

# Next Steps in Victoria's Kindergarten Workforce Strategy





The Department of Education and Training acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Victorian lands and waters, and we pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging and all Victorian Aboriginal communities.

© State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training) 2021



*Next steps in Victoria's kindergarten workforce strategy* is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. You are free to re-use the work under that licence, on the condition that you credit the State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), indicate if changes were made and comply with the other licence terms, see: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

The licence does not apply to:

- any images, photographs, trademarks or branding, including the Victorian Government logo and the DET logo; and
- content supplied by third parties.

Copyright queries may be directed to

# Contents

Minister’s message .....4

About this paper .....5

What we heard .....6

Strategy overview ..... 15

Connections to the National Children’s Education and Care Workforce Strategy .....22

Next steps .....23

# Minister's message



**This has been another big year for Victoria's early childhood education and care sector, including our kindergarten teachers, educators, and support staff.**

Throughout the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the kindergarten workforce has shown dedication, endurance and professionalism in keeping young Victorian children safe and supporting them to continue to grow and learn.

On behalf of all Victorians, thank you. I know it hasn't been an easy year. I admire your continued focus on giving Victoria's children the best start in life.

The kindergarten program workforce, and providers have also been planning and preparing for 2022, when three-year-old children across Victoria will be able to attend at least five hours of funded kindergarten a week. It's a significant step forward in the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers and educators underpin the reform's success. That is why the Victorian Government is working closely with the sector, employers and unions to continually improve how we support the kindergarten workforce.

In April 2021, we released the [Working Together to Build Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce](#) – to hear your ideas, the challenges, what works and the next steps we could take in our kindergarten workforce strategy.

We have been delighted but not surprised by the commitment with which the early childhood sector has engaged in the next chapter of our kindergarten reform.

Thank you to the many teachers, educators, service providers, local, state and federal governments, employer peak bodies, unions, higher education providers, TAFEs and other VET providers involved in this consultation process. It has highlighted the benefits of learning from each other and working collectively on ways to address common challenges.

The Victorian Government is taking immediate action to respond to what you said and new initiatives are outlined in this paper. They build on our existing \$209.9 million kindergarten workforce package to attract and retain staff and support high-quality education.

We heard about a variety of issues during consultation, reflecting the sector's diversity. Some issues are shared, while others are more acute for certain parts of the sector.

In particular, we heard about how negative perceptions of, and variation in, pay and conditions continue to present challenges to attracting and retaining teachers and educators. We know that many employers are taking action. I applaud the successful renegotiation of the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) 2020 and the Early Education Employees Agreement (EEEE) 2020. The Victorian Government's additional funding to services who are signatories supports them to provide better wages and conditions to their staff.

Pay and conditions were also highlighted in this year's consultation on the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy. Victoria is playing its part for our kindergarten sector, and collaborates on national work that benefits the early childhood education and care sector. The Victorian Government supports more Commonwealth Government leadership on these issues, particularly given their important lead role in policy and funding of the broader early childhood education and care sector.

Of course, government programs and supports complement the kindergarten sector's own efforts, some of which we are pleased to showcase in this paper. All stakeholders are integral to making Victoria's kindergarten workforce strategy a success.

I look forward to continuing to strengthen our collective efforts to build a dynamic, valued and well-supported kindergarten workforce into the future.

**Ingrid Stitt MP**  
Minister for Early Childhood

# About this paper

The Victorian Government is on a reform journey with the kindergarten sector to build a bigger, better and fairer kindergarten system in Victoria. In an Australian first, Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will be rolled out state-wide in 2022.

We set out earlier this year to learn more from the sector about workforce challenges, solutions and the best ways to collaborate.

[Working Together to Build Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce](#) gave an overview of Victoria's workforce strategy so far, including a comprehensive directory of the Government's programs and supports in place to attract and retain staff, and promote high-quality kindergarten programs.

It also helped continue conversations about supporting our workforce, inviting feedback about roles and responsibilities, new partnerships and innovation across the sector.

This paper provides an update to Victoria's kindergarten workforce strategy. It contains:

1. The key themes we heard through the consultation, with case studies about best practice and partnerships from across the sector, and new initiatives launched in response to key findings
2. The latest directory of existing government programs and supports
3. Discussion about connections with the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy and opportunities to continue this national conversation for reform.



# What we heard

Since April this year, we have held many meetings with sector stakeholders and received more than 90 survey responses and detailed submissions. The Education State Forum in August 2021 provided a further opportunity for participants from across the sector to connect, discuss ideas and share examples of best practice.

We heard from kindergarten program teachers and educators, service leaders, diverse service providers, local and federal governments, employer peak bodies, unions, higher education providers, TAFEs and other VET providers.

We heard many innovative ideas on how to attract more people to kindergarten careers, how to keep them in those careers and ways to improve teacher and educator training and ongoing professional support.

We received positive feedback about the Government's existing workforce strategy and existing supports. This validation was important to reinforce that we are on the right path.

But we know there is more to do.

We can learn from our current challenges and our strengths as we continue to build and support our kindergarten workforce. We can work together and share our successes to make best practice the norm across all services.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating new challenges and exacerbating existing ones. We have had to adapt our practices and innovate. We should learn from these experiences, to capture the strengths and acknowledge about what needs to change.

Throughout the consultation, we also heard your aspirations, what drives you and your shared commitment and purpose in giving children the best possible early education.

This next section highlights the six key themes and priority areas for action that emerged during consultations and showcases some examples of best practice in the sector. These themes will be the focus of the workforce strategy going forward.

The first three themes, listed below, have led to the development of new government actions, in partnership with the sector, to grow and support our kindergarten workforce.

The other three themes cut across and underpin all actions in the strategy and must be a priority for all parts of the sector.

1

**Expanding high-quality pathways to build educator supply**

2

**Supporting upskilling to grow teacher supply**

3

**Supporting leadership to improve workforce wellbeing**

4

**Continuing to focus on training quality, including through placements and mentoring**

5

**Taking collective responsibility for shifting perceptions about early childhood education and care**

6

**Strengthening sector partnerships to improve place-based workforce strategies and learn from best practice and innovation**

## 1. Expanding high-quality pathways to build educator supply

Services detailed their concerns about the supply of qualified educators and the need to strengthen our focus on attracting kindergarten educators, as well as kindergarten teachers.

Services also told us that educator traineeships with effective supervision can provide a high-quality pathway to attract new educators, to 'grow-their-own' educator workforce and benefit from the immediate on-the-floor assistance. But very few services currently use traineeships because most do not have the know-how or resources to set up and run their own traineeship programs.

### New initiative:

#### Jobs Victoria and Department of Education and Training to partner to deliver new Early Childhood Educator Traineeship Program

In response to feedback received during consultation on the workforce strategy, a new Jobs Victoria initiative will fund \$2.2 million to create 150 new early childhood educator traineeships across the state, to commence in early 2022.

The Chisholm Institute has been selected as the lead delivery partner and is working with the Department to design a high-quality traineeship program that delivers comprehensive support to trainees and employers. Trainees will learn while they earn – working in an early childhood service while they undertake a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care. Employers will receive funding to deliver wrap-around supports including mentoring to trainees. This initiative will create a job-ready, high-quality educator workforce to help meet immediate workforce demand next year.

### Traineeships are a successful pathway for new educators in Latrobe City Council early childhood services

Latrobe City Council has been using traineeships to 'grow their own' high-quality educator workforce for a number of years, with great results.

Trainees are recruited through local employment programs and placed in services where they are employed above ratio and are well-supported with an individualised learning approach, and dedicated mentor. Kate Kerslake, Manager Family Services says that an important first step is to identify people who know they want to work in early childhood education and care. 'There is a selection process when we interview candidates and make sure they understand what a career in ECEC is all about.'

Kate says the Victorian Government's Head Start program has been particularly beneficial, and local schools are doing a great job identifying students who have a passion for working with young children. Introduced in 2019, Head Start supports school students to spend more time doing paid, on-the-job training while completing their VCE or VCAL. Latrobe City Council has employed five Head Start trainees so far. Three trainees who completed their traineeship are now upskilling with the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care.

'We have built a reputation of being able to support trainees. We value their input and the benefits they bring to our services and the children long term', Kate says.

Traineeships will be a key element of Latrobe City Council's early childhood workforce strategy going forward.



## 2. Supporting upskilling to grow teacher supply

Service providers and universities were clear about how upskilling educators is a growing and promising way to build our kindergarten teacher workforce.

We heard great examples of service providers who support their staff to upskill with scholarships, time release and mentoring.

Upskilling can be a daunting prospect for some educators who have not undertaken a university course or may be juggling work with caring responsibilities.

The Government is providing support through scholarships and exploring new ways to make upskilling more attractive, including through the new Innovative Initial Teacher Education program.

### New initiative:

#### Expansion of Innovative Initial Teacher Education with university partners in 2022

Currently, early childhood educators with an approved diploma-level qualification are able to apply to complete a bachelor's degree through a compressed program of study at Deakin University, while continuing to work in their early childhood service. Students are eligible for an enhanced scholarship and receive extra supports, including mentorship and time release for study.

In 2022, the Innovative Initial Teacher Education (IITE) program will be expanded to additional universities. This will provide new, innovative and supported study pathways for aspiring early childhood teachers, including qualified educators who are seeking to upskill while continuing to work.

The expanded program will also include Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnerships (ECPPP). The ECPPP builds on formal partnerships between kindergarten service providers and Victorian universities to support leading practice in initial teacher education and improve the placement experiences of aspiring teachers.

### Upskilling educators' first experiences with the new Innovative Initial Teacher Education program

The Innovative Initial Teacher Education (IITE) program, delivered in partnership with Deakin University, allows diploma-qualified early childhood educators to complete the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education in 18 months.

All program participants are employed in an early childhood service for the duration of the program. The host service receives funding to provide wrap-around support and mentoring to help educators while they train to become teachers.

Kym Williams, who is employed at Carlisle Park Kindergarten in Cranbourne North, is among the first 85 early childhood educators participating in the IITE program and has found the experience rewarding and highly instructive.

'The IITE has definitely improved my teaching practice,' Kym says. 'I find that I am constantly applying the learnings from my study to curriculum decision-making and approaches to teaching more broadly.'

Kym says that Carlisle Park Kindergarten in Cranbourne North, which is managed and run by the City of Casey, has provided practical support and encouragement throughout her enrolment in the IITE.

'Before I applied to the program, I made sure that management were on board with the idea,' Kym says. 'I liaised with the Co-ordinator of Kindergarten Programs and my Team Leader, and we mapped out a plan.'

Deakin University assigns a coach to each IITE program participant. All coaches have extensive professional experience in the early childhood education sector.

During regular one-on-one meetings, coaches support their assigned participants through goal setting, capacity building exercises, regular debriefs about workplace experiences, problem solving pedagogical challenges and more.

'The educators at the service, especially my mentor, have been very supportive during the day-to-day process, particularly in regard to placement,' Kym says.

### 3. Supporting leadership to improve workforce wellbeing

The sector described the stress and fatigue felt by educators and teachers from working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many factors play a role in workforce wellbeing – including pay and conditions, and service leadership.

Service leaders are doing their best to support the wellbeing of staff and we heard many good examples of services providing mental health first-aid training for their staff, as well as gifting leave.

We know strong leadership and a culture of support and learning is critical to workforce retention. We heard many examples of how educators and teachers thrive with a sense of autonomy, when they feel valued and are recognised for their work, dedication, skills and expertise.

#### New initiative:

#### New supports and resources to improve workforce wellbeing

The Victorian Government is developing a suite of new wellbeing initiatives and supports to support early childhood service leaders to increase awareness of their roles and responsibilities as an employer for protecting and promoting mental health and wellbeing, including obligations under legislation. This will help create a work environment where all teachers and educators feel valued and supported, and able to seek help early should issues arise.

Following consultation with WorkSafe, the Department is developing free, targeted training including an online webinar and interactive online resources and support for early childhood service leaders, with delivery commencing from Term 4, 2021. Other initiatives also include a series of webinars and resources made available for early childhood teachers and educators.

In addition, the Department is funding a Wellbeing Support Program for staff employed at kindergarten services that are respondent to the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) 2020.

#### KU Children's Services – 'Employer of Choice' for the sixth year running

For the sixth year in a row, KU Children's Services has been recognised as an Employer of Choice at the Australian Business Awards 2021.

The award recognises KU for maximising the full potential of their workforce through established policies and practices that demonstrate effective employee recruitment, engagement and retention.

According to CEO Christine Legg, KU attracts people to work at its many services because of the provider's proud 125-year tradition of providing quality education and care to children.

'What truly resonates with our staff, and I believe what keeps them at KU, is our commitment to practising our values,' Christine says.

'We also pride ourselves on leading the sector in terms of pay and benefits, and the extensive support we offer staff in terms of mentoring and professional development, because we believe that our staff are the heart of everything to do with KU.'

General Manager of People Services, Jane Robinson, says that KU's status as a nationally recognised employer of choice is not something that happens overnight.

'There's no 10-step guide to becoming an employer of choice,' Jane says. 'Our executive has worked incredibly hard over a long period to build a culture of honesty in our workplace and cultivate value-aligned relationships between staff and management.'

'We've had a conscious program of integration across all the support services teams that sit within early childhood education and support services that sit outside of that, like our employee assistance.'

'We also demonstrate that we value our staff by paying well above the Award and living and breathing our values.'

The success of KU's workforce support and engagement strategies – from which more than 2,000 employees across 130 services benefit – is demonstrated in the 94 per cent of staff retained annually.



## **Aurora Early Education – investing in staff recruitment and retention through mentoring and professional development**

For the team at Aurora Early Education – a private long day care provider currently operating two services across metropolitan Melbourne – attracting and retaining high-quality teaching and administrative staff is fundamental to delivering high-quality early education and care.

Sheela Edwards, CEO of Aurora Early Education, believes a strong recruitment strategy, with a focus on alignment of values, works towards building a connected culture in which everyone feels safe and appreciated.

'We have discovered that often people have a terrific resume – but there is a gap in their practice knowledge,' Sheela says. 'It's then a process of bridging that practice gap for each individual and drawing a plan to build their teaching skills in a supportive environment. We have regular one-on-one mentoring sessions with our staff on top of the 20-hour mandatory professional development sessions that are built into every contract.' Sheela says mentoring and professional development is just one aspect of Aurora's holistic approach to support continual learning, which also includes mindfulness teaching.

According to Sheela, Aurora's rigorous recruitment plan, dynamic mentoring strategies and health and wellbeing support for staff have led to high staff satisfaction and retention rates, with some staff having remained at an Aurora centre since inception – nine years ago.

'When asked to comment on how staff feel about coming to work, the overwhelming response from staff is that they feel like they are home,' Sheela says.

## 4. Continuing to focus on training quality, including through placements and mentoring

We heard clearly that quality should not be compromised in our efforts to increase the supply of kindergarten teachers and educators.

Changes to the National Training Package that were shaped by the early childhood education and care sector are due to be in place by January 2023. These changes will improve the quality of children's education and care vocational qualifications and the work readiness of new educators. They include:

- strengthening assessment requirements
- increased work placement hours
- making the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care a prerequisite for the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care.

To assist the sector with this transition, the Victorian Government is funding the development of a suite of high-quality early childhood teaching and learning materials to support training providers to deliver the updated courses and to boost the quality of VET training.

During consultation, we also heard that improving the quality of placements for students and supporting ongoing professional development are also essential to supporting a high-quality workforce.

Mentoring was consistently seen to be a powerful tool for quality improvement across the entire career journey.

Stakeholders provided many outstanding examples of services building a workforce of mentors to support new teachers and universities playing a role in helping services enhance these mentoring skills.

### Shine Bright's experience with the Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnership Program

The Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnership (ECPPP) program aims to create high-quality placement experiences through a partnership model between Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and early childhood service providers.

Belinda Schultz, the Early Years Manager at Shine Bright – a large not-for-profit regional provider that is one of the participating providers – believes the ECPPP has significantly boosted the appeal of working in early childhood, including in country Victoria where Shine Bright's services are located.

'The program plays a pivotal role in showcasing the joy of a career in early childhood, but also the rewards of working in regional Victoria,' Belinda says.

A core element of the program is arranging for the student to visit the service prior to their placement so they are well versed in the values of the service, teacher practice and curriculum.

The program also provides the service's participating staff with access to professional and mentoring supports that help facilitate high-quality placements for the students.

Belinda says the benefits of the ECPPP program cut both ways for students and teachers.

'These students come in with new ideas and big energies and with a lot of knowledge from their recent learnings at university,' Belinda says.

'We also have teachers that have been involved in early childhood education for 30 years and the program has completely reinvigorated their practice.'



## 5. Taking collective responsibility for shifting perceptions about early childhood education and care

We heard how out-of-date and uninformed community perceptions about early childhood education and care can affect workforce satisfaction, and even act to dissuade people from entering the kindergarten profession.

Large-scale reforms such as Three-Year-Old Kindergarten are helping build awareness and appreciation about the value and difference quality early learning makes to children's lives.

There was agreement in the power of consistent narratives and language around the skills and capabilities of the workforce, and the sector's unique value proposition.

Campaigns such as 'Big Roles in Little Lives' (see case study) can help, and every employer can impact community perceptions and improve the attractiveness of the profession through local engagement and conditions of employment.

We heard about some creative and locally targeted recruitment videos some services have developed, promoting themselves as employers of choice with supportive pay and conditions.

### How Linda made the switch to a more meaningful career

Linda Price had an impressive resume in managerial roles at leading brands, but she wanted to do something more meaningful with her life. Following the birth of her children, Linda was involved at her son's kindergarten in Yalambie. Linda's aptitude was noticed by the teaching team, and they encouraged her to enrol in the Graduate Diploma of Early Childhood Teaching at RMIT. 'There was so much for me to learn in terms of neurological, social and cognitive development in children and how every single interaction with a child impacts their learning outcomes,' Linda says.

After finishing her degree, Linda landed a job at Kinglake Ranges Children's Centre, and was initially sceptical of the value of her previous professional experience to her teaching position. However, Linda discovered that her expertise in marketing and communications improved her teaching practice and allowed her to establish a reflective value-based teaching approach to her new work.

In 2021, the 'Bush Kinder for mental health' program that Linda helped develop won the Minister's Award in the Victorian Early Years Awards. Linda delights in practising the academic learning in her role as a kindergarten teacher. 'We are going to need people like this in the future: people who can think, problem solve and who are resilient. To know that you had a big part in shaping that is really rewarding,' Linda says.





## National workforce campaign highlights the big roles educators play in little lives

In February 2021, the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) launched a major national workforce campaign focused on attracting people to a career in early childhood education - 'Big Roles in Little Lives'.

The first phase of the campaign targeted people who may be considering a career change following the disruption of COVID-19 pandemic. The second phase promoted early childhood career opportunities to secondary school students, their parents and careers advisers.

The campaign raises awareness of the importance of early learning and the impact early childhood professionals can have on children. It also highlights the sector's robust growth.

"There is a great opportunity for young people in the booming sector of early learning and care," says Elizabeth Death, the CEO of ELACCA.

The campaign's first iteration has had both broad reach and engagement. The campaign video has been viewed more than 1.4 million times and media coverage reached an audience of almost two million people. ELACCA members were contacted by more than 400 jobseekers, and several members made offers of employment as a direct result. The second phase of the campaign is being evaluated in late 2021.

## 6. Strengthening sector partnerships to improve place-based workforce strategies and learn from best practice and innovation

There is a greater need for sharing information, knowledge, experience and ideas between services and other educational and community organisations.

Partnerships with local councils, schools, universities and vocational education providers are being formed to share information and work on local solutions for building the kindergarten workforce.

Workforce challenges and the sector's responses to these challenges differ across kindergarten settings, whether they be long day care, sessional services, or community run or privately run services.

The sector's diversity adds complexity but also provides opportunities for providers and services to learn from each other's experiences and different approaches.



### Local partnerships in Wimmera South West to address workforce shortages

The Wimmera South West spans the south west of Victoria. While a beautiful landscape with great country towns, the area's isolation and distance to large regional centres makes it one of the most difficult areas to recruit qualified early childhood staff.

Research shows that the most effective way to address workforce shortages in a regional location is to train people who are already living in those areas. The Department of Education and Training's Early Childhood Improvement Branch (ECIB) has partnered with local stakeholders to strategise on how to create a sustainable pipeline of qualified early childhood teachers and educators from their local community.

Debbie Moerkerk from the Wimmera South West ECIB says 'The strategies harnessed existing initiatives and sought to create new opportunities where gaps existed. The key approach was to gain collective buy in from the broad range of stakeholders, including local service providers and secondary schools, Local Learning and Employment Networks, South West TAFE, Federation University and the Warrnambool, Glenelg, Corangamite, Moyne and Northern Grampians councils.'

The strategy is three-fold, and includes:

- creating an aspiration to work in early childhood
- creating opportunities to study
- maximising the use and retention of existing workforce.

'The Wimmera South West workforce issue was a problem no one stakeholder had the capacity to address. By breaking it into small to large initiatives, there was something achievable for everybody,' Debbie says.

# Strategy overview

Victoria's broad-reaching kindergarten workforce strategy supports the attraction, retention and quality of the kindergarten workforce.

The Government is investing \$209.9 million over seven years in a package of short and longer-term measures to support employers to attract and retain high-quality staff.

The strategy is dynamic and will evolve as needed to support the sector to deliver three and four-year old kindergarten. It will continue to respond to sector feedback, new evidence and results of initiatives that are being trialled.

The strategy is organised around three themes: Attraction, Retention and Quality.

## Attraction

Attraction initiatives improve entry pathways and perceptions of the profession. They also support and incentivise students and qualified people to upskill and complete an early childhood qualification.

Attraction initiatives respond to known challenges facing the sector, including negative perceptions of, and variation in, pay and conditions across services and career pathway opportunities.

## Retention

Retention initiatives focus on supporting early-career and experienced early childhood teachers and educators to stay in the sector and excel in their jobs through career advancement, professional learning, and networking opportunities.

The sector knows that better retention of the existing workforce is key to both workforce supply and quality. We all have a role to play.

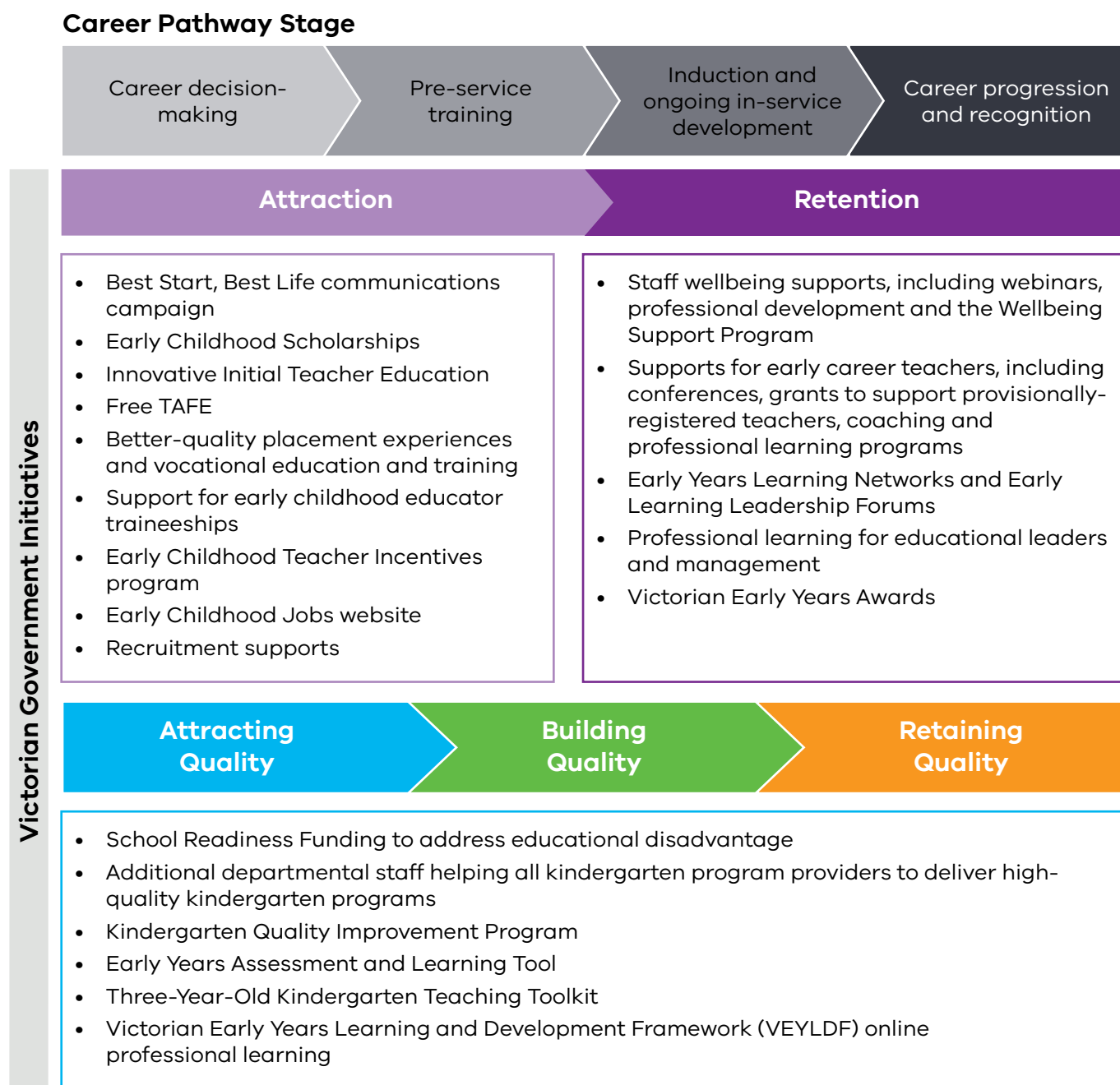
## Quality

Quality initiatives are the programs, guidance, tools and resources for teachers, educators and providers to deliver high-quality kindergarten programs and build effective leadership capacity across the workforce.

A focus on quality underpins the entire workforce strategy. We know that the quality of child-staff interactions, and how staff structure children's activities, are the primary ways early childhood education benefits children.



**Figure 1: Flow chart illustrating strategy themes and goals, and their relationship**



# Directory of programs and supports

New or expanded initiatives

## Attraction initiatives

Initiative	Description
Encouraging people to choose careers in early childhood education	
<a href="#">Best Start, Best Life communications campaign</a>	An integrated advertising campaign to attract people to the early childhood sector by raising awareness of career opportunities and the support available to study and join or re-join the sector.
Improving the accessibility and quality of pre-service training	
<a href="#">Early Childhood Scholarships</a>	Scholarships of up to \$25,000 are encouraging and supporting people to study to become early childhood teachers, with up to \$34,000 available for Aboriginal people to study through the Early Childhood Aboriginal Pathway Scholarships. Since 2018, more than 2,400 scholarships have been awarded under the program.
<a href="#">Innovative Initial Teacher Education</a>	<p>Early childhood educators with an approved Diploma-level qualification are able to apply to complete a bachelor's degree through a compressed program of study at Deakin University, while continuing to work in their early childhood service. Students are eligible for an enhanced scholarship and receive extra supports, including mentorship and time release for study.</p> <p>In 2022, the Innovative Initial Teacher Education (IITE) program will be expanded to additional ITE providers. It will also include the Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnerships (ECPPP). This is aimed at supporting the provision of high-quality student placements in early childhood services, promoting early childhood careers to dual qualified students, and providing continued professional learning and research opportunities. The ECPPP builds on formal partnerships between kindergarten service providers and Victorian universities to support leading practice and quality in initial teacher education.</p>
<a href="#">Free TAFE</a>	In 2020, the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, and the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, were added to the Free TAFE course list to strengthen the educator pipeline. More than 3,100 students commenced these courses in 2020 and 2,300 in the first nine months of 2021.
Better quality placement experiences and vocational education and training	
<a href="#">Early Childhood VET placement pilot</a>	A pilot project at Swinburne University is trialling a new placement model for the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, in partnership with the early childhood sector. The model has been designed and is well received by the sector partners and students. The model integrates theory and practice in a way that enhances quality and the experience of placement for both the sector and students.
Enhancing VET learning materials	The Victorian Government is funding the development of a suite of high-quality early childhood teaching and learning materials to support the delivery of the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care. The resources are aligned with the new training package to boost the quality of VET training and provide better learning and assessment resources to teachers.

## Attraction initiatives

Initiative	Description
Support for early childhood educator traineeships	A partnership between the Department and Jobs Victoria will fund \$2.2 million to provide 150 new traineeships for priority jobseekers, across the state, to commence in early 2022. Priority job seekers will undertake a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care while being paid to work in an early childhood service and receive wrap-around supports.
Getting people in jobs – when and where we need them	
<a href="#">Early Childhood Teacher Incentives program</a>	<p>There are two types of financial incentives available to support early childhood services to recruit qualified early childhood teachers.</p> <p>Location incentives of between \$9,000 and \$50,000 are available for early childhood teachers to take up a teaching position in selected hard-to-staff services delivering Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. These incentives are available in services across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.</p> <p>A new Individual Incentive of \$9,000 is available for qualified early childhood teachers not currently working in the Victorian early childhood sector to take up a position at any service that is planning to deliver a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program in 2022. Ten hours of coaching will be available to support these early childhood teachers who re-join the workforce.</p> <p>Successful job applicants who meet the criteria for both incentives will be able to receive both types of payments. Anyone receiving an incentive, and who is moving more than 200 kilometres to take up a role, is also eligible for relocation support.</p>
<a href="#">Early Childhood Jobs website</a>	Early Childhood Jobs is a new, free online platform for early childhood professionals to find roles at kindergarten services across Victoria. The website supports service providers with their recruitment and makes it easier for prospective teachers and educators to find jobs that suit their work preferences.
<a href="#">Recruitment supports</a>	<p>A new recruitment kit has been developed for employers with tips and strategies to attract candidates to vacancies, including sample written content that employers can tailor for their recruitment needs.</p> <p>A panel of specialist recruitment agencies is also working with the Department to support services and providers to employ new teachers in hard-to-staff areas. The recruitment agencies will also focus on seeking suitably qualified candidates from across Australia and New Zealand to help build the supply of kindergarten teachers in Victoria.</p>

## Retention initiatives

Initiative	Description
Supports for early career teachers	
<a href="#">Grants to support provisionally registered teachers</a>	Grants to services of up to \$2,872 per provisionally registered early childhood teacher have been established to support their progression to full teacher registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. So far, more than 1,000 grants have been awarded. The grants can be used flexibly by services, including to cover the cost of professional learning for the provisionally registered teacher, or to employ staff to backfill positions to allow mentors and provisional teachers the time they need to work through the process together.
<a href="#">Mentor support</a>	The Effective Mentoring Program provides two days of professional learning throughout the year to train experienced teachers to become mentors.
<a href="#">Career supports for teachers in their first five years of teaching</a>	<p>A range of free, evidence-informed professional learning and support programs are available to develop the resilience, capability and confidence of early childhood teachers who are in their first five years of their career. This includes a minimum five hours of individual coaching for all first-year early childhood teachers, communities of practice for second and third-year teachers and an alumni network to help these teachers stay connected and share their professional growth and expertise.</p> <p>Over 100 first-year teachers have commenced working with a coach in 2021, and 14 Communities of Practice have been established online, connecting second and third-year ECTs across the state.</p> <p>Early Childhood Beginning Teacher Conferences are being delivered annually and provide early childhood teachers with strategies to develop their practice and create meaningful relationships with children, families, peers and other professionals.</p> <p>Grants from \$5,000 to \$30,000 are being provided through the new Early Career Teacher Retention Innovation Grants to encourage service providers to develop innovative place-based solutions for improving early career early childhood teacher retention in their organisations.</p>
Staff wellbeing support	
Wellbeing webinars and research to better understand wellbeing	<p>The Department, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, has provided three webinars and supporting resources focused on educator wellbeing. This series explored the evidence behind positive psychology and its impacts on educator wellbeing. The webinars and resources are available on-demand at: <a href="#">Mental health and wellbeing in early childhood   Coronavirus Victoria</a>.</p> <p>Early Childhood Australia, on behalf of the Department, is undertaking a rapid resilience and wellbeing research project to better understand educator wellbeing and resilience, and strategies that educators use to maintain career purpose and fulfilment. This includes an anonymised survey and follow up interviews. Key results of the survey and follow up discussions are anticipated to be published on the Department's website by the end of 2021.</p>
Wellbeing Support Program	The Department is funding the development of a Wellbeing Support Program to be available to staff employed at kindergarten services that are respondent to the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) 2020.
Targeted professional development for service leaders	The Department is supporting early childhood service leaders to increase their awareness of their roles and responsibilities as an employer for protecting and promoting mental health and wellbeing, including obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. Following consultation with WorkSafe, the Department is developing free targeted training including an online webinar and interactive online resources and support for early childhood service leaders with delivery commencing from Term 4, 2021.

## Retention initiatives

Initiative	Description
Leadership and career development	
Early Years Learning Networks	From the beginning of 2021, Early Years Learning Networks are bringing together early childhood teachers and educational leaders to collectively share, reflect and deepen understanding of effective, evidence-based practices. A contribution to backfill is provided where needed to support educators to attend the Networks.
Early Learning Leadership Forums	The leadership forums bring together early childhood leaders to strengthen communication, consultation, co-design and leadership skills across the sector. Local and international early childhood experts, as well as local service champions have presented at the Forums and workshop groups have enabled collaboration and ensured local context is reflected in discussion between leaders.
<a href="#">Victorian Early Years Awards</a>	The annual Victorian Early Years Awards celebrate early childhood leadership, outstanding achievement, exceptional dedication and innovation in improving outcomes for children and their families. Winners in each category receive a grant of up to \$15,000 to support their nominated activity or individual professional development. The finalists and winners in each category are also eligible to win the prestigious Minister's Award, selected by the Minister for Early Childhood.
Educational Leader professional learning	In 2021, the Department is funding a tailored Victorian cohort of <a href="#">Early Childhood Australia's Leadership Program</a> for 220 Victorian Educational Leaders. This renowned leadership program is a strengths-based, self-directed, six-month program for early childhood leaders.
Career longevity support	The Department, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, recently ran two new free webinars on career longevity for Victorian kindergarten teachers and educators. The webinars delve into recent research on professionalism, leadership and career longevity in the early childhood sector, as well as profiling practical strategies that maintain and build careers in early childhood education and care. Videos of the webinars will be published on the Department's website shortly.
<a href="#">Supporting workforce planning and management</a>	The Department, in partnership with Early Learning Association Australia, has developed a free <a href="#">Employee Management and Development resource</a> and supporting online training modules that are available to all service leaders and people managers in the early childhood sector. These supports provide early childhood people managers with the tools to implement a best practice approach to the ongoing management and development of all employees that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of their service.

## Quality initiatives

Initiative	Description
<a href="#">School Readiness Funding</a>	School Readiness Funding (SRF) provides funding to services for programs and supports, which build the capacity of the workforce and benefit children, particularly children more likely to experience educational disadvantage. In 2021, SRF reached over 82,500 children in approximately 2,600 kindergarten services, including all those run by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
Early Childhood Improvement Branches	The 17 Early Childhood Improvement Branches (ECIBs) bring together staff with specialist early childhood expertise to work with early childhood staff, services, providers, local councils and the community. The aim is to provide practical, local support to implement early childhood reforms and improve quality. These staff also play a critical role in supporting workforce attraction, recruitment and retention, in partnership with local providers and stakeholders.
Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program	<p>The Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program (KQIP) is a professional development program that provides intensive, targeted support to early childhood services with identified quality improvement needs. It aims to lift the quality of participating services to improve outcomes for children to continue their learning and development into school. The program includes a range of resources, including personalised mentoring by external early childhood professionals.</p> <p>Since 2018, approximately 375 unique services have been or are being supported to improve their quality through the KQIP.</p> <p>In June 2021, an expansion of the KQIP commenced and offers access to an additional 360 services over the next three years.</p>
<a href="#">Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool</a>	<p>This online, observation-based Tool is designed to be used by early childhood teachers and their co-educators to support best assessment for learning practice aligned to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF). It will build the capacity of teachers and educators to understand and respond to children's strengths, interests and abilities through an ongoing cycle of observation, analysis, planning, implementation and reflection. The information generated by the Tool will also help early childhood teachers to share information with their school colleagues to support children's transition to school.</p> <p>In 2021 the Tool is being piloted and evaluated in around 50 kindergarten services.</p>
<a href="#">Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Teaching Toolkit</a>	The Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Teaching Toolkit is designed to help services in their first year providing funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. It supports early childhood teaching teams to deliver high-quality educational programs aligned to the VEYLDF and appropriate to the learning and development needs of three-year-olds. The Toolkit includes a box of educational resources (including tip sheets, posters, books and online learning vouchers), a two-day professional learning program and website content.
Online professional learning	<p>The Department continues to provide a range of free online professional development to early childhood teachers and educators to support implementation of the VEYLDF and high-quality practice, in response to emerging sector needs. In 2021, this included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a series of four webinars and a facilitated community of practice on guiding children's behaviour</li> <li>• a series of webinars on connecting assessment to practice</li> <li>• professional learning on writing Transition Learning and Development Statements</li> <li>• an Outdoor Pedagogy Portal for Victorian Educators that includes a professional learning module, online books and case studies on maximising outdoor learning</li> </ul>

# Connections to the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) recently published the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2031, [Shaping our Future](#). Sector stakeholders and all Australian governments collaborated to co-design the ten-year strategy, commissioned by education ministers, to help ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce.

With the release of the national strategy, work will now commence with all governments and sector stakeholders to co-design implementation and evaluation plans to guide efforts to achieve the strategy's objectives.

The Victorian Government will support this work and lead by the example of our comprehensive kindergarten workforce strategy, which already delivers on many of the actions included in the national strategy.

In implementing the national strategy, it will be important to recognise the different roles and responsibilities of governments. State and territory governments are the primary leads on policy and funding for kindergarten programs (with support from the Commonwealth Government through national partnership arrangements). The Commonwealth Government is responsible for Child Care Subsidy-funded services. Long day care services employ the vast majority of the early childhood workforce in Australia.

There are of course common challenges and opportunities across kindergarten and other forms of early childhood education and care. For example, many of Victoria's kindergarten workforce initiatives benefit the broader early childhood workforce – whether that be Free TAFE to build the educator pipeline or quality supports that also benefit staff who work outside kindergarten rooms. Commonwealth Government higher education settings affect the supply of teachers in both kindergarten and other early childhood services.

By the same token, the states and territories are limited in their ability to fundamentally address the attraction and retention challenges linked to negative perceptions of wages and conditions in the “childcare” sector.

It is in our joint interest that the Commonwealth Government leads on policies to support Child Care Subsidy-funded services to attract and retain a quality workforce and that all levels of government collaborate on national actions and reforms that will build and support the whole early childhood workforce.



## Next steps

This year we have taken stock and identified the priorities for Victoria's kindergarten workforce strategy. We have presented to the sector a full directory of the current workforce programs and supports, and we are developing new initiatives to support more traineeships, more teachers through upskilling, and supports to improve workforce wellbeing.

We know there are many more ideas and we need to keep working together to pilot, evaluate and scale up what works best in different settings.

We will continue to encourage and empower the sector to best leverage government investment and take their own actions to build and deliver the kindergarten workforce Victorian children need.

Next year is likely to bring further uncertainty as we continue to live with COVID-19. Progression towards the full roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten by 2029 may also have its challenges, as do all once-in-a-generation reforms. Our collective strategy and actions within each of our roles will need to evolve to support and expand the kindergarten workforce during this time.

The years ahead will also be exciting and invigorating. Momentum and public interest in early childhood education and care continues to grow, and Victoria is breaking ground that is inspiring others.

Our shared moral purpose is our strength – we are driven by making a difference to children's lives and we know at the heart of this purpose are our valued kindergarten teachers and educators.



