This confidence in such a specialised and in-demand workforce is embedded in conditions of secure work. Ongoing workforces provide continuity of care. Workers in these circumstances develop rapport which children, their families and carers, their fellow workers and their employer. They are able to be observed and can observe others. The Rapid Review acknowledged the myriad deficiencies of an insecure workforce:

A workforce that is highly casualised may be less likely to feel comfortable to speak-up and report something if they have concerns. A workforce that is low paid and not properly valued by the community may struggle to attract and retain the most capable people. A workforce that struggles to attract staff may lead to services having to choose between hiring staff they don't have full confidence in, or reducing capacity and turning children away. A workforce where many are less experienced, or are still working towards their qualification, may not know what to look for to protect and promote child safety, or how to report concerns. A workforce

*that has high turnover makes it hard to build a strong culture within a service, or strong relationships with children.*⁹

Our evidence confirms the veracity of the Rapid Review conclusion yet, the Allan Labor government have amended the SSR that stand in opposition to the conditions we know are needed to keep children safe and act appropriately when genuine safety concerns are raised.

3.2 The work

Educators provide services to children, parents, carers and fellow workers. A wide range of communication and problem-solving skills are applied to meet the needs of parents, families and employers. Children present with myriad personal circumstances that must be recorded and reported on. Documentation is increasingly a large portion of educators responsibilities. And much of this work is undertaken in circumstances where employers fail to provide adequate staffing. It is clear a primary responsibility of educators is observing children however, it is the additional workload educators are left to bear via inadequate staffing arrangements that creates problems. These are employer obligations to fix.

3.2.1 A day in the life of an educator

I wanted a job that was rewarding or that was caring (ASU 47)

Educators and the community want ECEC settings that encourage children to grow and thrive. Educators are dedicated to the work they do however, that work is undertaken in stressful environments. The stressors are structural. Inadequate staffing arrangements, low pay and work intensification are responsibilities of government and employers. Yet the risks associated with these deficiencies rest with the face-to-face workers providing the quality care and support educators are motivated to provide and that the community expects.

The work of an educator is complex. In addition to programme planning, educating and observing children to encourage and intervene when necessary, a raft of tasks that maintain health and safety in the workplace are required to be performed. These complexities are an outcome of the operational environment that is shaped by increasing demands on childcare settings as more working parents seek services, increasing diagnoses of children's behavioural and medical needs, and tight funding that, despite being partially addressed by the federal government's 'worker retention payment'¹⁰ remains a barrier to service delivery:

High responsibility, Lack of Support (no planning/ off the floor time for administrative tasks or minimum time, missed time due to staff shortages, no consultation with educators on added responsibilities, extra cleaning responsibilities that are daily mopping floors disinfecting toilets not one off...daily check lists. Childrens minimum ratios 3 and over 11-1 children still require toileting assistance, co regulation assisting with other additional needs. Very stressful with just one educator (ASU 9).

⁹ [Rapid Child Safety Review 2025, p.25.](#)

¹⁰ [Department of Education](#)

3.2.2 Work intensification

Our members manage children whose life experiences can be complex. For clarity, the experiences laid out in **Case Study 2** were relayed to management. Workcover claims submitted in this centre were upheld. This member reported their concerns regularly and in detail. They sought management assistance and advised management when additional services were insufficient. Advice via the Preschool Field Officers program was made available.¹¹ Whilst of assistance, the needs in this case study were immediate and delays in receiving additional support hampered educators' abilities to manage the circumstances they were facing daily. This case study also illustrates the need for greater funding of additional workers relative to the time a child is in the service.

We asked members about funding for children who need additional support.

Question: *Are there children with additional needs and/or challenging behaviours in your service who are **not** funded for additional support staff?*

95% of participants advised that there are children who are not funded for additional services and 85% reported having to provide the additional support in addition to their existing workload.

The impacts are real:

I was hit on the head very hard with a plastic shovel, by a child I told them for months needed lots of special help and support (ASU 10).

Even when a service does not receive government funding for a child with additional needs or severe behavioural challenges, an extra Educator, beyond the required ratio, must be provided. This is crucial to ensure the safety of other children and the wellbeing of all staff members (ASU 16).

I got punched in the face by a child with behaviour issues and I put the incident report through the system on the computer with a cold face washer on my nose, then went back to work as the manager quickly asked am I okay, the manager knew what happened. There was no support or debriefing, just went back to work (ASU 35).

They still put multiple children with challenging behaviour[s] in the same room. Making it traumatic for trauma children, children with behaviour issues. It's physically and mentally exhausting for educators and children (ASU 42).

Case Study – see Appendix 2

There was at least six children that would have needed inclusion support that didn't necessarily have it, and these were children with trauma. So violent behaviours, drug and alcohol affected parents, domestic violence.

...these were children that... needed so much love and care and support, and we were just so out of our depth, you know, I was getting training along the way and mentoring other educators.

However, it just, it wasn't fast enough. We weren't getting preschool field officers out to the service in time and at the end of the day, you know, there were children that were coming to the service that were experiencing trauma themselves because they were exposed to these violent behaviours every day by other children (ASU 46)

¹¹ [Preschool Field Officer program](#)

3.2.3 Improved staffing ratios

The averaging of 'under the roofline' ratios by employers creates dangerous working arrangements. To understand the practical implications of averaging we asked members to respond to this regular occurrence:

Question: *Using under the roofline ratios, if an Educator requires a bathroom break and must leave the floor, how does management ensure adequate resources to meet ratio requirements?*

Responses provided a mix of employer approaches. Some actively provide staff coverage. Others do not. Revealingly, additional workload is placed on educators to be able to engage in the most fundamental of personal hygiene practices:

BEST PRACTICE is not used at all neither is the duty of care everything is bare minimum ratios, no more no less (ASU 37).

Either call the team leader or just go! (ASU 5).

There are floating Relievers, breaks staff and the Centre Coordinator to call upon to ensure ratios are maintained (ASU 7).

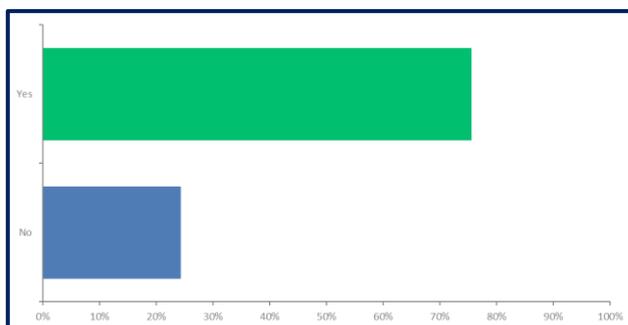
We have to ring down, to one of our managers (and hope, they are there in their office space and not in a meeting/training/or on a break or already on the floor tied up with another issue!!!) or reception, to come up and cover us, if they can. Otherwise we have to get another Educator from the room next door so we can run down to the toilet. Our toilets are in another building, admin/management a good minute walk (ASU 38).

Apparently up to 10min of absence is allowed and they are "still in the building" so still meeting ratio (ASU 10)

They don't. You go and make sure others are aware you are out the room (ASU 11).

Waiting for another educator to be inside the room or holding it in (ASU 14)

Question: *Have you worked in a service where under the roofline ratios are averaged across the service?*



Recommendation 14 of the Rapid Review calls for 'removing or amending the 'roofline' rule'. It is imperative the manipulation of a safety measure by employers be eliminated.

3.2.4 Private and no-for-profit comparators

Educators with experience in not-for-profit and private ECEC settings observed better practices in local government. Private operators were split between individually owned services and those owned by larger corporations. In this example, a new owner presented themselves as not-for-profit, the drop in quality of support for children and educators was evident:

It was taken over by someone who said they were not-for-profit, but it was about the money...suddenly everything's full of black and gold brand food.

And things went down...we were stretched a lot more...the classic under the roofline thing was definitely stretched as thin as possible. I was hanging out a kitchen window, doing handovers quite often.

That was the distinct difference. Before that, we felt like all part of a place that we contributed, it really felt like home. And then it felt like a business when it got taken over, because it was (ASU 45).

Another educator explained their experience operating across two private operators, one a smaller enterprise, the other a larger chain:

When I was at [large chain], there was lots of health and safety issues in terms of like supervision. Sometimes children were left outside unattended. Sometimes children were accidentally locked in a kind of room due to, like, the maintenance people didn't finish their job properly and left like a door handle off and locked.

And then I went to a private centre after that and that had a very high standard. That was a lot more like what I thought it would be like.

...at the private centre they had someone doing all the laundry type tasks and the stock.

So everything was really neat, organised, we weren't running out of gloves or nappies or anything like that. We had a chef that was a lot more dedicated.

...also we didn't have as many kind of managers and things. So it was really just one owner, manager and a receptionist, and they knew everything about the centre. So it was running really smoothly and they knew all the families, all the children.

...it still wasn't perfect, but the conditions for the children were a lot better. Not so much the staff, but the children (ASU 44).

Care of children is not a profit motivated exercise. The Victorian government should address rate capping to enable Councils to provide the services communities need and trust.

3.2.5 Employer oversight

Some workers reported that their employers have demonstrated a focus on maximising income, with the administration of this approach placed on workers in the least powerful position. The below description of an organisational decision-making process demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how to manage government applied funding arrangements. In this instance, the detailed description of why and how an organisation manages its service reflects the embedded strain in the sector for which ECEC workers should not be held accountable:

Opportunity to staff using under the roof ratios need to be removed. Opportunity for services to claim CCS for more than their licenced capacity needs to be removed. My current workplace instructs me to fill the centre with permanent bookings of an additional 2 children per day above their licensed capacity and the reasoning is “because there is always someone away” and if not then I need to send staff home who have children and this then leaves us under staffed. This practice brings in an additional \$86K of income for the owner and puts additional stress and strain on educators (ASU 39).*

*In practice, if a child is absent the service still receives either the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) or fees because children are booked in on an ongoing permanent basis. The [Department of Education](#) sets out provider obligations.

Members advise a WWCC is insufficient to assess a persons’ suitability for employment:

While WWCC is a necessary criminal check, it is not a sufficient tool because it does not assess educators’ knowledge of safe care practices or their ability to communicate safely and effectively with children. True protection requires ongoing professional development, not just a police check (ASU 16).

Greater protection is found in adequate staffing:

It’s a part of it but, better ratios on the floor would do a lot too (ASU 29).

Appropriate training and professional development are necessary to have a line of sight over the entire operations of an ECEC setting:

In my role, implementing the Child Safe Policy is an essential part of creating a safe and supportive environment for all children. It is team effort, essential to be staying alert to any signs of abuse, neglect, and grooming. As an educator must have the understanding of the legal and ethical obligations — such as mandatory reporting requirements, codes of conduct, and maintaining professional boundaries (ASU 36).

3.2.6 Conclusion

Frontline workers concisely summarise their work and the problems with the current system:

This industry needs to change. We have one of the hardest jobs in the world. Most people say they couldn’t do it or that parenting is the hardest job, yet don’t respect us who educate those children in massive numbers. People should never have to worry or feel concerned for their child’s safety or wellbeing when leaving their children in daycare. (ASU 19).

The undermining of secure employment places additional workload and work intensification on low paid women workers. We have demonstrated the reliance on transient workers is a structural problem that government can address. Workers move to insecure forms of work, or exit the ECEC sector, to address their own health needs.

Oversight of staffing numbers is a clear remedy that must be enforced, ‘Change to RATIOS !!! 2 staff always present with children and staff are never to work alone’ (ASU 38). We consistently heard of the health and safety risks to children and educators:

Even when a service does not receive government funding for a child with additional needs or severe behavioural challenges, an extra Educator, beyond the required ratio, must be provided. This is crucial to ensure the safety of other children and the wellbeing of all staff members (ASU 16).

Structural and systemic failures in ECEC settings individualise the risk to educators. This is an institutional failure that government must address.

4 The Future

Educators, through their unions and directly to their employer have long been sounding the alarm about poor practices in ECEC settings. The quality care children do receive is embedded in the application of professional skills and knowledge by experienced educators. The problems are structural, cultural and institutional. These features can only be addressed by policy makers and government's willing to appropriately fund and support the workforce that cares for our children.

Privatisation has failed children, their families and the community. Local government ECEC services are in demand. The reasons are clear. Notwithstanding the poor work experiences outlined in this submission, continuity of care is achievable in local government services. Rate capping by the Victorian government has failed the community. Councils have outsourced ECEC services, the ramifications of which are harmful. The Victorian government must reverse this ill designed policy that is not equipped to meet local government objectives.

There is an urgent need to fix systemic structural and institutional problems. Funding Councils to deliver high quality services, shifting internal cultures to address dangerous management practices, erasing profit making practices and making ECEC services a public investment supports the achievement of quality care, educator support and wellbeing. Our recommendations underpin creating conditions of secure work, workforce stability and the attraction and retention of skilled ECEC practitioners.

Recommendations

1. Remove artificial rate capping arrangements that influence local government outsourcing ECEC services
2. Prioritise ongoing, secure workforces as a first step toward improving child safety
3. Work with the Commonwealth government to fully fund ECEC services to meet service demand for minimum staffing levels and staffing levels for additional needs children
4. Enforce child safe standards to improve governance and managerial behaviour in relation to mandatory reporting and raising concerns about child safety and wellbeing

5 Appendices

Appendix 1

Case Study 1

Educator

Five years experience

I sought guidance from my coordinator and have not really received any...This is pretty dark...I had a child who, I think she was about 10-11 months old, when I worked with her.

And she used to wake up fighting, and she was a baby, you know, like quite a young child. She used to wake up throwing herself back, heavily distressed, pushing you away, you know, and you're trying to comfort this child. And I was like, that's really concerning. I'm going to keep an eye on that, you know, spoke to my colleagues about it. They're like, 'oh, she's always done that'. And then, anyway, she had a severe nappy rash. And I was speaking to the mother about it. The mother said, you know, you just need to change her nappy more frequently, we looked at, you know, maybe it's a dietary issue. We changed nappy rash creams, but it just got progressively worse and I kind of, I don't know, one day I was like, she's got this behaviour. This nappy rash is not improving no matter what I do, I'm gonna speak to the coordinator 'cause. I started to feel like it was an STD.

I went to the coordinator and showed them and they said 'Nah, it's just nappy rash and maybe she's allergic to the nappies that we're using' and said, 'don't worry about it. And I was like, no, she has also got this behaviour.'

And I tried to show them the the behaviour and explain it to them and they said just leave it that, you know, they've got DHS with them, you know, they had like a case manager and everything.

*Then, ...it turned out that she her dad was a paedophile. And it was reported by her siblings at their school, because they were consistently being abused.
(ASU 48)*

Appendix 2

Case Study 2

Educator

20 years experience

I was in a service where we had a really good reputation with the child protection, so we were a very safe space and a very inclusive and loving service which meant we had a lot of families come to our service and it was a large service. It was a hub and the outdoor space was open to all age groups. It was just one big open space.

And by the time we realised that we had too many children with high needs, it was too late.

I was in the three to five year room and we would have six children on every day of the week. There was at least six children that would have needed inclusion support that didn't necessarily have it. And these were children with trauma.

So violent behaviours, drug and alcohol affected parents, domestic violence.

And these were children, that would just...they were so...Oh...they were just, you know, they needed so much love and care and support, and we were just so out of our depth, you know, I was getting training along the way and mentoring other educators. However, it just it wasn't fast enough. We weren't getting preschool field offices out to the service in time and at the end of the day, you know, there were children that were coming to the service that were experiencing trauma themselves because they were exposed to these violent behaviours every day by other children.

Just everyday I was either being physically hurt. I was trying to prevent other children from being physically hurt. I was watching children become traumatised. I had emailed my team leaders and management...this was for a local government...I [emailed] everyone in the Family children's services. I'd sent out a crisis e-mail saying we need support.

This is dire.

We are under so much stress and they seem to come out and say all the right things, but nothing changed.

(ASU 46)