

# Working Together to Build Victoria's Early Childhood Education Workforce

April 2021





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# Minister's message



**Early childhood is a pivotal time. And right now is a pivotal moment for early childhood education in Victoria.**

In 2022, three-year-old children across Victoria will be able to attend at least five hours of funded kindergarten a week. It's a significant milestone on the road to a 15-hour per week program for children state-wide by 2029. And it's teachers and educators who will make it a success.

This paper signals the next stage in the Victorian Government's strategy to support and expand the highly skilled, dedicated early childhood workforce – the people at the heart of our nation-leading reforms.

The Victorian Government has a broad-reaching strategy to improve workforce attraction, retention, and quality. This includes investment in a \$174.2 million workforce package to attract and retain staff and support high-quality education.

This paper encourages everyone involved, including the workforce, services, providers, local, state and federal governments, employer peak bodies, unions, higher education providers, TAFEs and other VET providers, to consider how their strengths, resources and connections could be best deployed in the lead-up to the state-wide roll-out of kindergarten in 2022, and beyond.

By 2029, the reform will create more than 6,000 new jobs – we will need an extra 4,000 teachers and 2,000 qualified educators across the State. This will give children across Victoria the opportunity to have two years of high-quality play-based learning before school, led by a teacher.

Research shows that the benefits of this for children will be significant. For some, it will be profound and life-changing in terms of their future learning success, social and emotional wellbeing, and employment opportunities.

There is a clear opportunity to use the momentum and public interest generated by Three-Year-Old Kindergarten to make the most of our diverse strengths, our connections and the resources we have available.

Together, as a sector, we will continue to build the workforce Victorian children need. We will lead the way nationally in early childhood education. And above all, we will give young Victorian children the best possible early childhood education.

**Ingrid Stitt MP**  
**Minister for Early Childhood**



# About this paper

We know there is more to learn in terms of solutions to our workforce challenges, and the best ways to collaborate. The Government, and this paper, are focused on the workforce that delivers kindergarten programs. This paper is both a resource for stakeholders and a conversation-starter to facilitate discussions about roles and responsibilities, new partnerships, and innovation across the sector. It includes:

1. Strategy overview
2. Directory of existing government programs and supports to attract and retain staff, and promote high-quality kindergarten programs for Victorian children, no matter where they live
3. Call to take action together and share ideas about how we can partner for success.

The final section of the paper sets out the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in supporting the State's workforce to deliver kindergarten programs - services and providers, employer peak bodies, unions, local, state and federal government, and vocational education and higher education providers – to help highlight areas where interests and strengths may align.

Questions and case studies are included throughout the paper to help stimulate ideas and prompt you to share information and insights with others, including through the consultation process on this paper.

The challenges ahead are significant – but so are the opportunities.

Not only is it a great time to be a prospective teacher or educator, it is increasingly attractive to stay working in early childhood education, with more opportunities to upskill and play a greater role in the shaping of your career.



# Strategy overview

Making funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten available to children across Victoria is an ambitious undertaking. But we firmly believe that the benefits to our State, children and families will be exponential.

Due to the scale of the reforms, the Victorian Government has adopted a phased 10-year approach to the roll-out, providing support and resources to the sector at every step along the way. The Government recognises the dedication and skill of the kindergarten workforce and wants educators and teachers to feel proud of all they have achieved, and feel supported to grow and to continue to make a great contribution to the lives of Victorian children.

The strategy for the workforce is dynamic and it is important that the Government continues to work with you to adapt and modify it as needed. This includes responding to new data and evidence, and to what we learn about initiatives that are being trialled. There's also scope to learn from great practices underway in your local services.

Existing supports and resources respond to the challenges identified through consultation and research. They are organised around three themes:

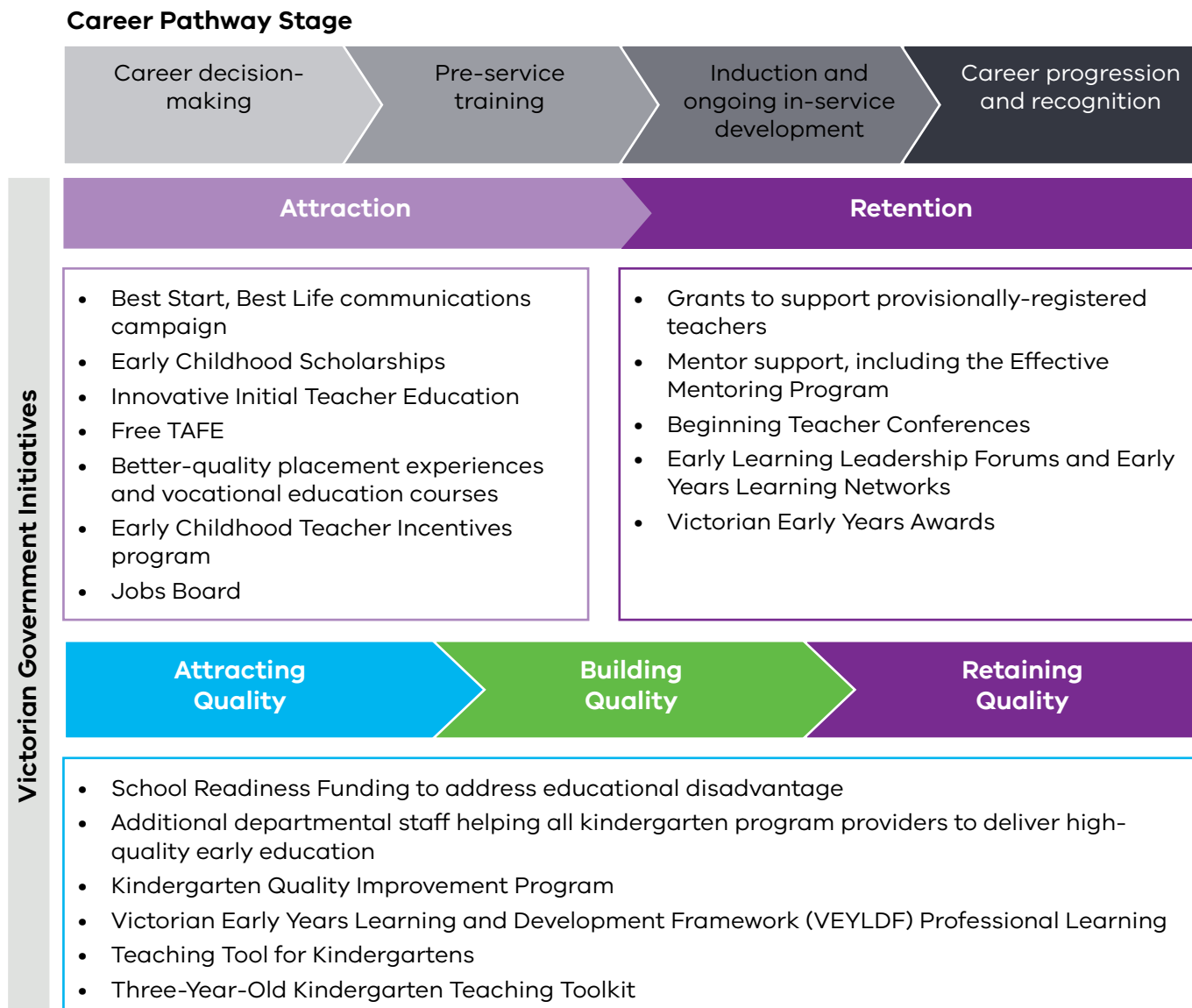
1. **Attraction** initiatives improve entry pathways and perceptions of the profession, and also support and incentivise students and qualified people to upskill and complete an early childhood qualification.
2. **Retention** initiatives focus on supporting early-career and experienced early childhood teachers and educators to stay in the sector and excel in their jobs through career advancement, professional learning, and networking opportunities.
3. **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.

As Figure 1 shows, measures to attract, retain and improve educational quality go hand-in-hand – and all contribute towards a thriving, sustainable workforce.

The next section describes the challenges, and responses, in more detail and prompts your ideas for partnerships or similar initiatives. It also prompts you to reflect on how you can reap maximum benefit from what's currently available.



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



# Directory of programs and supports

## Attraction

### Challenges

As 2022 approaches, there is an immediate need to attract and retain dedicated, enthusiastic and reflective people to work in funded kindergarten programs. At the same time, there is a need to build the longer-term workforce pipeline. This includes making sure there is a sufficient supply of people studying early childhood education.

Helping children learn and thrive appeals to many. But other factors play a role in career decision-making.

Challenges facing the sector include negative perceptions of, and variation in, pay and conditions across services and career pathway opportunities. Together, we also need to do more to attract people with different backgrounds, to better reflect the diversity of the community, encompassing different cultural and professional backgrounds, genders and ages.

We need to promote the benefits for educators to upskill to become teachers and ensure that pre-service training supports students to successfully complete their course and transition smoothly into the workforce. And we need to continue to better promote the benefits and the support available for people to work in rural and regional areas of Victoria.

### Progress

To address these challenges, the Victorian Government has worked with the sector to introduce a range of initiatives in recent years.

These include study and employment incentives, support to upskill to a teaching qualification, and incentives to improve the diversity of the workforce and get people into jobs in rural and regional areas.

These initiatives also include a powerful advertising campaign that spotlights the profession's profound impact, highly skilled practices and long-term opportunities, as well as all the incentives and supports available.

A career in early childhood has clear intrinsic appeal. As the 2022 state-wide roll-out approaches, there is an opportunity for us to work together to capitalise on the publicity and community interest that the roll-out of [Three-Year-Old Kindergarten](#) is attracting. Questions in this section prompt you to consider how you might benefit from these attraction measures, whether directly, or by adopting a similar approach within your own organisation.





## Encouraging people to choose careers in early childhood education

### Best Start, Best Life communications campaign

The [Best Start, Best Life](#) campaign is a multi-year integrated advertising campaign aimed at attracting people to the early childhood sector by raising awareness of career opportunities and promoting the support available.

Underpinned by evidence, the campaign centres on the idea that Three-Year-Old Kindergarten gives children the best start in life, recognising that early childhood education helps to prepare children for the school years and beyond.

This state-wide campaign also seeks to attract prospective teachers and educators by encouraging people from all backgrounds to pursue a career in early childhood education, whether by changing careers, upskilling, or enrolling in courses after finishing school. It inspires and informs across various channels and includes messages about the opportunities, benefits and support available to those considering a career in the sector, or further training.

In 2021, the campaign will be updated to attract qualified teachers to positions for 2022.

## Improving the accessibility and quality of pre-service training

### Early Childhood Scholarships

[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 1,940 scholarships have been awarded under the program.

Scholarships remain open for school-leavers, career-changers, existing students with eligible early childhood qualifications, and educators upskilling to become teachers.

### Your thoughts?

What communication resources would benefit your own recruitment efforts? How can the Department support these efforts?



## Gowrie Victoria – supporting educators to become kindergarten teachers

Gowrie Victoria has a strong culture of professional development. Early Learning Manager, Alistair Gibbs, embraces his leadership role in supporting and encouraging educators to build on their strengths and knowledge. 'Each year we have an Individual Performance Reflection Plan, where we ask our educators what their goals and areas for development are for the year,' he says.

For Jessie Gunstone, an educator at Gowrie's North Carlton service, this supportive environment meant she felt ready to study a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. 'It had been a while since I'd finished my Diploma and I was ready to increase my knowledge and challenge myself,' Jessie says. Jessie's 2021 plan speaks to her study goals and has allowed Alistair to provide specific support: helping her apply for an Early Childhood scholarship, setting up contacts within Gowrie for mentoring, and adjusting her role in the service to support her in her studies.

Jessie is excited about her career ahead. 'I just love what I do. I laugh every day at work. I love guiding children and watching as they understand something or discover something. This is where I can make the biggest difference in the lives of people and help set them up for a life of learning and discovery.'



## Innovative Initial Teacher Education

Early childhood educators with an approved diploma-level qualification are able to apply to complete an accelerated bachelor degree at Deakin University, while continuing to work in their early childhood service. Students are eligible for a scholarship valued at \$30,000 and receive extra supports, including mentorship and time release for study, to help them complete their degree in 18 months thanks to a trimester model of study and recognition of prior learning. Ninety students started in 2021, and applications for study in 2022 open in August. Unsuccessful candidates may still be considered for other early childhood teaching courses at Deakin University, as well as for Early Childhood Scholarships of up to \$34,000.

### Your thoughts?

Are there other ways to support more 'earn and learn' models to make opportunities to study early childhood teaching more sustainable and appealing?

What are some other innovative opportunities that could be explored for upskilling educators to become teachers?

What actions can the Commonwealth Government, higher education providers and other stakeholders take to increase the number of people studying early childhood education?



## Free TAFE

[Free TAFE](#) is making it easier for people to study to become early childhood educators. 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. More than 3,100 students commenced these courses last year – more than double the number in 2019.

### Free TAFE rekindles Haira's early childhood ambitions

Haira Hussein has a deep-seated belief in the importance of early childhood education. Growing up in Sri Lanka, it was her dream to become an early childhood educator. But Haira had to put her professional plans on hold to raise her three boys and build a home with her husband after they migrated to Australia over a decade ago.

Then, once her boys were at school, Haira had the time to contemplate the next chapter in her life. After doing some research, she was very excited to learn that she could study a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care tuition fee-free.

Haira has nearly completed the course at Chisholm TAFE in Dandenong. 'It has been an amazing experience,' she says. 'I would not be this close to becoming an early childhood educator were it not for Free TAFE.' Haira's passion is reflected in her grades, and she is on-track to graduate among the top students in her class. She is grateful for the course that rekindled the dream she first conceived as a child.

### How Free TAFE helped Ethan play to his strengths

Like many school leavers, Ethan Drummond found it nearly impossible to decide the career he should pursue. Although he had a rough idea of what his strengths were – he was good with children and passionate about learning – he wasn't keen to be saddled with a huge HECS debt. Then he saw an advertisement for Free TAFE, and applied and was accepted into the Diploma of Early Education and Care at Gordon TAFE in Geelong.

A year later, Ethan is certain he made the right decision and is already considering a Bachelor degree following a year of on-the-job training.

Ethan is also keen to dispel lingering myths about educating pre-school children, particularly among men. 'There needs to be a lot of educating the community about the important role of educators and teachers. It's important for children to see men in nurturing positions and for them to have positive male role models at an early age,' he says.

## Better-quality placement experiences and vocational training courses

Victoria's future early childhood workforce is dependent on students of early childhood education having access to a range of opportunities to build their capabilities and experience placements in different settings. Students' timely completion of their qualification is critical not only to their immediate opportunities for employment, but also to future workforce sustainability. Without the support of early childhood services across the sector, there are risks to workforce supply.

Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnerships between kindergarten program providers and four Victorian universities are helping to improve placement experiences of aspiring teachers. Funding is provided for a university site director to coordinate partnerships with kindergartens, provide placements and networking opportunities for students, support mentoring for pre-service teachers, and help students successfully transition into the workforce.

The Victorian Government has engaged the Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN) to assist students undertaking a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care or a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care to find work placements in 2021. AEN works collaboratively with Victoria's TAFE network and Learn Local Registered Training Organisations to connect students with early childhood services that have expressed interest in hosting a student on placement.

We have also partnered with Chisholm Institute to develop a suite of high-quality early childhood teaching and learning materials to support the delivery of the Certificate III and the Diploma. Further work is underway to develop and pilot an independent assessment, targeted at completing Certificate III trainees to enhance quality.

## Getting people in jobs – when and where we need them

### Early Childhood Teacher Incentives program

Early childhood teachers are eligible for financial incentives of up to \$50,000 to take up positions at identified services delivering Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in hard-to-staff areas. Teachers get an upfront payment followed by regular payments for up to three years to support them to stay in the community and at the service. A specialist recruitment agency is also working with the Department to support services and providers to help employ new teachers in areas that find it difficult to attract staff.

### Jobs Board

To assist the sector to successfully advertise and fill positions, the Victorian Government is launching a centralised early childhood jobs board that will be available to the sector for free from mid-2021. The Jobs Board will support service providers with their recruitment and make it easier for prospective teachers and educators to find jobs that suit their work preferences. The Jobs Board will also provide information on available Early Childhood Teacher Incentives and other offerings from the Department.

### Your thoughts?

How can local government, kindergarten providers and other stakeholders, supported by the Department, encourage more local community members to enter the early childhood profession?

And how could we all encourage existing early childhood professionals to stay in communities in need – or move to areas in need?

What have been your experiences in filling 'hard-to-staff' roles? What has worked, and what were the circumstances?

What actions have you taken that have been successful in improving workforce attraction?

## Going regional 'the most satisfying experience'

Meg Ellard had almost 10 years' experience as an early childhood teacher when she was supported by a Victorian Government grant to move from Melbourne for a position in South Gippsland.

'When I heard the funded three-year-old program was happening, I really wanted to make sure it was a success and I wanted to bring my experience of teaching three-year-olds to the role.'

Meg helped set up the new three-year-old program at Fish Creek Kindergarten and she is now part of the community. She says the experience has been the most satisfying of her career.

'I can't recommend the experience of relocating and setting up a program in a service more highly,' Meg says. 'In regional areas, the teachers are really looked at as community leaders. You can play a really important role in making sure the families are well-supported.'



## Culture of support helps many staff to upskill and builds a local workforce

St Arnaud Early Learning Centre is a small centre excelling in upskilling its staff. Operated by North Grampians Shire, in a small, relatively isolated community, the service also works closely with the local secondary college to build the profile of early childhood as a career option. This includes having students enrolled in VET through their school and Charlton TAFE gain work experience in the service. Among existing staff there are:

- two Diploma qualified educators upskilling to the Bachelor, both of whom have received Victorian Government scholarships
- one Certificate III educator upskilling to a Diploma through the Free TAFE initiative
- one Diploma educator upskilling to an Advanced Diploma
- one industry-based Certificate III educator upskilling to the Diploma
- two Bachelor-qualified teachers with a third about to qualify.

This work will ensure St Arnaud's has a pool of early childhood staff available in its community, ensuring sustainable service provision well into the future.

# Retention

## Challenges

Retaining early childhood teachers and educators is a challenge across Australia and internationally.

We know that variability in pay and conditions, lack of professional and peer support, and limited progression opportunities are key issues.

Mentoring, high-quality professional development and career advancement opportunities are critical. Strong, supportive leadership can also make a big difference, by helping to build a culture that allows professionals to play an influential role in their work, and that recognises work well done. These factors all play a major role in staff retention, reducing turnover and resourcing costs, and improving the quality and appeal of services.

## Progress

Working with our partners, the Victorian Government has introduced a range of initiatives over the past few years to keep people in the sector and support them to excel in their jobs.

These measures complement our 'attraction' measures, and include support for new graduates, professional development opportunities and initiatives to build professional networks and improve the identity of all levels of the workforce.

Here, we outline the measures available and encourage ideas for collective action. It's important to recognise that the expansion of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will increase the number of qualified teachers in many smaller early childhood services, bringing new opportunities to enhance peer learning and supports.

## Your thoughts?

What planning is your organisation doing to employ and retain staff?

How can pay and conditions be used to increase retention?

## Support for new and provisionally-registered teachers

### Grants to support provisionally-registered teachers

The provisionally-registered teacher's journey to become fully registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) is a deeply involved process that provides a strong foundation for a career of high-quality teaching practice. It requires focus, skill and a significant investment of time from both the provisionally-registered teacher and their mentor. [Grants](#) of up to \$2,872 are available to support this transition. 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 mentors, or to employ staff to backfill positions to allow mentors and provisional teachers the time they need to work through the inquiry process.

### Mentor support, including the Effective Mentoring Program

The first years of early childhood teaching are rewarding, and even exhilarating, but they can also be overwhelming. We know that dedicated support from an experienced teacher can make all the difference.

The Effective Mentoring Program provides two-days of professional learning throughout the year to train experienced teachers to become mentors. Participants learn how to guide provisionally-registered teachers through an inquiry approach to develop their practice and collect evidence that meets the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the Proficient Teacher level (required to achieve full registration with the VIT).

This program ensures participants meet the minimum requirement to be recognised by the VIT as a trained mentor approved to support provisionally-registered teachers.

## The value of mentoring

After Neelika Edirisinghe graduated from a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education in 2017 she began working as a provisionally-registered teacher in a long day care service. Unfortunately, the service wasn't able to give her the support she needed to achieve full registration with the VIT. Neelika was unsure about the requirements for registration and it was difficult for her to take time off to undertake the inquiry process. As a result, Neelika had to extend her provisional registration.

When Neelika left that service and connected with her mentor, Rachel, everything changed. 'Rachel was very supportive, very understanding and encouraging. She explained everything clearly to me, gave me a timeline and broke it down, step by step. I could reach her anytime by email, and she gave really valuable feedback.' Now fully registered, Neelika is extremely grateful for the mentor support from an experienced teacher like Rachel. 'Mentors are so important for new teachers. This experience has really made me want to be a mentor myself.'

## Beginning Teacher Conferences

Annual Beginning Teacher Conferences for first-year early childhood teachers induct and welcome people to the profession and create opportunities to build important peer support networks. They also help to strengthen professional practices.

Conferences are delivered annually but were unable to run in 2020 due to ongoing uncertainty around coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

To support early career teachers who were impacted by the restrictions, a series of free, interactive webinars in Terms 1 and 2, 2021 are providing tailored practical advice to teachers in their first few months of practice. Conferences are scheduled to resume from August 2021, with registrations opening in June.



## Leadership skills and networking opportunities

### Early Learning Leadership Forums

Early Learning Leadership Forums bring together early childhood leaders to strengthen communication, consultation, co-design, and leadership skills across the sector. In 2020, 13 Leadership Forums were held for leaders in Long Day Care and Kindergarten services across Victoria. This included four regional forums attended by more than 1,000 early childhood leaders. From Term 3, 2021, two forums will be held each year in 17 different locations across Victoria to reach and connect leaders in their local areas.

### Early Years Learning Networks

Since launching in early 2021, Early Years Learning Networks are bringing together early years professionals, including both teachers and educators. Seventy networks will be built across Victoria, with each meeting four times a year to collaborate, enhance professional identities and share best-practice strategies.

### Victorian Early Years Awards

Now in its 16th year, the annual Victorian Early Years Awards celebrate early childhood leadership, outstanding achievement, exceptional dedication and innovation in improving outcomes for children (from birth to eight years old) and their families. Award categories focus on improving engagement in learning, supporting parents, building collaborative community partnerships, improving health and wellbeing, exemplary practice, leadership, and significant service improvement. Winners in each category receive a grant of up to \$15,000 to support their nominated activity or 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.

### Your thoughts?

How can your service or organisation build on the Victorian Government retention initiatives to strengthen professional learning and recognition, and build stronger career pathways for teachers and educators?

Is there anything else you'd like to mention that has been positive in retaining staff?

What actions have you taken that have been successful in improving workforce retention?

## Quality

### Challenge

In addition to supporting a growing workforce, we need to focus on quality as this is what has the biggest impact on children's learning and developmental outcomes. The most powerful factors influencing quality across age groups and service settings are the skills, qualifications and training of our dedicated workforce.

Local and international research continues to show that child-staff interactions, and how staff structure children's activities, are the primary ways early childhood education benefits children.

### Progress

The Victorian Government has introduced a suite of initiatives that focus on supporting high-quality practice, including providing the tools and resources for teachers and educators to deliver high-quality kindergarten programs.

A strong focus on quality is critical to our early childhood system, and is particularly important throughout the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. This section aims to inform and inspire you about how we can give our teachers and educators the additional support they need so that children can reap the full benefits of two years of high-quality kindergarten.





## Helping all kindergarten services deliver high-quality education

### School Readiness Funding to address educational disadvantage

[School Readiness Funding \(SRF\)](#) is an Australian-first initiative. It provides funding to services for programs and supports that benefit children across the state, particularly children more likely to experience educational disadvantage. A big focus of the initiative is on building the capacity of early childhood teachers and educators, to ensure they have the most positive impact on child outcomes.

In 2021, SRF reached over 82,500 children in approximately 2600 kindergarten services, including all those run by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. SRF is a permanent commitment and this year will reach children attending all funded kindergarten programs in Victoria – representing a 10 per cent increase to total funding for the State's kindergarten system.



### Coaching teachers, improving services: Corangamite capitalises on School Readiness Funding (SRF)

SRF can be used to develop teachers' skillsets in ways that suit the needs of their local community. The seven kindergarten services managed by Corangamite Shire Council were able to pool their SRF in 2019 and 2020 to purchase coaching services for teachers.

A particular focus of coaching was on training teachers in ways to engage families in language and literacy activities with their children.

As a result of the coaching, teachers report feeling that they are able to take risks in their pedagogy to try new things, knowing that the coaches are there to drive improvement. Engaging in meaningful and authentic partnerships with families and the wider community and shire services system is a key focus for Corangamite Shire Council.

### New Early Childhood Improvement Branches

Seventeen dedicated Early Childhood Improvement Branches have been created across Victoria over the past few years. These branches 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.

Feedback from the sector indicates the new branches are guiding the implementation of SRF and Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, providing guidance during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, and supporting collaboration and best-practice sharing.

### Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program

This professional development program provides intensive, targeted support to early childhood services with identified quality improvement needs. It aims to lift the quality of these services to improve outcomes for children to continue their learning and development into school.

Since 2018, the program has and continues to support around 270 early childhood services rated as 'Working Towards' the National Quality Standard or identified as requiring support. This year, it will be expanded to support more services requiring additional help to improve quality.



## Resources to help teachers plan and deliver quality programs

A range of resources and professional learning programs continue to be offered by the Department to help the early childhood workforce achieve the Early Years Learning Outcomes outlined in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) since it was introduced in 2009.

The [FUSE platform](#) provides educators with access to thousands of digital educational resources that can be used by young children and their families when they are learning from home. FUSE and the Department's website also offer a range of online webinars, teaching guides, and up-to-date resources aimed at bringing teachers' practice in line with the VEYLDF outcomes and practice principles.

VEYLDF practice guides and literature reviews are also available from the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA), and staff across the workforce can subscribe to the VCAA Early Years Alert to stay up to date with the latest news and features on early childhood research, policy and practice.

### Learning from home webinars

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, five free [Learning from Home Webinars](#) were delivered in Term 2, 2020. They attracted 5,217 attendees/live viewings (approximately 1,000 educators per live session) and continue to be accessed on demand. A further Masterclass series was offered in Term 3, 2020 focused on optimising the use of online technology. This series attracted over 8,300 attendees/live viewings across the seven sessions and is now accessible on-demand via the Department's website.

## Teaching Tool for Kindergartens

This [online, observation-based tool](#) is designed to be used by early childhood teachers to support best assessment for learning practice aligned to the 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 teachers and educators to take action to support a child's transition to school.

In 2021, the tool will be piloted and evaluated in over 50 kindergarten services. This will inform the future use of the tool in kindergartens, including what professional learning is needed to support its use.

## Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Teaching Toolkit

[The Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Teaching Toolkit](#) is designed to help services in their first year providing 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), professional learning materials and website content.

### Your thoughts?

What aspects of quality should we focus on together during the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten?

What actions have you taken that have been successful in improving the skills and capabilities of the workforce?

# Taking action together

The early childhood sector is diverse. But it does not always make the most of its strengths, or see itself as a collective force.

The previous section outlined responses to workforce challenges to help stimulate ideas for further action. It's now time to come together to share ideas and information, and capitalise on the sector's combined knowledge, expertise and power.

## Understanding our roles

Many different stakeholders are integral in supporting the workforce to deliver high-quality kindergarten programs. Clarifying roles and responsibilities will help us to connect with others and see where opportunities lie.

<b>Victorian Government:</b>	Responsible for kindergarten policy, funding and direct support, the regulation of early childhood services (through QARD), plays a role as system steward, and develops policy for, regulates and contributes funding to vocational education and training
<b>Commonwealth Government:</b>	Contributes funding through the National Partnership on Universal Access and the Child Care Subsidy, as well as policy, regulation and funding contribution for tertiary education and funding for Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to administer the National Quality Framework. This includes lead responsibility for the sufficient supply of people studying early education
<b>Local governments:</b>	Play a key role in strategic planning and provision of early childhood services and facilities within their community, including local workforce supply and demand
<b>Services and providers (including local governments and Early Years Management organisations that deliver kindergarten programs):</b>	Understand their workforce needs and play a critical role in attracting, upskilling and retaining staff – including by using the opportunities listed in the previous section of this paper
<b>Higher education and vocational education providers:</b>	Play a lead role in providing a sufficient supply of early childhood teachers and educators, including by providing attractive study opportunities
<b>Peak bodies and unions:</b>	Represent employees and employers and play a key role in promoting the profession and negotiating terms and conditions of employment



## Walking the talk

Consultation and meetings on this paper start in April 2021. The aim is to nurture relationships and build new partnerships across the sector that will take immediate action to:

- promote and communicate the roll-out of Three-Year-Kindergarten and the workforce opportunities for Victorians
- improve the status of early childhood education careers, working to address misconceptions
- support the upskilling and professional development of early childhood teachers and educators
- expand early childhood career opportunities and increase Initial Teacher Education enrolments, and ensure high-quality, timely placements for educators and teachers in early childhood services
- create place-based solutions to attract and retain a high-quality workforce throughout Victoria
- share best practice on delivery models for a high-quality, rewarded and engaged workforce
- share data and evidence to better understand our shared workforce challenges and to learn more about the effectiveness of tested solutions.

## Examples of success

We know that all partners are committed to the reforms. And already, there is some great work underway to build supply and quality across the sector.

Early childhood staff, services, providers and local councils have worked closely with the Department's Early Childhood Improvement Branches to take practical steps to address the challenges of staffing Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. These include developing or adapting programs to be as efficient as possible, optimising the use of existing teachers and educators.

## Bass Coast Shire – partnering to support workforce development

Bass Coast Shire is taking an active role in supporting services to prepare for the rollout of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. As more people move to the region, a key challenge is growing the early childhood workforce, and the council knows that services cannot do this alone.

The council is offering to promote job vacancies via its central careers page. It can help services draft the advertisements and include promotional material about living in Bass Coast Shire. These jobs will be shared with local TAFEs, on local Facebook and LinkedIn pages, and with local recruitment agencies.

The council is also partnering with Bass Coast Country Universities Centre (CUC), Federation University and Chisholm TAFE to promote local study opportunities. The aim is to encourage at least 15 students to enrol in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education so that it can be delivered from the Bass Coast CUC in Wonthaggi.

Funding from the Victorian Government to implement a Kindergarten Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme will also assist Bass Coast Shire to understand workforce demand, in addition to strengthening access and equity to kindergarten across the community.

Bass Coast Shire is keen to collaborate on more place-based solutions and is engaging closely with partners such as the local Early Childhood Improvement Branch and the Municipal Association of Victoria to consider opportunities.

## Alpine Children's Services – a multipronged approach

Alpine Children's Services (ACS) is a funded Early Years Manager of four kindergarten services in the Alpine Shire, where funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten has commenced in 2021.

Tanya Scott, CEO of ACS, says workforce challenges are the biggest concern for services. 'Staff are the core of the business. Without staff we've got nothing,' she says. As a relatively remote region with a growing population and increasing housing costs, it can be difficult to attract qualified educators and teachers from outside the Shire. ACS has had to be creative and use multiple levers to support workforce needs. However, it remains an ongoing challenge. Their initiatives include:

- encouraging and supporting existing staff to upskill, including support staff so they can cover breaks and assist with backfill
- working closely with local secondary schools to offer work experience and support VET pathways for interested students
- applying for and receiving Victorian Government grants to support qualified teachers to take up roles in the region
- surveying families to understand local preferences and explain the benefits of multi-age programs to be able to deliver Three-Year-Old kindergarten
- flexible and new staff rostering to maximise coverage
- offering attractive pay and conditions and promoting job vacancies widely on local Facebook groups.

The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA), representing some of the country's largest early childhood education providers, launched a national campaign, 'Big Roles in Little Lives', in February 2021 to promote careers and opportunities in early childhood education and entice career-changers into the sector.

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) have collaborated to improve pay and conditions under early childhood enterprise agreements.

The in-principle agreements, made in November 2020 and pending Fair Work Commission approval, will give early childhood teachers and educators in a large number of services substantial salary increases and improved conditions. They will also strengthen our efforts to attract and retain a highly qualified and dedicated early childhood workforce.

### Your thoughts?

Can you share examples of positive partnerships that you or your organisation has generated to support workforce development?

How could you expand on your current role to help achieve our collective workforce goals?

What resources could support you in doing this work?

## Getting on board

As the state-wide roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten approaches, workforce demands will affect every corner of the sector. There will be no one-size-fits-all solution, but children, teachers, educators and providers will all benefit, directly or indirectly, from the action we take this year and beyond.

This paper has delved into the challenges we face and the Victorian Government's responses to ensure we have the sustainable, highly skilled and well-supported early childhood workforce to deliver these programs.

We now want to work with you to strengthen our collective efforts and affirm our shared commitment and priorities for supporting the workforce into the future.

From April to June 2021, we will be facilitating a series of roundtable discussions and targeted meetings with stakeholders from the early childhood sector. Among the questions you'll be asked are:

- What are you doing in your service or organisation to attract, support and retain early childhood teachers and educators?
- What government supports, outlined in this paper, are working well 'on the ground'? What can be improved?
- How can the sector maximise the Government's investment and efforts so far?

- How can the sector work more effectively together to support the growth and development of the early childhood workforce?
- Can you share examples of positive partnerships that you or your organisation have generated to support workforce development?
- How could new partnerships or collaboration help us better respond to workforce challenges?
- How could you expand on your current efforts to help achieve our collective workforce goals?

Everyone's input is welcomed, whether that be via the organisations you're a part of, or as individuals via the Engage Victoria platform at [engage.vic.gov.au/next-steps-victorian-early-childhood-workforce-strategy](https://engage.vic.gov.au/next-steps-victorian-early-childhood-workforce-strategy). You can provide feedback through the Engage Victoria platform until 30 June 2021.

Your feedback and the discussions we have during the consultation period will then help to inform the next steps in the Victorian early childhood workforce strategy, which will be released later in 2021.

Victoria's Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform can be a national and international success story. Not just because of the committed, skilled early childhood workforce and committed stakeholders driving the reform – but because we are working on it together.



# Summary of questions

These questions appeared throughout the document to help stimulate ideas and prompt you to share information and insights with others.

## Attraction

1. What communications resources would benefit your own recruitment efforts? How can the Department support these efforts?
2. Are there other ways to support more 'earn and learn' models to make opportunities to study early childhood teaching more sustainable and appealing?
3. What are some other innovative opportunities that could be explored for upskilling educators to become teachers?
4. What actions can the Commonwealth Government, higher education providers and other stakeholders take to increase the number of people studying early childhood education?
5. How can local government, kindergarten providers and other stakeholders, supported by the Department, encourage more local community members to enter the early childhood profession?
6. And how could we all encourage existing early childhood professionals to stay in communities in need – or move to areas in need?
7. What have been your experiences in filling 'hard-to-staff' roles? What has worked, and what were the circumstances?
8. What actions have you taken that have been successful in improving workforce attraction?

## Retention

9. What planning is your organisation doing to employ and retain staff?
10. How can pay and conditions be used to increase retention?
11. How can your service or organisation build on the Victorian Government retention initiatives to strengthen professional learning and recognition, and build stronger career pathways for teachers and educators?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to mention that has been positive in retaining staff?
13. What actions have you taken that have been successful in improving workforce retention?

## Quality

14. What aspects of quality should we focus on together during the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten?
15. What actions have you taken that have been successful in improving the skills and capabilities of the workforce?

## Taking action together

16. Can you share examples of positive partnerships that you or your organisation has generated to support workforce development?
17. How could you expand on your current role to help achieve our collective workforce goals?
18. What resources could support you in doing this work?

